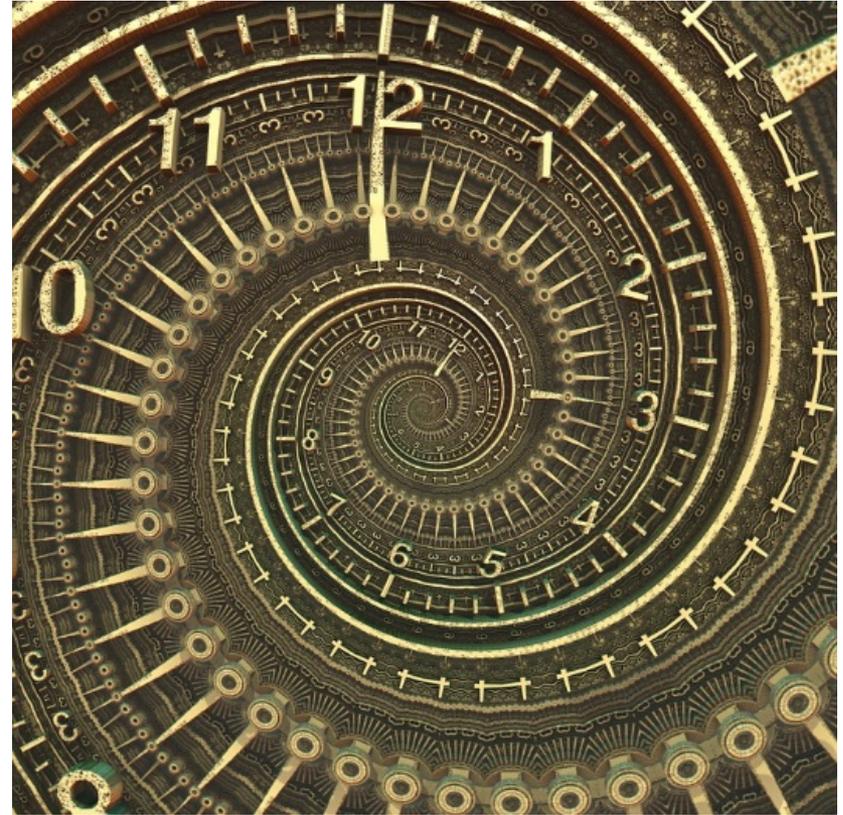
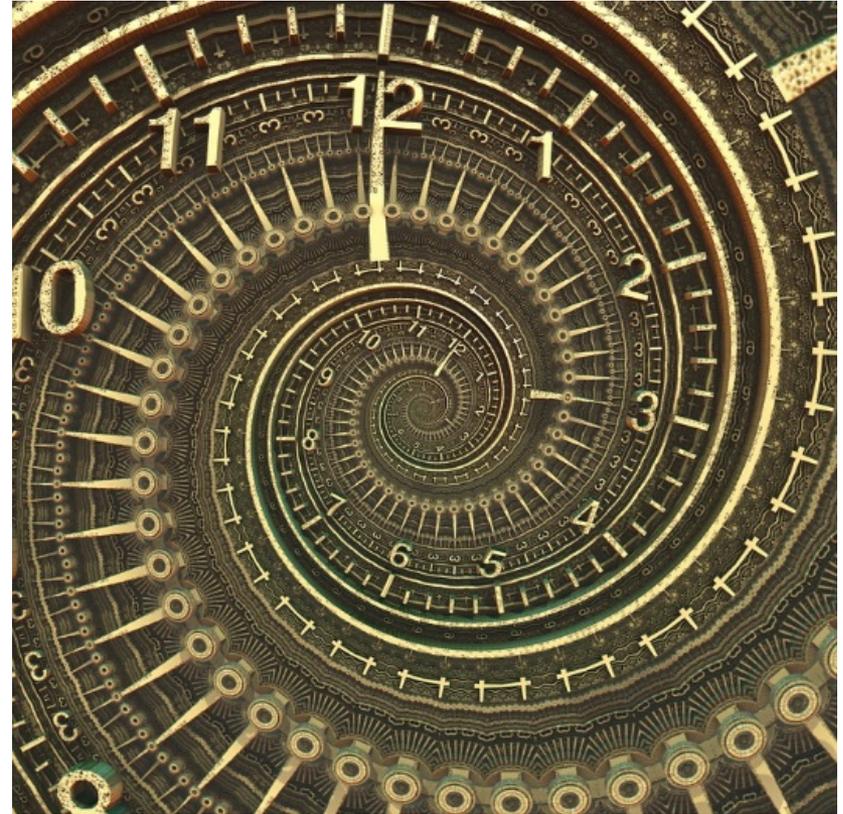


