

## Political Parties: Social Bases, Organization, and Environment

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Political parties have long been the subject of opposing assessments. From a negative perspective, parties are criticized because they promote conflict and dissension. Lord Bolingbroke (1965), writing in the 1730s, saw parties as deserving suppression, to be replaced by a leader who could supply the moral authority to promote national unity. On the eve of World War I, perhaps viewing himself as such a leader, Kaiser Wilhelm II announced that he no longer recognized parties, only Germans. In much less extreme fashion, James Madison's distaste for parties went along with a recognition that they were inevitable and hence needed to be controlled.

All the U.S. Founding Fathers, who, perhaps understandably, were uncomfortable with the kinds of rudimentary parties with which they were familiar, shared Madison's concerns in some form. It took another eighteenth-century Englishman, Edmond Burke, to recognize the value of parties when, removed from a milieu of paralyzing conflict, they could operate as civil competitors (Mansfield, 1965). At the birth of the United States, despite the ill-feeling toward political parties, the Founding Fathers soon found parties necessary to govern and, later, to peacefully transfer power (Hofstadter, 1972:viii).

It was not until the early twentieth century that political theorists began to give parties a central role in guaranteeing democratic government. In one such assessment, James Bryce (1921:119) wrote that, "parties are inevitable. No free large country has been without them.

No one has shown how representative government could be worked without them." Outside of government, Lipset, Trow, and Coleman (1956) found that the presence of organized opposing interests, equivalent to parties, were the means to sustain internal democracy in the International Typographical Union.

Yet the relation between parties and democracy has not been settled to everyone's satisfaction. Part of the difficulty in finding a resolution stems from the many meanings assigned to democracy (e.g., Markoff, 1996:101–25). On one side are those who argue that one-party states can be "people's republics." Other critics, such as Ostrogorski (1970) and Michels (1962), stressed the ways parties foster corruption and resist needed changes. In the United States, we find those who feel confined by the overwhelming ascendancy of the Republican and Democratic parties. We offer no answers to such critics in this chapter – we, in fact, admit to believing that competitive parties are essential for democratic government. Yet these often negative perceptions continue to provide a context for more recent controversies present in the scholarly literature. As a result, it is important to recognize the difficulty in totally separating discussion about the nature of parties and how they operate from the normative judgments made about them. We therefore give attention to both normative and empirical concerns.

We divide our study of parties into four parts: the social bases of political parties, the structure and culture of political parties, parties' relations

with the institutional environment, and remaining questions. The objective in each of the first three sections is two-fold. First, we seek to locate the study of political parties within the broader history of political sociology. Second, we offer a critical review of the literature, with a bias toward the past twenty years. That literature is evaluated in terms of continuities with earlier, influential traditions in the field as well as with regard to how effectively it breaks new ground. Accomplishing these two objectives permits us to address our final goal, making an informed assessment of where we are in understanding political parties, both with respect to what has been done and where significant gaps remain.

A political party is an organization that nominates candidates to stand for election in its name and seeks to place representatives in the government. Etymologically, party can be traced back to its roots in “part” and in “divide,” implying that a party represents one side of a controversy. Yet in practice the word “party” is also used to refer to entities like the German Nazi Party or the Soviet Communist Party, where party and state were synonymous and no opposing parties were permitted. Furthermore, almost all parties claim that, if successful, they will exercise power on behalf of the general public, and some states with single-party systems may seek to build democracy rather than repudiate it (Wekkin, Whistler, Kelley, and Maggiotto, 1993). But some still insist that states with only a single party do not really have parties at all: “[A party is] an organization of society’s active political agents who *compete* for popular support with another group or persons holding diverse views,” says Neumann (1956:395), and Schlesinger (1968:428) claims a party is a “political organization which actively and effectively engages in the competition for elective office.” Our own more generous definition includes both all-powerful single parties and hopelessly unpopular minor parties and is, we believe, more consistent with general usage. It is similar to that of Sartori (1976:64), who defines party as “any political group that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office,” although the word *capable* is a stumbling block for us – some parties are so very

inept that capability seems out of their realm. At the same time, some parties, both in one-party states and where they are in competition for power, may engage in acts of violence and fraud that stretch the fabric of inclusion in a peaceful electoral process.

In searching for the broadest existing definition of political party, one unconstrained by national setting, degree of institutionalization, or electoral fortunes, there is a possibility of overlapping with social movements and interest groups (Clemens, 1997; Tarrow, 1995; Thomas and Hrebener, 1995:1–2).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, not all definitions of parties confine them to actual or potential government roles. Weber (1978:939), for example, defined parties as contending groups that struggle for political control within corporate bodies. Lipset et al. (1956), as we have already noted, examined the internal workings of the International Typographical Union through the activities of two opposing organized groups or parties. Although these broader conceptions have contributed many insights to our understanding of how parties work, they do not form an essential part of our subsequent discussion. In this volume, interest groups and social movements are the primary subject of Chapters 14 and 16 respectively.

<sup>1</sup> In Tilly’s model, a social movement offers “a sustained challenge to power holders” (1999:257), which, when coupled with electoral activity, can characterize a protest party, what Schwartz (2000, 2002) considers a “party movement.” Keuchler and Dalton (1990:189–90) speak of a “movement party” as the partisan arm of a social movement and Yishai (1994:198–200) refers to “interest parties” as those that represent single-interest groups. Organizations like trade unions, farm organizations, and business interest groups, although they have nonelectoral goals that provide their primary rationale for existence, may, without having formal party status, also play an active role in elections and work exclusively on behalf of a single political party or its candidates. But when a movement or an interest group nominates candidates to stand for election in its own name and these candidates are accepted for placement on the ballot, then that organization is no longer “just” an interest group – it has become, however temporarily, a political party. Conversely, when a group does not place candidates in contention for office in its own name, it is not a party, no matter how active it may be in determining and supporting the candidates of existent parties.

## THE SOCIAL BASES OF POLITICAL PARTIES

The social bases of political parties have three interrelated aspects – origins, ties with organized interests, and links with citizens. Under origins we treat the social structural roots from which parties emerge, an emphasis that gives weight to national histories while considering the extent to which history can be overtaken by contemporary changes. Ties with organized interests continue the theme of origins by linking groups with parties in a way that concentrates on active efforts at mobilization that take place after the founding experiences. Finally, links with citizens, although clearly an outgrowth of both origins and organized interests, need to be considered on their own terms, as ways even unorganized population categories are mobilized. It is this last kind of link that is generally associated with conceptions of “party in the electorate” (e.g., Beck and Sorauf, 1992; Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000). But the electoral or citizen component of parties are more than just ties with voters. Origins, whether remote or recent, and ties with organized groups, whether stable or changing, are also necessary in giving social meaning to political parties.

## Party Origins

The originating circumstances of political parties remain important markers for their future development, comparable to the impact of childhood on an adult (Duverger, 1963:xxiii). For Duverger, a political scientist, the important question to ask is whether parties have formed inside or outside legislative bodies – those forming inside are, he says, more likely to be elite-based parties, whereas those forming outside tend to be open mass parties. Panebianco agrees that origins are important, but calls for a more complex “genetic model,” one taking into consideration a party’s specific construction and development, the presence or absence of an external “sponsor institution,” and/or charismatic leadership (Panebianco, 1988:50–2).

What Panebianco calls a “sponsor institution” may simply be groups that turn themselves into a

political party. Charlot (1967:37–8) shows how the French Rally for the Republic, known originally as the Union for a New Republic, was formed out of a collection of groups and individuals who supported Charles de Gaulle during the 1958 crisis produced by France’s battle with Algerian rebels. Determined to place their hero (and themselves) in office, they found it necessary to form a party. More often, it is a single group that transforms itself into a political party, as did the African National Congress after the fall of apartheid in South Africa (prior to which it was an illegal movement) and the trade union-based movement of Solidarity in Poland after the fall of communism.

