Playing Politics

The Nightmare Continues

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PARTY GAMES

6 Party Games: the Rules

ELECTIONS

A game for 2–200 players. It should take about one and a half hours. If more than seven players are involved, they should be split into seven crews.

Each player/crew controls a political party fighting to win an election by making promises that fool as many voters as possible. Voters themselves are not represented in the game and are treated by the parties as unthinking zombie-like machines driven by a range of different preferences about which policies they prefer to see implemented on matters of national importance. Zombie-voters will always vote for the political party that promises policies as close as possible to those they most prefer. The possibility that these promises, once made, will not be honoured by politicians does not, for some inexplicable reason, occur to them. Parties therefore compete with each other to find the policy that appeals to more zombie-voters than any other, although the slings and arrows of electoral fortune can upset even the most cunning of calculations.

EQUIPMENT

The equipment required is a pack of cards and a timer or sound system, plus a bundle of money and a badge for each player. Players will also need a copy of the game board shown in Fig. 6.1, plus twenty-one black counters (any other colour, I suppose, would do) and a playing piece for each party. Players may use as playing pieces any objects that they find amusing, provided that these are also small enough to be moved without too much fuss around the playing-board. GOD will also need a trusty ruler.

THE RULES

1. *Setting up the board.* The playing-board shows possible policies that can be promised by political parties on the most important issue of the day, which is taken for the sake of argument to be the level of personal income tax that will be set in the next budget. Possible policies on this matter can be seen in the top and bottom rows of the board and range from 60 per cent taxation on the far left to 22 per cent taxation on the far right.

Above each policy position is a column which shows how many zombie-voters rate the policy position in question as their favourite. At the beginning of the game, and before the political parties have got to work, the distribution of opinion among voters is shown by the shaded squares on the election board. A black counter is thus placed on each shaded square. (These show, for example, that 400,000 voters would most like income tax to be set at 60 per cent, while 900,000 voters would like it to be set at 30 per cent.)

The black counters will be moved up and down to show how opinion among voters changes during election campaigns, but more of that later.

2. Players or crews represent political parties and GOD gives each crew a name from the following list and 200,000 in campaign funds.

- Hippies
- Yippies
- Yuppies
- Beatniks
- Rappers
- Rockers
- Rudies

The election campaign

3. Before the game starts, a time-limit is agreed by the players and the timer is set. Above one and a half hours is a good amount of time to play. More entertainingly, the time-limit can be the length of two albums played on the sound system. The game ends abruptly at the end of the time-limit.

4. The first round of the game is a little different from the others, because the parties must declare their initial policy positions. They do this in sequence by placing their markers on the bottom row of the board on the policy position of their choice. No party can occupy a square which is already occupied by another party.

The order of moves is decided by the length of each party leader's hair. The party leader with the longest hair moves first, followed by the party leader with the next longest hair. The party leader with the shortest hair moves last. If more than one party leader is completely bald, then they cut cards to decide who moves first, low card winning. In the event of a dispute about hair length, GOD will settle the matter one way or another with her trusty ruler.

5. The remaining part of this election campaign, and the whole of each subsequent election campaign, consists of parties jostling each other for position over a period of three political weeks. Each party tries to find the policy which it thinks will be most popular with the electorate. Election campaigns have many surprises but, the closer we get to the great day, the clearer things become.

Opinion polls

6. An opinion poll is held before each week of jostling. *Quite* unlike what happens in real life, opinion polls results are pretty much random. The cards are shuffled and one card is dealt from the bottom of the deck. A red card shows that the swing is going to the left, a black card shows that the swing is going to the right. The election is held after three weeks of jostling; the swing in votes when the election is held will be in the direction shown by the majority of opinion poll cards. In other words, if there are two or three red cards, then the swing will be to the left; if there are two or three black cards, then the swing will be to the right.