Mechanistic versus correlational evidence in reasoning about voting

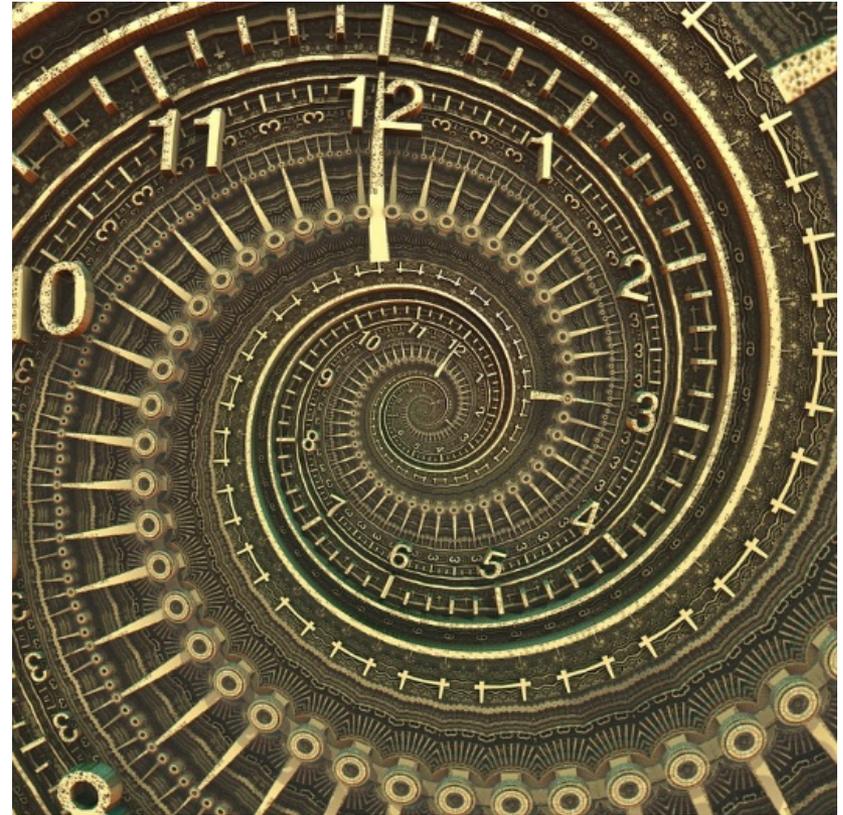
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1. Symmetry, time, and mechanism
2. Duverger's Law and reasoning about mechanism
3. Shifting the timeframe



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Symmetry and Time



Symmetry a problem for several things.

Explanation Causation

Laws

Time is sometimes posited as a solution to symmetry.

Correlation/association?

These are symmetric too.

Evidence of mechanism

I advocate an evidential *pluralism*:

Work on quality evidence of mechanism in biomedicine.

Concerns how evidence of mechanism can *supplement* evidence of difference-making, such as correlations.

Here I am interested in:

How we get evidence of mechanism for Duverger's Law.

Multiple things evidence of mechanisms can be used for (explanation, external validity, ...).

Time

Time and evidence of mechanism intertwined in:

Deciding what variables to study, how to measure them –
and *when*.

Including deciding how long to run a study for.