Sociologists have taken a different approach to the study of party origins, one based more on social than institutional factors. Unquestionably the most influential and far-reaching is found in Lipset and Rokkan (1967), who built on theories developed by Talcott Parsons to account for the kinds of parties that appear at particular stages of national development, depending on the cleavage structure. They array cleavages along two dimensions, the territorial-cultural and the functional. The first had its roots in the national revolution that led to the rise of nation-states; the second, in the industrial revolution. Each revolution, in turn, gave rise to two kinds of cleavages. The national revolution created tension between church and state and between a central nation-building culture and that of “peripheral” subjects distinctive in language, religion, or ethnicity. The industrial revolution created tension between the landed aristocracy and the new industrial entrepreneurs and between owners and landlords, on the one hand, and tenants and workers, on the other. They conclude that, “Much of the history of Europe since the beginning of the nineteenth century can be described in terms of the interaction between these two processes of revolutionary change: the one triggered in France and the other originating in Britain” (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967:14–15). Cleavages make up interrelated systems whose appearance under formative historical circumstances leads to the emergence of particular kinds of parties. Once established, these parties continue even under

changing conditions – the party systems of the 1960s still reflected, they found, the underlying cleavages of the 1920s or even earlier. Politics may heat up and change, but party systems freeze at birth and do not alter much thereafter – what has come to be called the “freezing hypothesis.”

Although often considered applicable to the United States and Canada, Lipset and Rokkan developed their model mainly to account for party origins in Western Europe. But even in Europe they found deviations. Where there is a “fully mobilized nation state” – that is, once all citizens have been incorporated – there can still be new forms of protest against elites stemming from conflicting conceptions of the nation and leading to the rise of “anti-system parties,” exemplified by fascism and other authoritarian, right-wing movements (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967:23).

Limits to the Lipset–Rokkan model were apparent in the United States, where concern with party origins has focused on why it remained virtually the only industrialized country without a strong working-class party. Engels (1942:467) attributed U.S. backwardness to the absence of feudalism, which would otherwise have stimulated more differentiated classes. Sombart (1976) argued that U.S. workers enjoyed relatively better economic conditions, greater social equality, and opportunities for mobility, particularly to the West, which discouraged the kind of militancy experienced by German workers and required for a vibrant socialism. Lipset (1968) was motivated to write his dissertation on this topic in the 1940s, finding what was missing in the United States in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan, where socialism emerged among prairie wheat farmers.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Lipset’s explanation of how Saskatchewan differed from comparable regions in the United States has altered with time. Originally, he attributed it to social and ecological conditions in Saskatchewan that produced a rural class consciousness (Lipset, 1968:xiii). Later he would give more importance to political institutions, in particular, the nature of federalism and a parliamentary system of government (Lipset, 1968:xiii–xiv). In a third shift, he gave new significance to cultural factors, created by the impact of Canada’s counterrevolutionary tradition (Lipset, 1990).

By using Saskatchewan as his source of comparison, Lipset allowed “agrarian socialism” to stand in for the more usual association between socialism and the urban working class (Schwartz, 1991). In contrast, other explanations for the absence of a viable socialist party in the United States focus on the weakness of the early labor movement. Despite its success in mobilizing large numbers of urban workers in the 1880s, the Knights of Labor soon lost its appeal with that population and hence its potential to form a working-class party. Voss (1993) blamed this failure on opposition from employers’ organizations. Kaufman (2001) links the falloff in Knights of Labor support to its positioning as a fraternal association, putting it in competition with similar groups in a crowded organizational niche. Moving to the twentieth century, Katznelson (1982) finds the pull from ethnicity and community overpowering the potential for a unified working-class consciousness. Lipset’s latest analysis gives greatest weight to the effects of the political system, antistatist and individualistic values, and working-class diversity. For example, the contention that immigrants made it difficult to sell socialism to workers is shown to apply only when the community was ethnically heterogeneous (Lipset and Marks, 2000).

New questions about the origins of parties have arisen in Europe, where the durability of some parties in Western Europe has continued alongside rising electoral volatility and the creation of new parties. One of the first to document this trend was Pedersen (1979), stimulated by Denmark’s “earthquake election of 1973” to analyze the phenomenon in Western Europe. Pedersen’s observation that European party systems were steadily shifting was subsequently confirmed by others (Dalton, Flanagan, and Beck, 1984; Harmel and Robertson, 1985; Lawson and Merkl, 1988; Shamir, 1984; von Beyme, 1982; Wolinetz, 1979, 1988). As Rommele (1999:9) pointed out, “the new studies suggested the glacier was in retreat, and a great thaw had begun.”

Consistent with Inglehart’s (1977, 1990, 1997) work on value orientation and value change, Kitschelt (1989, 1990) found that the

new parties were emerging from social movements concerned with lifestyle issues of the environment, racism, peace, and gender and labeled them “left-libertarian” parties. “They are ‘Left’ because they share with traditional socialism a mistrust of the marketplace, of private investment, and of the achievement ethic, and a commitment to egalitarian redistribution. They are ‘libertarian’ because they reject the authority of private or public bureaucracies to regulate individual and collective conduct” (Kitschelt, 1990:180). Characteristically, these parties are associated with economic affluence and appeal to the young and well-educated.

Were the old cleavages disappearing in this wave of political postmaterialism? Not according to Katz, for whom the new cleavages are strongly akin to the older ones, focused on disputes over the distribution of power between citizens and the central state and between employees, including employed professionals, and corporate enterprise. He argues that Lipset and Rokkan’s evolutionary argument, in which class was the newest basis of party formation, overlooked the contemporary power of more primal cleavages of religion, language, origin, or location (Katz, 2001). Others have shown that these ascriptive characteristics show up as well in new parties of the right. In Canada, a significant basis for the formation of the Reform Party resides in the power of regionalism to mobilize discontent (Harrison, 1995:38–47). The anti-immigrant and politically disenchanted members of the French National Front, the Danish People’s Party, the Italian Northern League, the Austrian Freedom Party, the Swiss People’s Party, the Belgian Flemish Bloc, and the Norwegian Progress Party share the belief that democracy works best when there is a culturally homogenous population (Betz, 2001).

In other contexts, however, it is difficult if not impossible to find new parties based on the old cleavages identified by Lipset and Rokkan and this is particularly true in newly democratizing countries (Lawson, Rommele, and Karasimeonov, 1999). Yet successor parties in Portugal, after the passage from an authoritarian to a democratic regime, appear to have continued class cleavages, most readily from the left

(Maxwell, 1986). The fall of the Soviet Union produced newly autonomous states and new opportunities for political parties. Parties in Russia appear to be based largely on shifting combinations of interests in the pursuit of capitalistic success (Barany and Moser, 2001; Pammett and De Bardeleben, 2000). In many Eastern and Central European states, old cleavages were brutally wiped out by successive Nazi and communist totalitarian regimes and the only consistent posttotalitarian cleavage has been that between current winners and losers. But more immediate history remains relevant. Kitschelt (1995a) classified communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to construct a typology of patrimonial, bureaucratic-authoritarian, and national consensus types that he then used to account for the character of communist successor parties.

### Ties with Organized Interests

Many political parties exist in more or less close relationship with organized interests. Some ties arise at the formative stage, when a party is created as the political arm of an organized interest group. Past examples include the development of parties to defend the interests of particular religious denominations, which then continue to express positions reflecting the views of those churches. In the Netherlands, Calvinists formed two parties, the older Anti-Revolutionary party, which split through internal dissension, and the later Christian Historical Union (Daalder, 1955; Lijphart, 1968). Trade unions also have been both sources of parties and continuing influences on their policies and governance.

When the line dividing parties from related interest groups is unclear, it may lead to what Yishai (1994) calls interest parties, illustrated by the Poujadists in France, the Peace Party in Japan, and the Pensioners’ Association in Israel. Or it may foster an uneasy relation, as illustrated by the Christian Right and its penetration of the Republican Party in the United States. Yet, although the Christian Right supplies important resources of money and support, its influence on the party’s nomination process may lead

to conflict with other interests within the party and to an inability to elect candidates it favors (Green, Rozell, and Wilcox, 2001).

Other ties have been instigated by parties themselves in efforts to ensure resources for their own continuity as well as to tap into the concerns of potentially important constituents. These efforts are often matched by those of organized groups seeking access to policy makers. One process through which such ties are formed is through co-optation, where new elements are given a voice in an organization to prevent them from causing disruption (Selznick, 1949:13). The expectation of those doing the co-opting is that the elements co-opted will become less fervid exponents of their original group's interests. The organizational literature suggests that co-optation is likely to take place as a means of managing interdependence (Scott, 1998:200), when the organization doing the co-opting would otherwise be hindered in its activities by opposition from competitors. And as Scott (1998:201) reminds us, co-optation "provides a two-way street, with both influence and support flowing sometimes in one direction, sometimes in the other." Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus (1996) describe how third parties in the United States may disappear through co-optation by one of the major parties yet still experience a kind of victory through their impact on the policies of the co-opting party.

