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REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT IN MODERN EUROPE

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CHAPTER 10

INSIDE EUROPEAN POLITICAL PARTIES

As earlier chapters in this book make clear, political parties play a vital role in European politics. They control governments, dominate parliaments, and have a strong role in the appointment of members of constitutional courts. In many parts of the world, parties are inclined to be peripheral or transient bodies. They may be built around a single leader and cease to exist when this leader disappears from the scene, as has occurred in some third-world countries. They may play a secondary role in what are in many ways candidate-centered politics, as in the United States. In Europe, however, parties really matter, and many authors have quoted with approval Schattschneider's statement that "modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties" (Schattschneider, p. 1). Voters themselves agree with this, acknowledging that parties are necessary to make politics "work" even if they do not particularly love the parties they have (Holmberg, p. 291; Torcal et al., p. 266).

We have seen in earlier chapters that some European parties have a long history, surviving world wars and fundamental changes of regime. We saw in Chapter 3 that the institutions of European parliamentary democracy mean that it is party, rather than candidate, that Europeans vote for at election time. On the whole, government in Europe is party government, although other organizations, such as interest groups, sometimes appear to challenge this, as we shall see in Chapter 14. Consequently, the internal affairs of parties, although many Europeans regard them as mundane and uninteresting, may make a significant difference to the politics of a country by determining the nature of both the politicians and the policy packages among which voters choose at elections. In this chapter, therefore, we move inside parties and ask what sort of bodies they are. We consider how well they are organized; how they make decisions; where they get their resources; how they are adjusting to important social changes, such as the increasing role of the mass media in politics; and how political parties make their distinctive contribution to the politics of representation in Europe.

→ WHAT DO PARTIES DO?

Political parties are present in, and indeed at the core of, politics in all European countries. Even though many Europeans are cynical about parties and their motives, European politics would scarcely operate without them. They perform a number of functions that are crucial to the operation of modern political systems. Among these functions, four are particularly important.

First, political parties structure the political world. As we have seen in earlier chapters and will also see in Chapter 12, parties are the key actors in the operation of governments and parliaments. If there were no parties—in other words, if every member of parliament was an independent with no institutionalized links with other members—the result would be something close to chaos. The only west European country that has come anywhere close to this situation in living memory was Fourth Republic France prior to 1958, when the parliamentary groups were numerous and internally incohesive, rendering stable government and cohesive policy making, except to the extent that the civil service filled the breach, impossible. Parties also structure the political world for many voters, who see politics in terms of the fortunes of parties as much as the fate of issues, especially at election times. Most individual voters don't have time to work out their view on every political issue, and many tend to follow their party's judgement on matters about which they have not thought deeply.

Second, parties recruit and socialize the political elite. To become a member of parliament in Europe it is almost essential first to be selected by a political party as an election candidate. Likewise, to become a government minister in most countries it is usually necessary to be a senior member of a political party. Thus gaining access to political power requires being accepted by a party, and usually being a leading figure in it. Parties also socialize the political elite; most government ministers have spent a number of years as party members, working with other party members and learning to see the political world from the party's perspective. In doing this, they become accustomed to working with others, learning about teamwork, about the need to coordinate their activities with other figures in the party and, most important, about the constraints that party discipline imposes on them. The control that European parties possess over elite recruitment and socialization marks one major difference between most of Europe on the one hand and the United States and certain other presidential systems on the other. In the latter, the country's political leader often does not emerge from within the party organization, and in some cases complete political outsiders, such as Alberto Fujimori in Peru, can come through and win political power. This means that the political direction of such systems is inclined to be inherently less stable, whereas in Europe, where political parties control the channels of elite recruitment and socialization, the behavior of political leaders is usually more predictable, for better or worse.

Third, parties provide linkage between rulers and ruled, between civil society and the state. They constitute one of the mechanisms by which voters are linked to the political world, providing a flow of information in both directions. As we shall see later, there are many doubts as to whether parties are still performing their linkage role effectively.

Fourth, parties aggregate interests. Unlike interest groups, which we look at in Chapter 14, they put forward and try to implement packages of proposals, not just policies in one area of government. Most parties at elections put forward manifestos containing policies on many different issues and thereby stand ready to give direction to government. By doing this, they offer meaningful choices to voters between alternative policy packages and thus play a crucial part in converting voters' preferences into government policy. Party control of government, whether by one party or by a coalition of parties, should mean some more or less coherent program that the government aims to follow, rather than a situation where disparate individual ministers each pursue their own ideas.

→ Basic Party Organization

Party organizations differ in detail around Europe, but the basic organizational elements are similar. Members of parties belong to a local unit based on a geographic area, usually known as the *branch*. Ideally, the party will aim to establish branches all over the country in order to maintain a presence on the ground and to mobilize potential voters. The branches usually have a role in selecting election candidates, and they are entitled to send delegates to the party's *annual conference*, which in many parties is nominally the supreme decision-making body. Delegates at the annual conference usually elect most members of the party's *national executive*, which runs the party organization between conferences, adjudicating on internal disputes. This works in conjunction with the party's head office, staffed by the party's own employees, who constitute a permanent party bureaucracy. The other main element in the party is the *parliamentary party* or *caucus*, comprising the party's elected deputies.