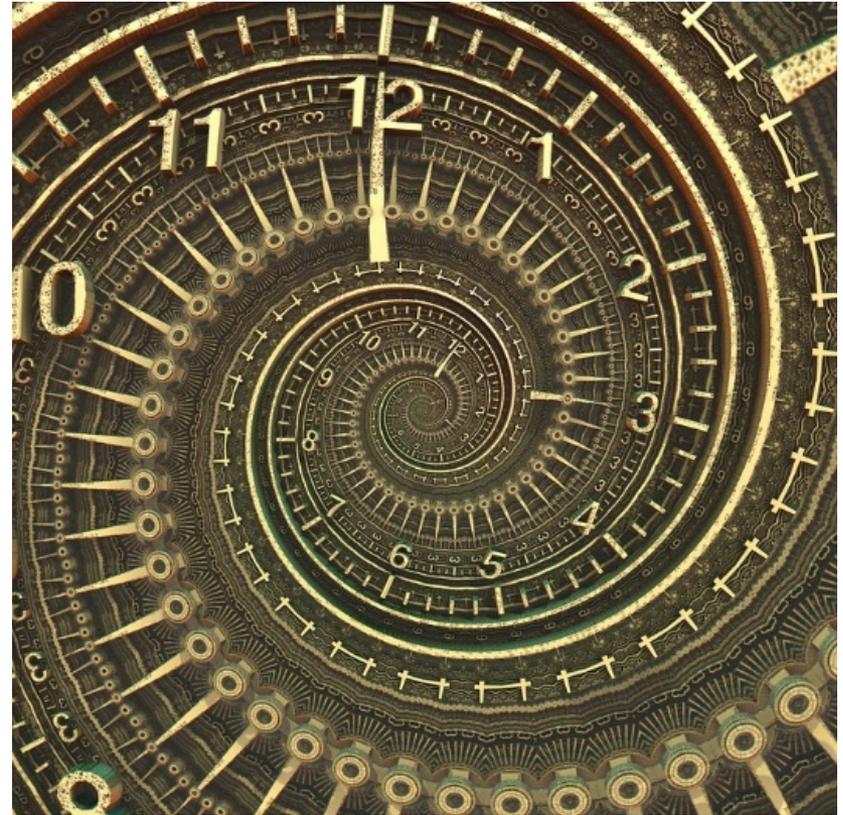
In this paper: to decide on the direction of the causal
arrow (so breaking the symmetry of correlation).

Breaking this symmetry:

not merely about what comes first in time

but concerns the operation of a mechanism over time.

1. Symmetry, time, and mechanism
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Duverger's Law:

“The simple-majority single-ballot system favours the two-party system. Of all the hypotheses that have been defined in this book, this approaches the most nearly perhaps to a true sociological law (Duverger, 1959, 217, emphasis in original).” (Benoit p70.)

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Duverger's Law and the Study of Electoral Systems

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Simple majority single-ballot

One member of parliament elected in each voting district. The candidate who gets more votes than any other candidate is elected (even if there is no majority, i.e. candidate's score less than 50%).

Simple-majority single-ballot system favours two-party system

Majority system with second-round runoff

If no candidate receives more than 50% of the initial votes, there is a second round with the top-two candidates

Majority system with a second-round runoff favours multi-partism

Proportional representation

Multiple members of parliament for each district; seats allocated based on percentage of votes for each political party.

Proportional representation favours multi-partism.

Duverger's Law:

“The simple-majority single-ballot system favours the two-party system. Of all the hypotheses that have been defined in this book, this approaches the most nearly perhaps to a true sociological law (Duverger, 1959, 217, emphasis in original).” (Benoit p70.)

At the time, association between electoral systems and party systems was important evidence.

Canada and India were two notable exceptions: both single-member district plurality systems but both multi-party.

Treated as a probabilistic law only.

Can time decide this?

At the time, association between electoral systems and party systems was important evidence.

Canada and India were two notable exceptions: both single-member district plurality systems but both multi-party.

Symmetric: this evidence does not tell us whether the electoral system is cause, or effect.

Time alone cannot settle this, as both electoral systems and party systems exist for long periods of time, frequently interacting with each other.

Also difficult to eliminate common cause entirely.

Duverger offered two related mechanisms

(Social mechanisms are complexes of interacting individuals, usually classified into specific social categories, that generate causal relationships between aggregate-level variables. (Steel 2004, 59.))

Mechanical:

how electoral rules constrain manner in which votes converted into seats

Psychological:

shaping of voter (and party) responses anticipating mechanical constraint

The mechanical

The mechanical effect of electoral systems operates on parties through the direct application of electoral rules to convert votes into seats. In the mapping of vote shares to seat shares, some parties — almost always the largest ones — will be ‘over-represented,’ receiving a greater proportion of seats than votes. Because this mapping is a zero-sum process, over-representation of large parties must create ‘under-representation’ of the smaller parties. (Benoit p73.)

Clearly causally directed: votes are counted and converted into seats, and not vice versa.

(Primarily *reasoning*, but on the basis of known rules.
Evidence is now sought.)