In the United States, the amount and significance of interest group campaign contributions to, or on behalf of, candidates has grown exponentially in recent years (Goidel, Gross, and Shields, 1999). Efforts to keep the sums involved down to reasonable proportions have either failed altogether or resulted in such watered down legislation as to make little difference (Rozell and Wilcox, 1999:100-1). Although there is strong evidence for big business preference for the Republican Party and for legislation supporting a conservative agenda (Clawson and Su, 1990; Clawson, Neustadt, and Scott, 1992; Clawson Neustadt, and Weller, 1998; Neustadt, Scott, and Clawson, 1991; Su, Neustadt, and Clawson, 1995), it has become more common for organized business

interests as well as labor to distribute their contributions more evenly between both major parties. Because U.S. legislatures operate in a log-rolling fashion, not only will probusiness Democratic office-seekers be supported but so will others, perhaps not so sympathetic, yet in critically influential committee positions (Eisemeier and Pollock, 1988; Mizruchi, 1992; Schwartz, 1990:54-6).<sup>3</sup>

In other nations, where candidate dependency on private funds is less pronounced, the links between particular groups and parties have also weakened. In Canada, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association (CMA) has long been a strong supporter of the Conservative Party, but never to the exclusion of the Liberal Party.<sup>4</sup> On the Left, the New Democratic Party (NDP) began in 1961 with strong commitments from organized labor and formal provision for affiliation (Horowitz, 1968), but when the party gained office in the industrialized province of Ontario during an economic slow-down, labor did not hesitate to publicly criticize the government (Schwartz, 1994b:16-17).

Despite the fact that Socialist parties often owe their origin to organized labor, European trade unions have recently loosened their formerly strong ties with the left and have reached out to establish better relations with often-ruling conservative parties or, at least, as in the case of the relations between the French Parti Socialiste and the Confédération Française de Travail (CFDT), to make it clear their support can no longer simply be taken for granted. Rivalry among trade unions, leading to competitive demands, is suggested as the cause for a loosening of ties with the Spanish Socialist Party (Ruiz, 2001). The British Labour Party (BLP), which grew out of the trade union movement, long encouraged "automatic" membership in the party through prior membership in affiliated trade unions, giving labor leaders, along with

<sup>3</sup> The relation between campaign contributions and social cleavages is dealt with in more detail in the chapter by Manza, Brooks, and Souder in this volume.

<sup>4</sup> However, when the two major parties lined up on diametrically opposed sides over free trade with the United States in the 1980s, the CMA's contacts with the Liberals became sidelined (Bashevkin, 1991).

elected party elites, influential roles in party decision making (McKenzie, 1956; Webb, 1992). However, under the leadership of Tony Blair, the BLP has moved to avoid being seen as merely a workers' party. In parallel, the trade union movement has worked to place its own eggs in more than one basket (Webb, 1994:115).

In the United States, in an analogous way, trade unions maintained relatively close relations with the Democratic Party. Unions are a significant source of campaign contributions, advisors, and party workers for the Democrats, especially in those geographic locations where unionized industry remains strong (Jewell and Morehouse, 2001:154). Yet the sharp drop in union membership has clearly reduced the overall presence of trade union leadership in the Democratic Party and the Clinton administration disappointed its union supporters time and again, perhaps most significantly by going forward with the North American Free Trade Agreement [although unions kept up enough pressure to ensure the passage of a labor side-agreement, the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (Mayer, 1998)]. Unions now maintain better contacts than earlier with the Republican Party and can, at times, find individual candidates of that party they deem worth supporting (e.g., Schwartz, 1990:234, 237).

### Citizen Linkage

The question of parties and linkage can be approached from two perspectives: we can assume that citizens who vote for a particular party are thereby linked to that party and, via it, to the political process and then seek to discover and track changes in voter alignment, asking which groups identify with which party and noting changes over time. Or we can, instead, ask how exactly political parties link citizens to the political process and whether there are different kinds of linkage, performed by different parties in different nations.

The first approach has been by far the most common, and here we begin by exploring sociological visions of linkage as the mobilization of population groups by political parties in

competitive systems. In these studies "mobilization" means voting. Indeed, the connection between social cleavages and voter alignments is at the core of what is often thought of as the "sociological model" of politics (e.g., Dalton and Wattenberg, 1993:199–200).

In the United States, the most influential early studies of voting behavior, associated with what we can call the Columbia school (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; Berelson et al., 1954) and the Michigan school (Campbell et al., 1954; Campbell et al., 1960), all agreed on the centrality of social characteristics in connecting voters to either the Democratic or Republican parties. Even without clearly class-based parties, it was possible to discern a strong connection between the working class and Democratic voting and the middle class and Republican voting. In addition, religion, race, urban or rural residence, and region of the country all played a prominent role in partisan mobilization.

By the 1980s, scholars were arguing that the social structural basis of partisan alignments was declining in the Americas and Western Europe (Dalton, 1988; Franklin, 1992; Wattenberg, 1996). Whatever had emerged in its place was now so fluid that patterns were no longer discernible. Reasons given for these changes, and conveniently summarized by Manza and Brooks (1999:20–33), rest on four theses:

(1) changes in social structure, especially increased levels of affluence, upward social mobility, and declining marital homogamy; (2) increased levels of education and 'cognitive mobilization' in the electorate, which potentially provide voters with the tools to make judgments independent of social group loyalties; (3) the rise of new values and issue conflicts; and (4) changes in the party systems and the patterning of macro-level electoral alignments.

Given our focus on political parties, it is worth elaborating on this fourth theory, which argues that, because no party can muster a single cleavage-based constituency sufficient to give it office, parties must broaden their appeal to include other kinds of voters, thereby weakening ties with the original social base. First presented by Kirchheimer (1966), the "catch-all" theory of political parties found further support in an analysis of Western European social democratic

parties (Przeworski and Sprague, 1986) and is buttressed by more recent changes in those parties in Britain, France, and Germany. It also finds support in the experiences of the Canadian New Democratic Party (Schwartz, 1994b) and in the shift to the center by the Democratic Party under President Bill Clinton. The result of these changes is to limit the options available to working-class voters. They can stick with their original party, though their influence is diluted by the inclusion of other kinds of voters, find an alternative party (generally a minor one), or withdraw from politics altogether. The likelihood of the latter possibility is supported by research that shows nonvoting to be higher among the poor and working class in the United States (Piven and Cloward, 1988; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady, 1997).

Yet not everyone is prepared to give up on the importance of social cleavages in providing links with particular parties. Manza and Brooks (1999) cover the field most thoroughly by first defining social cleavage according to whether it is rooted in social structure, associated with group consciousness, and mobilized for political action. Based on this definition, they identify four major cleavages in the United States: race, religion, class, and gender. Classifying religion and class more finely than by the usual dichotomous variables, they are able to find significant cleavages associated with partisanship as strong in the 1990s as in the 1950s. Among their relevant findings are the preeminence of race, followed by religion, then class, and finally gender. Class has fluctuated over the decades, showing sharpest decline in 1996. Professionals, once the most Republican, moved to be the most Democratic in 1996. The self-employed became more Republican and the nonskilled less Democratic. Liberal Protestants changed from being the most Republican to a centrist position, while Conservative Protestants remained unchanged as staunch Republicans. The gender gap has been growing since the 1960s, moving more women into the ranks of Democrats and reflecting the impact of increased labor force participation.

At one level, at least, Manza and Brooks's analysis supports that of others who argue for the

declining significance of class in U.S. politics, if by this is meant a decline in support from the working class for the Democratic Party. Growing unpopularity of the welfare state and countervailing pulls from race and ethnicity may account for some of this shift. At the same time, the increasing significance of race and ethnicity ensures that U.S. parties will remain distinct in composition, especially as more Latino voters enter the electoral arena.

What of other Western democracies? There too controversy remains over the declining significance of class as the underlying rationale for partisan behavior. Basing their argument on data analyzed by using an index first developed by Alford (1963) to dichotomize occupations into classes, Clark, Lipset and Rempel (2001) are among those who argue for decline most forcefully. Goldthorpe (2001), who works with a more complex index of class, represents those who, although abandoning any commitment to a straightforward Marxian analysis of class conflict, still see the salience of class to politics. In this second camp, researchers report decline in class voting as well but emphasize how it is tied to national differences, with Canada and the United States the lowest and Britain and the Scandinavian countries the highest (Nieuwbeerta, 2001). The division of postcommunist populations into winners and losers is another way of saying that class persists.