Changing party positions

7. After an opinion poll card has been dealt at the start of each political week, in the light of the positions of the other parties and the most likely direction in which votes appear to be shifting, each party may choose to modify its policy position in an attempt to capture as many votes as possible when the election is finally held. In each week of the campaign, party leaders take turns to move

their marker, or to choose not to move it. As before, the hair length of the party leaders decides the order of moves. It costs money to make a change of policy, since the zombie-voters must be told about this and convinced that the change in policy position that has been announced actually means something. If a party moves to an adjacent policy position in any week, then this is hardly noticed by anyone and costs nothing. If a party moves more than one space in any week, then each additional space moved costs the party 20,000 in campaign funds, which must be paid, in cash and in advance, to an advertising agency run by GOD, who has never been known to take cheques, IOUs, or anything other than hard currency. Parties may move as many spaces as they can afford, provided that the space on which they land is not already occupied by another party.

After each party has moved, or has decided not to move, the political week is over and another opinion poll is held, as in rule 6. After this poll, another week of jostling takes place. A third week of jostling, preceded by an opinion poll, follows the second.

The election

8. The election takes place after three weeks of jostling. Each party must pay 20,000 from campaign funds to GOD's advertising agency to meet its election expenses. Parties unable to pay their election expenses cannot receive *any* votes in the election. They remain in the game but are treated when votes are shared out as if they did not exist. A party that fails to meet election expenses in two consecutive elections is summarily thrown out of the game, during which process the other players make speeches saying the nicest things that they can think of about the failed political party.

9. The direction in which votes will swing in the election has already been revealed by the opinion polls (see rule 6). The opinion poll cards are now returned to the pack, which is reshuffled in a desultory way by GOD.

10. The first election results to be declared are those for the side of the board that will gain from the swing in votes. If the swing is to the left, then the first result declared is for the policy position which is furthest to the left (60 per cent income tax). If the swing is to the right, then the policy position furthest to the right (22 per

cent income tax) is declared first. The results for the remaining policy positions are declared in sequence, moving towards the centre of the board.

11. The result for each policy position is declared by dealing a card face up from bottom of the election pack. Court cards represent the aristocracy and, as might be expected, make no difference either way to anything at all and especially to elections; thus no votes are added or subtracted if a court card is dealt for some policy position. Other cards represent the Salt of the Earth, honest zombie-voters who do make a very significant difference to election results. When one of these cards is dealt for a policy position, if it is:

- Ace, 2, 3 then add 100,000 votes
- 4, 5, 6, 7 then add 200,000 votes
- 8, 9, 10 then add 300,000 votes
- Joker then add 500,000 votes

Whatever the cards say, no policy position can be supported by more than two million, or less than 100,000, voters.

People who have trouble doing sums should not find any of this too taxing. This is because the board itself functions as a kind of stone-age calculator. The counter above the position in question is moved after the election result for that position has been declared, to indicate the number of voters now supporting that position. To add 100,000 zombie-votes, hold your tongue tightly between your teeth and move the relevant counter up one space. To add 300,000 votes, move the counter up three spaces in the same fashion, and so on. Thus all people capable of simultaneously holding their tongues tightly between their teeth and moving a counter on a board should be able to conduct an election. Players incapable of doing this may retain the services of a 5-year-old child to assist them.

12. The results for the losing side of the board are now declared. The ten election cards dealt for the winning side are first collected. These cards, *and these cards only*, are then reshuffled by GOD. Election results are declared in exactly the same way as for the winning side of the board, except that votes are subtracted, rather than added, at the levels indicated in rule 11. Thus it should be immediately clear that the counters on this side of the board are

moved down rather than up the appropriate number of spaces when each result is declared.