The psychological

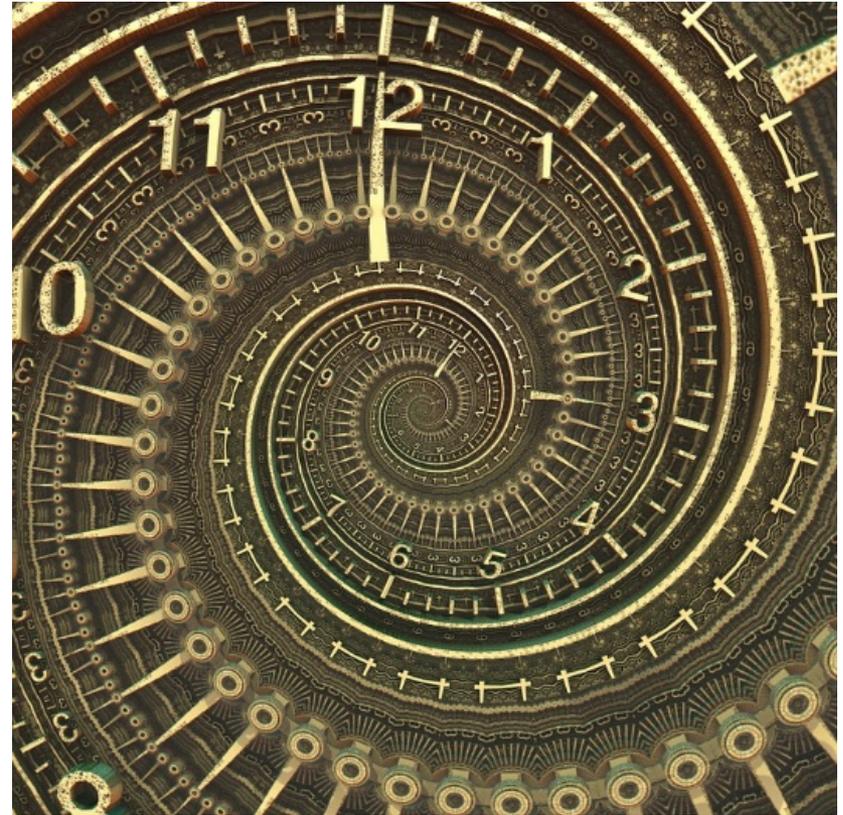
Duverger's psychological effect comes from the reactions of political actors to the expected consequences of the operation of electoral rules. The psychological effect is driven by the anticipations, both by elites and voters, of the workings of the mechanical factor, anticipations which then shape both groups' consequent behavior (Blais and Carty, 1991, 92). Under electoral rule arrangements that give small or even third-place parties little chance of winning seats, voters will eschew supporting these parties for fear of wasting their votes on sure losers. Political elites and party leaders will also recognize the futility of competing under certain arrangements, and will hence be deterred from entry, or motivated to form coalitions with more viable prospects. (Benoit p74.)

Summary

‘A final contribution of Duverger’s formulation of his law and hypothesis was the detailed explanation not just of the outcomes which electoral institutions produced but also of the process by which they influenced political parties in bringing about these outcomes.’ (Benoit p72.)

Benoit identifies Duverger’s major contribution as the mechanical-psychological distinction and the detailed process explanations that supported the association is supplemented with a detailed unfolding of a mechanism through time.

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Implicit timeframe

The psychological mechanism in particular rests on two assumptions about how relevant behaviour is determined:

What voters do is influenced by their knowledge of the electoral system and whether it favours large parties.

What party leaders do is influenced by their knowledge of the electoral system and whether it favours large parties.

There is a clear temporal and causal order: the electoral rules exist, and influence voters and party leaders.

But what happens when we relax the timeframe?

We can no longer take the electoral rules to be set.

‘Duverger was certainly not unaware of the problem of endogenous electoral system origins. Electoral systems, he wrote, ‘are strange devices — simultaneously cameras and projectors. They register images which they have partly created themselves’ (Duverger, 1984, 34). Yet, Duverger’s original strong institutional determinist stance had an enormous influence on the subsequent focus on electoral systems as independent variables.’ (Benoit p78.)

‘... relative lack of understanding of the link between electoral laws as causes and as effects stands as a barrier to further gains in the wider study of electoral systems.’ (Benoit p78-9.)

Time and evidence of mechanism

The operation of mechanisms over time can be important to break the symmetry of associations.

But temporal assumptions are important to evidence of mechanisms (and reasoning about them) just as they are in other evidence of causality.

And if a timeframe is shifted, a causal arrow may reverse.