Nonetheless, as we noted earlier in our discussion of party origins and ties with organized groups, ascriptive characteristics also remain powerful in determining European partisan behavior, as they do in the United States. Dogan (2001), for example, who refers not only to the Western European drop in class but also to the religious voting (which had remained very robust until the 1970s), sees new importance in ethnic factors as a result of immigration. Migrants, often visibly distinctive, unenfranchised, geographically concentrated, and working in low-skilled jobs, contribute to the erosion of working class solidarity and the attractions of right-wing parties to native-born workers (Kitschelt, 1995b).

Other writers are less concerned to discover linkages between particular groups and parties

than to focus on the forms of linkage parties provide. Lawson (1980:13–19) takes the broadest view by identifying four possibilities. Parties can connect the public with government by serving as agencies for citizen participation, providing avenues for the representation of citizens' views, returning favors for votes, or manipulating and controlling constituents. From this perspective it is possible to view the linkage roles of parties even in noncompetitive and coercive political systems.

For some scholars the most fundamental linkage role is encouraging participation, regardless of how that participation is directed.<sup>5</sup> Here recent evidence of decline is considerable. Wattenberg (2000) looks at figures for nineteen industrialized countries, comparing the first two elections in the 1950s with the two most recent ones in the 1990s. Every country except Sweden and Denmark shows a drop in voting turnout, from as high as 39 percent for Switzerland to as low as 1 percent in Australia. Although acknowledging that these figures may represent only a temporary phenomenon rather than a long-term trend, because many countries did not demonstrate decline until the 1980s, Wattenberg is inclined to a pessimistic assessment. "The fact that voter turnout has declined indicates that there is less of a market for the parties' product and that party systems around the advanced industrialized world have fallen upon hard times" (Wattenberg, 2000:76).

### Assessing Social Bases

Dividing our discussion of social bases into three has the virtue of revealing the distinct ways they operate. Origins give direction to party formation, indicating which social cleavages are sufficiently mobilized to take advantage of opportunities to emerge as parties. They also recognize the importance of national histories, including their capacity to create new tensions, sources of grievance, and cleavages that can take partisan shape. Attention to ties with organized groups

picks up from origins to examine the possibilities of continuing interaction between parties and groups as well as the attenuation of those ties. Relations with the electorate are different in that they do not presume either a formal connection with parties or the organization of demographic groups. Each approach to these social bases remains important in its own right by demonstrating continuities, disjuncture, and new connections.

All three perspectives on social bases also point to interrelations and their consequences. At least as far as the literature is concerned, the most notable conjunction is between socialist parties and the working class. Socialist parties have emerged where there is a self-conscious working class, organized into trade unions. But they also appear in rural areas, where small landholders find, at least in some variant form, political solutions in socialism (Lipset, 1968:15–38; Schwartz, 1991). In either case, the existence of a class-conscious laboring group is a prerequisite for the emergence of a socialist party. Socialist parties that exist without this social basis, united solely by ideology, are not electorally viable. Genuine socialist parties must negotiate their relations with the organized constituencies that gave them birth. Yet even here the amount of influence that the latter will have on the day to day affairs of the party and on its policy making is now in question.

Our own assessment acknowledges both the reality of the declining relevance of class in advanced industrial societies, along with national variations, and the persistence of class as just one of the significant factors in the mobilization of the electorate. Overall, we see the continuing importance of social cleavages, not the homogenization of the electorate. At the same time, the size, salience, and mobilization of cleavages alter, supporting the need for ongoing research, as Katz (2001:89) convincingly argues. And to that research must now be added a new puzzle: to what extent do parties, especially those seeking power based on large majorities rather than the mere opportunity to speak out on behalf of cherished values, actually seek to mobilize cleavages?

<sup>5</sup> See the discussion by Manza, Brooks, and Sauder in this volume.

THE STRUCTURE AND CULTURE  
OF POLITICAL PARTIES

### Classical Approaches and Influences

In the days before there were sharply drawn lines among social science disciplines, the organizational structure of political parties attracted the attention of a number of scholars who continue to influence both sociology and political science. The most preeminent were Ostrogorski, Weber, and Michels.

Ostrogorski (1970) viewed organization, which he equated with extralegislative party machines and caucuses, with suspicion. Using examples from U.S. urban politics, he worried that such organizations could manipulate the public and the political agenda through the use of patronage and outright corruption. Ostrogorski's warnings were supported by later exposés of party machines (Riordon, 1963) and fed the populist disdain for politics, leading to ever increasing legal restrictions on parties (Lawson, 1987; Winger, 1995), including their disbarment from competition in local elections (Hawley, 1973). Amenta (1998:252–3) argues that the continued existence of patronage-oriented parties in the United States was one of the barriers to the adoption of far-reaching social welfare policies. Others, however, take a more measured look at machines, finding virtues in them through their ability to integrate immigrants and provide local arenas for political participation (Gosnell, 1968; Merton, 1968:125–31). In addition, there is evidence that only rarely have machines actually been fully developed and dominant in American cities (Eldersveld, 1964; Key, 1964; Mayhew, 1986). Meanwhile, nonpartisan elections have been shown to depress voting turnout, advantage incumbents (Schaffner et al., 2001), and discourage working-class and minority participation (Winger, 1995).

Weber, who viewed parties broadly as groups that struggle for political control (1978:939), is most influential for his theory of legitimate authority and the administrative structures based on it (1978:212–45). Authority can stem from traditional, charismatic, or rational-legal

roots but it is the latter, giving rise to bureaucratic structures, that best describe the modern world (1978:956–1002). Although Weber saw elections modifying the principle of rationality by introducing other, more personal factors (1978:266–9), he viewed competitive mass political parties, including those of England and the United States as well as the German Social Democrats, as essentially bureaucratic (1978:984).

When reference is made to organization it now often conjures the kind of bureaucratic structure described by Weber but with a negative image. Moreover, in the United States, the supposed absence of organization as a characteristic of political parties was perceived to be a positive virtue, captured in the sardonic tribute paid by Will Rogers, who said, “I belong to no organized party. I’m a Democrat.” The result is that political parties have tended to escape the kind of study that has been addressed to a variety of other organized activities. Panebianco (1988) attributed the shift away from organizational analysis to new methods and theories that examined electoral behavior, social class, and public policy and led to an emphasis on party systems. But there has been a loss from this change, “namely the awareness that whatever else parties are and to whatever other solicitations they respond, they are above all organizations and that organizational analysis must therefore come before any other perspective” (Panebianco, 1988:xi).

Michels (1962) influential work, based mainly on his analysis of the pre–World War I German Social Democratic Party, argued that, even as social democratic parties formed to fight for greater democracy, they were destined to turn into oligarchies, with power concentrated in the hands of a small number of entrenched leaders. According to him, a viable political party, particularly one that sets out to challenge the existing distributions of power, must become organized. The result is a bureaucracy, where holding office becomes a full-time activity. Whether acting as functionaries or popularly elected leaders, officeholders acquire the kind of information that gives them power and reduces the role of rank-and-file members. In this model, internal democracy is not possible.

Michels's prediction about the inevitability of oligarchy has been a challenge to those who see political parties in more positive or nuanced terms (see Lipset, 1962:25–8). Duverger (1963:424) acknowledges that all systems of governance are necessarily oligarchic in the sense that it is virtually impossible for everyone to equally participate in decision making. Panebianco (1988:171–3), based on a more complex conception of organization, sees oligarchy as one possible outcome that results from the form of the dominant coalition (those who control and coordinate the party's activities) and the extent of institutionalization (closeness in the relation between the party and its environment). An oligarchy results when a small coalition exercises power under conditions of complete institutionalization. For Panebianco, such institutionalization is part of an evolutionary development that moves a party from expansive social movement-kinds of interests and organization to ones that are more limited, professional, and bureaucratic. Given that Panebianco (1988:165) offers the SPD as his prime example of an oligarchy, it is clear that he has not abandoned Michels but only added to his theory.