13. The level of support for each party can now be worked out. Each party receives all of the votes that are in columns closer to its own policy position than to the position of any other party. If there is an odd-number of unoccupied policy positions between two parties, then the votes from those supporting the middle position are shared equally by the two parties concerned. (For examples, see Fig. 6.2.)
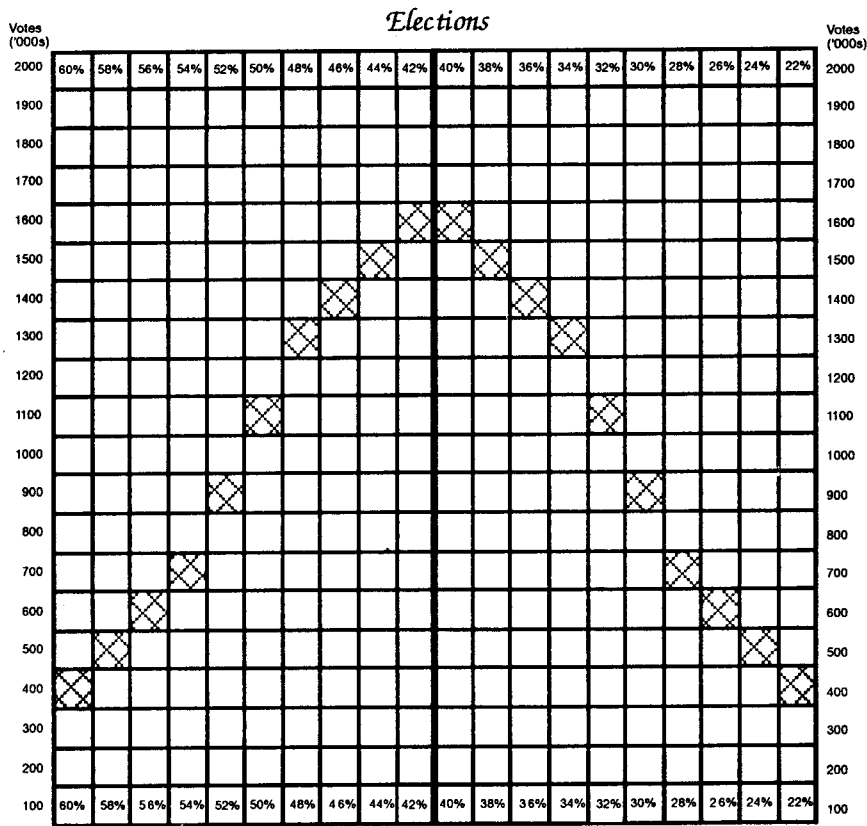

Fig. 6.1   The election board

The pay-off

14. Once the vote totals for each party have been declared, parties receive a contribution from GOD towards their campaign expenses for the next election. This contribution is in direct proportion to the number of votes the party won at the election that has just been held, at the rate of 10,000 for every million votes.

15. Another election campaign starts immediately. The starting-positions of the parties at the beginning of the next election campaign are those that they occupy at the time of the election that has just been held. Play therefore recommences at rule 6. Parties now move in the order of the votes totals that they won in the previous election, with the party winning the most votes moving first. If two or more parties win the same number of votes, then the party leader with the most overweening ambition moves first.

16. When the time-limit is up, a snap election is held. No cards are dealt, and votes for each policy position are those shown on the
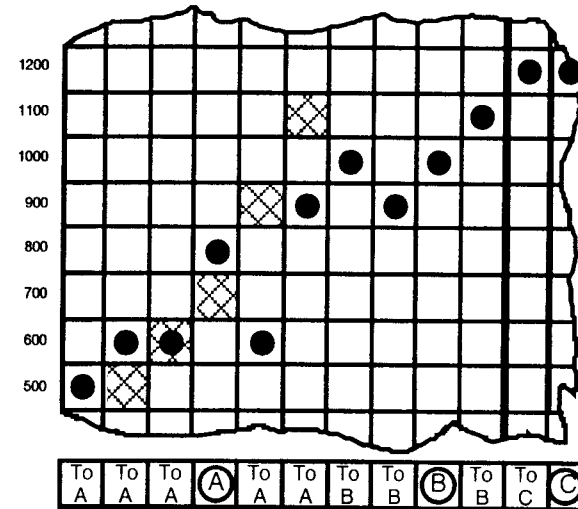