### Variations in Organizational Structure

Perhaps the most radical statement about the significance of organization came from Duverger (1963:xv): “present-day parties are distinguished far less by their programme or the class of their members than by the nature of their organization. A party is a community with a particular structure. Modern parties are characterized primarily by their anatomy.” From this position he went on to build a schema based on structural elements, kinds of membership and support, and leadership. Most relevant is his distinction between cadre and mass parties. Mass parties are based on members that contribute their resources to ensuring an ongoing operation, originally descriptive of Socialist parties. In cadre parties, a relatively small core is responsible for activities tied to elections and may be inactive at other times. There is a coincidence between these membership characteristics and

party structure. “Cadre parties correspond to caucus parties, decentralized and weakly knit; mass parties to parties based on branches, more centralized and more firmly knit” (Duverger, 1963:67).

Duverger predicted that mass parties would become the dominant form of organization as cadre parties saw the advantages of greater member participation. He was soon opposed by, for example, Kirchheimer (1966), who instead saw the spread of “catch-all parties”; Epstein (1980:126–9), who disputed any “contagion from the left”; and, more recently, Katz and Mair (1995), who present an alternative model in the cartel party. Cartel parties loosen the boundaries between party and state and cooperate with each other to tap resources. Scarrow's (2000:92–5) empirical analysis of the eighteen OECD members concludes that the mass party was never widespread and was, in any case, more prevalent during the third quarter of the twentieth century, rather than in the first half, as Duverger argued. Even so, the mass party model has found some success in the postcommunist transition within the Hungarian Socialist Party and Social Democracy of the Polish Republic (Lewis 1996:16–17).

Structure can be evaluated differently when, in opposition to the Weberian model of bureaucracy, organizations are treated as coalitions of interests, sometimes cooperating and sometimes competing (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978:36). In these situations, parts are more loosely coupled. With coordination no longer so important, it is possible for the organization to find areas of slack, where there are unused resources that can be mobilized at times of changing needs (Scott, 1998:234–5). In the United States, for example, field staff from the Local Elections Committee of the Republican National Committee often took the initiative in deciding which state legislative seats deserved their help, even when their choices did not coincide with those made by state-level party officials (Schwartz, 1990:32, 218–219). Loose coupling reduces interdependence among parts, an advantage where an organization operates in a diverse and segmented environment (Scott, 1998:268). In federal systems, like those in Canada and the United States,

the weakness of a party at one level of government or in particular areas of the country does not then necessarily translate into overall weakness. Loose coupling within parties can also be associated with efforts to be broadly representative of a diverse electoral environment (Schwartz, 1990:257–9). Or, in the case of left-libertarian parties, loose coupling can also be present with more ideological coherence (Kitschelt, 1990:185).

One structural variation allowing loose coupling is a matrix form, where there are competing centers of authority based on vertical and horizontal lines. Vertical lines are usually tied to functions; horizontal lines, to projects, or geographic location (Hill and White, 1979). When political events occur at different geographic levels – local, provincial, and national – and when responsibilities are distinct (e.g., independent elections and unique activities) the kind of party organization that evolves will likely be of this matrix form. It should be noted that matrix is a label applied by an organizational analyst; it is not necessarily a form deliberately selected by party actors. The way in which a matrix emerges is illustrated by the Canadian New Democratic Party (NDP). In 1961, it was recreated from the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) to better represent social democracy within urban, industrial Canada (Whitehorn, 1992). The NDP's structure and constitution made national politics crucial, yet the structure and culture of Canada ensured that regional/provincial interests would remain prominent. The results were illustrated by tensions between the national and Saskatchewan wings, where, provincially, the CCF had a history as the governing party. Formation of the NDP was unwelcome in Saskatchewan, still dominated by rural, farm interests rather than by the working-class concerns in more industrialized areas. To emphasize these differences, the party continued to call itself the CCF Saskatchewan Section of the NDP (Morton, 1986:22). It was not until 1968 that it officially changed its name to the New Democratic Party of Saskatchewan even while continuing to distinguish itself programmatically from its federal counterpart (Schwartz, 2002:160–1).

An analysis of the Republican Party of Illinois found the basis of a matrix organization in two dimensions subsuming how activities are organized – “central arenas of action in contrast to local ones, and efforts at centralization in contrast to those aimed at retaining autonomy” (Schwartz, 1990:84). The result is consistent with Epstein's (1982) characterization of U.S. parties as federations of individual and collective actors. Federations are “organized hierarchically, not in terms of dominance, but in the clustering of interdependent parts” (Schwartz, 1990:267).

Network structures that emphasize egalitarian and reciprocal ties among units are another organizational variant (Powell, 1990). Although egalitarianism may not be prominent in political parties, network imagery itself is broadly applicable to party structure. The network is not limited to a formal organizational chart but encompasses “individual and collective units sharing a party name whose activities have some recognized partisan purpose” (Schwartz, 1990:11). Components can range from public officeholders, at all levels of government; party functionaries, whether elected or appointed; official committees; unofficial influentials like advisors and financial contributors; representatives of allied interest groups; and members at specified levels of activism. This way of looking at party has been recognized by party functionaries such as Tom Cole (1993:61) when he was executive director of the National Republican Campaign Committee. “One of the blinders on political scientists is to think in terms of parties, not partisanship, which is much more important.” Relations among network elements can be examined – for example, whether they are strong or weak – as well as with respect to sources of stability and change – for example, in so far as they are affected by the governing status of the party or the personal styles of individual actors.

A network approach supports new ways of looking at party membership. Mair (1994:16), for example, suggests that parties now are consciously distinguishing among categories of members by giving increased power to the supposedly more docile rank-and-file than to party activists. Even with overall membership

decline, members remain important in intra-party struggles (Scarow, 2000:100) and in selecting legislators and legitimizing elections (Scarow, Webb, and Farrell, 2000). In Austria, membership is now fostered less to maintain a loyal electoral base than to enhance financial resources and sources for recruiting candidates (Müller, 1994:66–7). In Canada, the direct election of party leaders by all parties, not just by those that had a mass-type organization, has removed the old distinctions between members and nonmembers because now those choosing leaders need only pay a membership fee to be given this privilege without incurring any other responsibilities (Carty, Cross, and Young, 2000:227).

Abandoning rigid organizational models that focus solely on formal positions and conceiving of parties as network structures gives a place to professional advisors whose main loyalty is to party chiefs. Panebianco (1988:264) assesses the importance of professional staff in leading to the development of electoral-professional parties, where there is, concomitantly, a direct appeal to the electorate, emphasis on public representatives, and dependence on interest groups. The use of professional campaign staff contributes to party centralization and enhances the position of the party leader (Farrell and Webb, 2000). Professional staff is also given a critical role in Monroe's (2001) analysis of California parties. Schwartz's (1990, 1994a) network analysis of the Illinois Republican Party included elements whose influence in the party came from their status in the larger community, like business, trade union, or professional leadership.

There are, in effect, multiple ways for parties to organize. Bureaucracy remains a critical organizational form – it is just not the only one. Variations become apparent when parties are examined in different institutional contexts. For example, in the United States, there has been an inclination to think of party organization in terms of state or local bodies (for a summary, see Epstein, 1993). When the emphasis is on local machines, the model is a kind of fiefdom, based on personal loyalties and secured through patronage and other favors. Although using different terminology, this assessment is

similar to Epstein's (1986:134–44) but differs from Ware's (1988:xii), who sees them as caucus-cadre types, with power concentrated in the hands of local elites. The decline of machines is matched by studies of individual cities where new kinds of organizations, with more bureaucratic structures, have emerged (see those included in Crotty, 1986).

Evidence suggests considerable variation and distinct differences between Republicans and Democrats at different levels, with county, and particularly state and national, levels of organization most elaborated among Republicans (e.g., Cotter et al., 1984; Herrnson, 1993; Ware, 1988). It is such differences that make it possible to plausibly argue either that parties as organizations are or are not declining. We feel most comfortable with a conclusion that party organizations are changing.

### Organizational Culture

For Panebianco (1988:163–4), party organization has an importance that is independent of social base or ideological thrust. Our own agreement with this position is modified by the understanding that organizations are as much cultural systems as they are structures of relations. It is culture that provides the cognitive and symbolic bases for both constraining and enabling social action (Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994:1436–42). Trice and Beyer (1993:2) distinguish the substance of culture as the emotionally charged ideologies developed for dealing with uncertainty. The expression of beliefs, values, and norms takes place through cultural forms manifested in symbols, language, narratives, and practices (Trice and Beyer, 1993:77–128).

Party culture operates in at least four ways. At one level, culture is expressed as ideology – the beliefs that identify a party as distinct from others and provide a rationale and identity for adherents, an explanation of political events, and a blueprint for action. Such cultures exist in the grand isms of modern political theory. Nationalism, fascism, socialism, and communism are all associated with major social movements that are (or were) also political parties,

although not always in competitive party systems. Socialism retains its vitality in various workers, socialist, and social democratic parties at the same time as it is shaped and altered by national settings, electoral strength, and governing experience. Socialism also demonstrates how a single ideology can become fragmented, even within one country, through factional disputes over how it should be translated into actions and who are recognized as its genuine exponents (e.g., Bartolini, 2000). Nationalism also remains potent in the contemporary world, sometimes translated into specific regional or ethnic parties (Johnston, 1994). Examples include the Canadian Reform Party and the Italian Northern League. Meanwhile, new value orientations emerge, such as feminism and environmentalism, reshaping old parties or creating new ones, like the Green Party. Middle-of-the-road catch-all parties tend to suppress ideological currents. Yet, even so, in the United States, the Democrats and Republicans manifest clear differences along a right/left dimension, especially when viewed from the perspective of party leaders (Grofman et al., 2002).

Second, culture provides the organizing rationale by which members are incorporated. It is captured in Neumann's (1956) distinction between parties of representation and parties of social integration. The former are made up of cadre or catch-all parties that involve supporters mainly in their capacity as voters. The latter, descriptive mainly of democratic socialist parties that encompassed the social and cultural life of members through various auxiliary organizations, are now less common. The loosening of integrative ties has led to further inference about party decline.

Comprehensive social integration is often a feature of social movements that rely on solidarity incentives. To the extent that social movements and parties overlap, those kinds of incentives will create an integrative and committed culture. At the extreme, such a culture can preempt attachments to family, friends, or even the state. For example, a long-time Canadian Communist, Jack Scott, recounted how an organizer in the Communist Party of Canada – Marxist-Leninist exerted pressure on members'

personal lives, dissuading the study of literature as a bourgeois pastime and demanding devotion to the movement to the point of driving one unfortunate person to suicide (Palmer, 1988: 219–21).

Third, culture is prominent in styles of action. Judgments that the two parties in the United States are indistinguishable are negated when culture is used to assess them (Freeman, 1985–6). Klinker (1994) describes competing cultural styles in which the Republicans display a business culture tied to the background of prominent activists and their treatment of the party as a business. He found the Democrats, at the time studied, to have a culture of democracy, premised on inclusiveness, internal democracy, and attention to constituencies. There is, of course, a difference between a culture that supports internal democracy and the practice of such democracy. The tension between ideals and performance was at the heart of Michel's critique of the German Social Democratic Party. It has been echoed as well in analyses of the Canadian CCF/NDP, whenever a preference for centralized organization and strong leadership comes in conflict with its commitment to member participation (Morley, 1984:173–200; Schwartz, 1994b:24–8; Whitehorn, 1992: 252–3).

Although culture, by definition, has considerable stability, styles can change. Clark and Hoffmann-Martinot (1998) relate how political policies of left-wing parties in Britain and Germany, as well as the Clinton Democrats, represent a "third way" (Giddens, 2000) in the sense of a new political orientation different from that of their predecessors. Yet it is exactly such cultural change that is interpreted as another sign of party decline.

Finally, party activities can be an expression of culture. Fine (1994) describes platforms as a way for parties to symbolically express their identity. Ideology is one of the factors that accounts for the direction of party policies (Amenta, 1998; Boix, 1998). Even in the United States, where ideology is thought to be a low-level influence, it enters into the policy preferences of legislators (Wright and Schaffner, 2002). Poole and Rosenthal's (1997) analysis of roll calls presents

the most thorough historical study of how cleavages, ideology, and policy positions have changed over time.

The connection between party platforms and their effect on mobilization remains clouded. Although hard evidence in the form of governing party policies is not always clear, it has been argued that party platforms are treated as party mandates and do differentiate parties (Hofferbert and Budge, 1992; King, Budge, Hofferbert, Laver, and McDonald, 1993). But the sharpness with which party elites in the United States can now be distinguished along a number of policy dimensions appears not to be translated into parallel mobilization of the general public. That is, except for a hard core of party identifiers, public views have not followed leaders into similarly polarized ideologies (Layman and Carsey, 2002), suggesting that social cleavages may not be presented with compatible partisan choices.

By adding culture as an aspect of organization, we flesh out structural elements with symbolic and ideational ones. Culture is then not something separate but an integral part of organization and yet another way to assess the theme of party decline. The programs and policies associated with parties that rest on cultural factors become one of the outcomes of organization. Although party structures appear to be becoming more similar, culture remains differentiating. However, the significance of cultural differences can also decline and become largely symbolic when detached from programs.

#### RELATIONS WITH THE INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

##### Renewed Concern with Institutions

Contemporary concern with institutions and their analysis emphasizes the regulatory, normative, and cognitive forces that provide the context from which organizations emerge, flourish, and change (Scott, 1995:xiii–xix). To sociologists represented in the new institutionalism, institutions are distinct from individual actions, have rulelike qualities by virtue of being

taken for granted, and are slow to change except under drastic circumstances (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991:8–11).

Curiously enough, although the institutional perspective encompasses systems of power, authority, and governance, it has led to little overt attention to the institutional basis of political parties. For example, even such political science luminaries as James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, who devote a volume to reinvigorating the application of institutional analysis to politics, have only a single reference to political parties. That one reference is itself to Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) paper on party origins, which March and Olsen (1989:169) use to demonstrate the stability of ineffective political forms.

Two decades ago, Skocpol (1985) and others began arguing that sociology had become neglectful of how state institutions played a role in both creating and restraining opportunities for action. Although Skocpol's plea led to a resurgence of work that is characterized as state-centered, among sociologists that work has stimulated only fairly narrow interest with political parties. Among political scientists, a greater variety of topics are considered. We try to take account of both disciplines in the following review.

Regardless of how much overt attention has been given to the institutional basis of political parties, there is little question that parties themselves have institutional qualities, operate in an institutional world, and influence the functioning of other institutions. Institutional analysis is present even if it is not labeled as such. Here we examine studies in which this institutional approach is explicit as well as those in which it is not, considering the exchange of power and influence between parties and the state, the media, and the global system.

##### Parties and the State

State institutions constrain parties through laws ranging from clauses embedded in national constitutions forbidding certain kinds of parties to municipal ordinances forbidding parties to run candidates in local elections. In the United

States some of the most significant restrictions on parties are a result of the direct democracy reforms at the beginning of the twentieth century. The establishment of primary elections took away a party's right to name its own candidates and placed that power in the hands of those whose only connection to the party was the label they gave themselves upon registering to vote, or not even that, in the case of open and blanket primaries (Cronin, 1989; Haskell, 1996; Lawson, 1999a; Reiter, 1993). Restrictive ballot laws have made it difficult for third parties to mount campaigns in the United States, though they have never been totally successful in suppressing them (Donovan, 2000; Lewis-Beck and Squire, 1995) and recent campaigns by Ross Perot and Ralph Nader have suggested to some that the pressure for changing such restrictions is mounting (Sifry, 2002). Changing constraints have been examined in Canada in the choice of national party leaders (Courtney, 1995) and in local constituencies (Carty, 1991) as well as in Europe in the rules governing candidate selection (Norris, 1997; Ware, 1987b). Subtle differences in constitutional structures also affect the ability of parties to govern: in some nations, narrow majorities are able to legislate despite resistance, whereas, in others, minority parties can sharply influence legislation (Huber, Stephens, and Ragin, 1993).

Other kinds of institutional constraint are often more indirect in their effects on parties. For example, a strong presidency has been shown to lead to an emphasis on winning, downplaying ideology, and fostering cadre-type parties (Linz, 1990). Similarly, the size of electoral districts affects how parties operate (Schlesinger, 1984), fostering mass-type communist successor parties where the average district size is larger (Ishiyama, 1999). More controversial are inferences about the effects of proportional representation and whether it leads to multiple parties and party innovation (Courtney, 2004; Duverger, 1963; Kim and Ohn, 1992; Kitschelt, 1988). Redding and Viterna (1999) find proportional representation one of the major factors contributing to the success of left-libertarian parties. Rule and Zimmerman examine its effect on the election of women and

minorities to public office in the United States (1992).