Fig. 6.2   (*a*) Adding up particular election results: an even number of spaces between adjacent parties

Party A's vote = 500 + 600 + 600 + 800 + 600 + 900 = 4,000
Party B's vote = 1,000 + 900 + 1,000 + 1,100 = 4,000
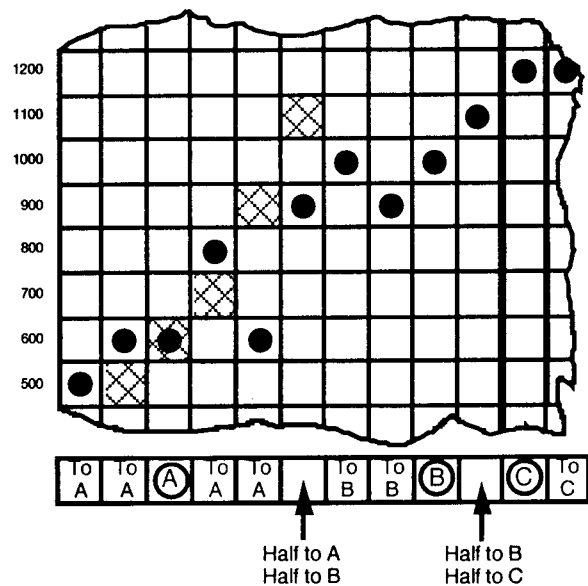NB: Calculations denominated in terms of 1,000 votes

Fig. 6.2 (b) Adding up particular election results: an odd number of spaces between adjacent parties

Party A's vote = 500 + 600 + 600 + 800 + 600 + 900/2 = 3,500
Party B's vote = 900/2 + 1,000 + 900 + 1,000 + 1,100/2 = 3,900
NB: Calculations denominated in terms of 1,000 votes

board when the time-limit expires. The number of votes won by each party is decided as at rule 13. The numbers of votes won by each party at each election are then totalled, and the winner of the game is the party winning most votes overall during the game, or the only party left in the game if all other parties go bankrupt, or get bored and go home, before the game is over.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME

Party splits
If the game is played between teams, then players who are not party leaders may be allowed to split away from the main party and form a party of their very own. They do this simply by banging a handy table, then making a defiant public announcement that they have ratted on their former party colleagues, telling the world about their new name and providing themselves with a distinctive playing piece to move around the board. Obviously, they get no cash. Defecting parties take their place in the sequence of moves immediately before the party they have just betrayed, on their first move placing their counter no more than two spaces away from the position of the party that loved, nurtured, and cared for them since political infancy.

Party fusions
Whether or not the game is played by teams, two parties at adjacent positions on the policy scale may be allowed to fuse into a single party. They do this by making a simple public announcement of their proposed union, speaking simultaneously while holding hands as they do so. GOD then recognizes their union as official, and no player may put asunder two parties that GOD has thus joined together. Parties that join together in this way then combine their campaign resources and take the policy position of the party with the greater number of votes. They do not combine their total of votes won before the fusion, however. The fused party takes the larger total of votes won to date by the two parties fusing, and the smaller party disposes of its playing-piece.

First-past-the-post elections
Instead of paying parties in proportion to how many votes they receive at the election, GOD gives the *entire pay-off of 200,000 to the party winning the most votes!* If two parties share this position, then GOD tosses a coin to decide which gets the entire pay-off. The winner of the game is the party that has come first in more elections than any other when the time-limit has elapsed. Astonishing and unrealistic as this variation might seem to the innocent bystander, this winner-takes-all voting system is in fact actually used for real elections in certain backward Western 'democracies' in which mass literacy has yet to have any significant impact on the political system.