Among political scientists, there is renewed attention to reforming the electoral system (Farrell, 1997; Lijphart, 1994). As states as diverse as Mexico, Russia, Germany, and Italy adopt mixed systems, scholars have begun to reassess the relative merits of single member districts, proportional representation, or some mixture (e.g. Amy, 1993). Lijphart (1999) and Powell (2000) expand these concerns to include how the number of parties, bicameralism, federalism, and other related institutional features contribute to greater democracy. At stake is the way such characteristics enable voters to influence policy-making and the part played by the relative strength of parties.

Another important theme focuses on the regulation of party campaign financing, both comparatively (Alexander and Shiatori, 1994; Ware, 1987a, 1987b) and in the United States (Goidel, Gross, and Shields, 1999; Reiter, 1993; Sabato, 1984; Sorauf, 1988; Thurber and Nelson, 1995; Wayne, 2000). Initially, questions about the need for such regulation produced conflicting answers, as did questions about the corrupting influences of money. But as technological changes made the need for money in campaigns so much greater (Magleby, 2002; Sabato, 1989; Selnow, 1994; Trent and Friedenberg, 2000), the effects of unregulated contributions raised troubling issues about the ability of large contributors to determine every stage of the electoral process: who is nominated, who wins, and what policy choices will be made (Medvic, 2001; Nelson, Dulio, and Medvic, 2002; West, 2000). Yet the kind of regulations that would be ideal is still far from clear (Mann, 2002; Ware, 1987a).

Parties and the state have a two-way relationship. As we have already seen, in working through the electoral process, parties link citizens to the state. They also provide political leadership in appointive as well as elective offices of governments and suggest programs of action to be followed. In the most positive assessment, parties lend legitimacy to government, ensuring that the people themselves choose the path government must follow. Because almost

all legislative and executive officers in modern democracies wear partisan labels, government policies are policies made by parties (Castles, 1982). Indeed, according to Schattschneider (1942:1), "political parties created democracy, and . . . democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties." More recently, Aldrich (1995), using a rational choice perspective, sees parties as the creation of ambitious politicians who can then accomplish their goals within parties. But they do so in ways that solve three problems intrinsic to democratic government: ensuring that the polity rests on popular elections, that legislatures enact public policies, and that issues are kept to a manageable number. By providing a basis for collective action, even if only imperfectly, parties encourage citizens to vote and politicians to cooperate while restricting the legislative agenda as they must deal with.

Other, more limited assessments of the positive contributions of competitive parties find legitimacy flowing from the capacity of parties to channel dissent and maintain system stability (Epstein, 1980; Rose, 1980; Sartori, 1976; Ware, 1987, 1996). Wilensky's (2002) analysis of the nineteen richest democracies, for example, measures legitimacy by the vitality of political parties.

Not everyone is convinced of the connection between parties and legitimacy. In the United States, Mayhew (1974, 1991) has argued most forcefully that congressional candidates seek election independent of party positions, which he interprets as meaning that such candidates cannot be treated as exponents of unified party platforms. He concludes that government works just as effectively when parties are weak and levels of government divided.

Governmental institutions enable parties to enact policies, but do parties play their legislative role in ways that differentiate among them? Evidence of such partisan effects is provided by Boix (1998), whose examination of twenty countries shows that socialist governments invest relatively more heavily in education, labor market policies, and capital investment. Others who find an association between social democratic governments and generous social policies include Esping-Andersen (1990), Korpi (1978),

and Stephens (1979). Marks, Wilson, and Ray (2002) find that parties, and especially party families (those linked by ideology), provide frames for new issues. When experts in thirteen countries were surveyed about the position of party leaders on European integration, they were able to reliably predict leaders' placement. There is, however, recent questioning of the link between policies and governing parties, primarily the result of economic retrenchments that have affected the welfare programs of social democratic parties (Hicks, 1999; Huber and Stephens, 2001; Swank, 2002).<sup>6</sup>

In the United States, it is also possible to see parties structuring issues (e.g., Cox and Poole, 2002). Wright and Schaffner (2002:377) argue that the apparently low level of ideological consistency in policy positions is the result of party actions to incorporate new issues and new voters. This assessment, we note, goes along with previous citations to evidence that there are sharp and growing ideological differences between the two parties. Examining policy making at the state level, Barrilleaux (2000:70) found that the ideological dispositions of the two parties interact with electoral competition so that "Democrats and Republicans differ when they are forced to." Even as contentious an issue as abortion policy, normally avoided by parties, became a source of opposing stands for the Democrats and Republicans (Halfmann, 2000). Cox and McCubbins (1993) trace how the majority party in the U.S. House of Representatives uses its rule-making power to ensure partisan outcomes to the legislative process.

Not all observers agree that partisan differences become apparent in policy. Rose (1980) showed years ago that British parties were largely in agreement with one another and so failed to offer seriously different choices to the voters. Although both major parties tended, by and large, to keep campaign promises, the policies adopted seldom had the effect promised in affecting unemployment, low wages, low growth, high public expenditure, and high interest rates.

<sup>6</sup> For a fuller discussion, see the chapter by Hicks and Esping-Andersen in this volume.

Such problems were created and changed by factors largely outside the control of government, such as the world economy. Furthermore, even when there was control, government effectiveness was limited by internal quarrels and administrative inertia. The rightward move of Tony Blair's Labour government has exacerbated these effects in more recent times.

Others debate whether parties actually do keep campaign promises; in such studies much seems to depend on what is meant by "promise" (Jacobs and Shapiro, 2000; McLaughlin, 2000). Lawson (1999b) points out that, in dissociating themselves from cleavages, majority parties tend to substitute less important (and less divisive) issues for those of deeper concern, a tactic which makes it easier to keep campaign promises. For Katz and Mair (1995) the strategic choices of cartel parties make them ever more remote from their supporters, both before and after elections.

### The Media

Institutions other than the state also interact powerfully with parties, of which one of the most important are the media. Murray Edelman (1985, 1988) was perhaps the first to understand the profound implications of the growing relationship between media and party politics. Recent general studies include those by Dye, Ziegler, and Lichter (1992), Jamieson (1996), and Graber, McQuail, and Norris (1998). Here, as well, the relationship is two-way: the media influence what parties do; parties influence the media.

The first effect is often more apparent to voters. Several studies have stressed how the mainstream media – businesses that make a profit by attracting readers and viewers – seek to present political campaigns as entertainment, concentrating excessively on personalities and the "horserace" aspect of political competition, reducing serious discussion of issues, developing mere group fantasies about the nature of political reality and thus endangering the democratic process (Bennett, 1996; Jamieson and Waldman, 2003; McChesney, 1999; Newman,

1994; Nimmo and Combs, 1983; Perloff, 1998). According to some, the growing concentration of media ownership in the hands of giant corporations is another force compelling parties and candidates to distort their messages to reach their hoped-for publics (Alger, 1998). Picard (1998) has shown how far this process was taken by Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, chairman of the multimedia Fininvest firm. Patterson (1998) demonstrates, in a broadly comparative study, that journalists do find ways, nonetheless, to interject their own political values, but how reassuring that is to the parties obviously depends on the match between those biases and their own programs. And as in the question of campaign finance, it is not always clear what should – and can – be done to solve the problems of excessive mediaization of democratic politics: issues of free speech and questions of political feasibility are difficult to resolve (Lichtenberg, 1990).

Parties, however, should not be seen as helpless victims of the media. When in office, they may pass laws regulating the media that are designed to ensure fair representation of all points of view by preventing or seriously limiting the use of paid political advertising (or forbidding it altogether, as in France), by requiring the broadcast media to give equal or at least proportionate free coverage to all the parties, and/or by providing sufficient public funding so that even the smaller parties can buy the access they need (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 1995). Or they may, conversely, effectively block efforts to pass such laws, ensuring that the advantage continues to go to themselves, the well-financed majority parties.

Furthermore, party campaign strategists have learned to beat the media at their own game, securing favorable coverage by such "entertaining" tactics as sound bites, photo opportunities, and ever more aggressive and negative attacks on the opposition (Diamond and Bates, 1992; Maltese, 1994; Mickelson, 1989; Newman, 1994; Sabato 1996; Selnow 1994). They also use the Internet, direct mail, and the telephone to reach voters via media that are more difficult for others to control (Johnson, 2001). Finally, and most importantly, parties secure the media

coverage they want by paying for it. The amount and cost of political advertising has steadily increased in every nation, although most dramatically in the United States (Diamond and Bates, 1992; Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 1995; Magleby, 2002).

### Globalization

Globalization is not only the internationalization of capital and capitalism but also the penetration of global institutions and processes into all parts of the world. With it come new constraints on the established ways in which national parties operate. For example, changing conditions in the global economy and the related decline in rates of unionization contribute to weakening ties between organized labor and parties. A study of sixteen industrialized countries finds that it is the decreasing importance of unions themselves that has reduced their influence on policy making in social democratic parties (Piazza, 2001). At the other end of the political spectrum Swank and Betz (2003) find that economic uncertainties affected by globalization have contributed to the success of right-wing populist parties in Western Europe.<sup>7</sup>

The role of parties at the international level is still a puzzle that studies are only now beginning to address. Changing conditions of globalization have led to assessments that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)<sup>8</sup> will displace political parties in building links among a wide range of actors. This is because they can create advocacy networks that “multiply the channels of access to the international system” and make

international resources available to new actors in domestic struggles, “blurring the boundaries between a state’s relations with its own nationals and the recourse both citizens and states have to the international system” (Keck and Sikkink, 1998:1–2).

The evidence on this score remains mixed. In North America, where NGOs have been important in recent debates on free-trade treaties, political parties in their governing capacity remain important. Opportunities remain for parties to form transnational relations although these have barely begun (Macdonald and Schwartz, 2002). Europe has had most experience with transnational party links, going back to the first Socialist International. More recently, the move to the European Union stimulated parties to form ties across states (Gaffney, 1996; Hix and Lord, 1997). Meanwhile, the need for stronger involvement by both parties and NGOs to establish democratic procedures at the international level is argued by Etzioni-Halevy (2002).

In response to the formation of the European Union, the three most prominent families of parties, the Socialists, Liberals, and Christian Democrats, each formed its own federation in the 1970s – the Confederation of the Socialist Parties of the European Community (CSPEC), the European Federation of Liberal, Democratic and Reform Parties of the European Communities (ELDR), and the European People’s Party (EPP, the Federation of Christian Democratic Parties in the European Communities). The degree to which these federations actually play party roles is, however, not clear, because their national components can have interests at odds with each other. The working of the European Parliament (EP), meanwhile, encourages national party representatives to seek coalitions outside the federations (Bardi, 1994).

The European Greens have differed from other party families by being less positive about the European Union and forming a federation with countries outside the EU. Still, they have been effective in presenting their positions to the EP. At the same time, their federation has been less effective than that of other parties in

<sup>7</sup> Stimuli to right-wing parties are mitigated by national policies with generous welfare provisions.

<sup>8</sup> NGOs may be voluntary associations, interest groups, or social movement organizations. Their separateness from government may be ambiguous where they are regulated by government or receive state funding. As we noted in the section on “ties with organized interests” the boundary between interest groups or social movement organizations and political parties may be blurred. NGOs make up what is termed civil society, a concept generally, though arguably, used to exclude political parties.

becoming unified. Dietz (2000:208) attributes this to

Differing points of view concerning European integration in general, the reluctance to give up parts of the national sovereignty because of their decentralized, grassroots and anti-bureaucratic ideology, conflicts between more left and more center-oriented parties about the method and extent of cooperation with small left-wing parties and the permanently increasing number of member organizations.

Yet, to the extent that national ties remain strong among the Greens, they are not unusual among parties in the EP. From an examination of 1,000 roll call votes in the EP, Hix (2002) finds that national party policies are the strongest predictors of how members will vote.

The long-term effects of European integration on national cleavages remain unclear. National settings and their electoral environment remain important forces at the same time as integration arouses new foci for possible conflict and, with it, new alignments (e.g., Bartolini, 2001).

Globalization also goes along with renewed local and regional efforts to retain separate operations and identities (e.g., Di Muccio and Rosenau, 1992). Tossutti (2002) examined twenty-one countries with particularistic parties based on ethnic, religious, or regional interests. Yet rather than an expected direct reaction to globalization, she found the success of such parties greater in countries relatively more insulated from global forces. At present, the question is open on the extent to which global forces make partisan policies vulnerable to conditions that individual states will be unable to control (Scharpf, 2000).

In sum, relations with the institutional environment both allow political parties to operate and constrain what they can accomplish. In turn, parties actively influence the role other institutions are able to play. Here we have given most attention to the interaction between parties and governmental institutions, ranging over forms of governance, electoral systems, and campaigning. Parties link citizens to the state but debate continues over how effectively they do this. Although recognizing the growing

relevance of institutions such as the media and the forces of globalization, we note that findings about relations with parties are often still tentative.

Missing from this discussion is the place of political parties in civil society, although some aspects of this were dealt with earlier, when dealing with the social bases of parties, and party scholars have always paid attention to the relationship between parties and groups.<sup>9</sup> Still unexamined is the extent to which political parties should be treated as components of civil society, completing the circle of institutional analysis.

#### REMAINING QUESTIONS

As subject matter for political sociology, the trouble with parties is that they arouse strong feelings pro and con. In earlier times, it was the conflicts that stemmed from opposing parties that produced negative reactions. Positive assessments, in contrast, assigned parties centrality in ensuring democratic government. Today's negativity is more often related to the failings of parties in bringing about a more perfect democratic governance, either of themselves or of the states where they operate. A mixture of normative concerns with a selective empirical agenda appears to affect the amount of emphasis that has been given to political parties by political sociologists. But if political sociologists take another look at political parties, unconstrained by concerns about what parties should be or by past findings that may have prematurely appeared to answer all our questions, they will find rich territory for study.

<sup>9</sup> Epstein (1986), for example, noted the ease with which interest groups and social movements could enter U.S. major parties, making the party system not only unique among competitive party systems but also commendably able to resist serious competition from third parties. Now authors are more likely to see nonparty groups as either a welcome alternative to disappointing parties (Putnam, 1995), as themselves one of the causes of the decline of parties as agents of democracy (Berman, 1997; Doherty, 2001), or just one of the crucial elements in modern democratic life (Foley and Edwards, 1996; Skocpol, Ganz, and Munson, 2000).

Among the most prominent questions that remain are ones about the continuing relevance of social cleavages, whether in countries with uninterrupted histories of democracy or in ones newly experiencing the struggles to achieve democratic government. Everywhere, the mobilization of specific cleavages continues to change. How do we anticipate which will become more prominent and how do we account for national differences? And to what extent are contemporary parties failing to mobilize cleavages altogether, focussing instead on issues that are less divisive?

Because the ways in which parties organize and the relation between culture and structure change over time, they need closer scrutiny. The transformations that come about as parties, both old and new, grapple with changing environments require an alertness on our part that is not constrained by preconceptions of what makes for organization. What is needed are alternate models of organization that take into account different ways of responding to structural problems and different opportunities for cultural expression.

Of the three general topics dealt with, the institutional environment received least coverage, a reflection of how political parties are perceived, especially within sociology. Most attention went to work on relations with the state, ranging from the particulars of policy making to the fundamentals of legitimacy. Under changing environments, we can expect the need to examine these issues in even more detail. As of

yet, less well-studied are questions about the effects of the media, globalization, and the relation between parties and civil society.

Most of all, we need to be prepared to address the recurring predictions of party decline with more specific questions about the kind of decline involved. How do voters attach themselves to parties? What organizational adaptations do different parties follow? What is the current relation between the legitimacy of the state and the performance (and existence) of parties? In what ways do parties retain the ability to mobilize voters and produce policies?

We can, as well, find inspiration for further study in considering how well parties adapt and perform. For example, Lawson's (1999b:33) concern with the quality of linkage running from citizen to state via party leads her to ask: If winning parties, or coalitions of parties, are in fact campaigning on catch-all programs only marginally distinct from those of their nearest competitors, and then governing more and more in response to the demands of large donors (as is in the United States), and if increasingly large percentages of Western citizenries fail to exercise their right to vote altogether, then what difference does it make if those who do vote make their choices in terms of the cleavages or issues that separate them most from their fellows? Finding voters who characterize themselves in terms of old or new cleavages and pin their hopes accordingly to this or that party is not the same as finding parties that compete and perform accordingly.