In the case of some parties, this basic picture is complicated by the presence of other bodies. A few parties, such as the French Socialists, are highly factionalized. Such parties contain a number of clearly defined groups, often quite institutionalized, with a continuous existence over time; the various factions jostle for power and position within the party. Factionalization is generally something that parties aim to avoid: Factions were an important element in the death of the Italian Christian Democrats (DC) in the early 1990s. Other parties have in the past had interest groups affiliated to them; examples include the labor parties in Britain, Norway, and Sweden, though in each case the links have become much weaker in recent years. In federal countries, the party organizations in the various states may have considerable freedom of action. This is especially true of the German Christian Democrats and the Austrian People's Party (the latter also has interest groups, in the form of farmers', workers', and business leagues, attached to it).

Party constitutions usually give the impression that the party is a smoothly functioning organization in which important decisions are reached through a fully participatory process. The reality, as might be expected, is often rather different. Although some parties do operate reasonably peacefully (though not necessarily very democratically), others are wracked by constant internal tension. One very common source of conflict concerns the ideological "purity" of party policy. The battle lines are often drawn between party activists, for whom it may be of prime importance that the party adhere to the ideals that led them to join it in the first place, and party legislators, who may well wish to trim ideological sails in order to get into office. Internal conflict along these lines was very prominent, for example, in the British Labour Party during most of the 1980s. Overall, in any case, what is important to remember is that every European political party is a political system in its own right. In order to understand what parties do, therefore, it is important to understand what is happening inside them.

→ Party Membership

Who Becomes a Party Member?

Belonging to a party in Europe is slightly more formal than in some other parts of the world, involving more than just expressing an inclination toward the party in question. Typically, to become a party member a person has to pay a small annual membership

fee and indicate (by signing some kind of pledge) that he or she accepts the basic principles of the party. Members are also expected, at least in theory, to attend regular local branch meetings.

Not surprisingly, most people who vote for a party do not go to the trouble and expense of actually joining it. Party members make up only a minority of party supporters as a whole. Just how large or small this minority is varies a lot, both from country to country and from party to party within countries. Indeed, it can be difficult to pin down exactly how many people really do belong to parties. Some parties are simply not sufficiently centralized for anyone in a party to know how many members it has. In Switzerland, the most decentralized country in Europe, for example, party headquarters may have little knowledge of the party's position in the various cantons around the country. Similarly, most of the Green parties that began to emerge as a significant political force in the 1980s shunned the formal organizational structure of the established parties on principle, though in many cases they have had to think again about this position in order to compete effectively with other parties (Burchell). Other parties may have a good idea of their membership but may be reluctant to disclose the information publicly. In Poland, for example, one writer comments that all parties "maintain high levels of secrecy regarding data on membership" due to their "embarrassingly low memberships" (Jasiewicz).

Even when we do manage to get membership figures for a particular party, we sometimes need to treat them skeptically. Parties have an obvious incentive to claim more members than they really have, in the hope of increasing their legitimacy. In addition, the figures passed on to the head office by the local organizational units around the country may not be reliable; the number of delegates each branch can send to the annual conference may depend on how many members it has, for example, so the larger it claims to be, the more delegates it can send. Local members may even pay membership dues for "ghost" members, creating "paper" branches, either in order to boost local representation in national bodies or to boost their own influence in local intraparty competition over, for example, candidate selection. Another problem is the relatively subjective definition of membership in some cases. There may be people in some parties who invariably help the party campaign during elections but never actually join and thus are not formally considered members. Other parties might still count as members people who, in fact, drifted away years ago but never explicitly resigned. There is also a degree of "noise" in the annual membership figures, which may fluctuate randomly or in a manner linked to the electoral cycle.

A good, through probably extreme, example of the difficulty of counting members comes from one of the countries that on paper appears to have an exceptionally high proportion of party members, namely Iceland. Perhaps appropriately, given the island's geographical location in mid-Atlantic, the concept of "party membership" bears as much resemblance to the U.S. model as to the standard European one. In the 1990s, the parties' records claimed that around 25 percent of the electorate belonged to a party (Kristjánsson, p. 165). Evidence from surveys found that around 17 percent of respondents reported that they were party members—a lower figure but still very impressive. However, Kristjánsson suggests that most of the people describing themselves as "party members" really meant only that they had a feeling of identity with a party, not an organizational connection. None of the parties collects annual dues from members, and

neither do they purge their membership lists, so anyone who ever joined is counted as a member until death. In reality, Kristjánsson, suggests, all party work is carried out by about 0.5 to 1 percent of the electorate.

Still, when all the qualifications are made, we can come up with at least some reasonably hard facts about party membership in individual countries. The pattern for each country is summed up in Table 10.1. In most countries, only a small fraction of the people who vote for a party are sufficiently committed to join it, and, as we shall see, only a minority of this minority can be considered active in the party. There are only three countries, besides the dubious case of Iceland, where a tenth or more of electors join a party: Austria, Malta, and Finland. The way in which the parties in Austria saturate society is well documented; over one in six of all Austrians belong to a political party, and the parties permeate many aspects of ordinary life by providing social outlets together with a patronage system so extensive that even the most menial public sector job can be hard to obtain unless the job-seeker belongs to the party in whose domain it lies. An even higher proportion of Maltese electors are members of a party: In nearly every town of any size, the two main parties, the Maltese Labour Party (MLP) and the Partit Nazzjonalista or Nationalist Party (PN), have a social club that is the center of social life for many members, and the parties have a range of ancillary organizations. For example, the PN has separate associations for workers, the self-employed, pensioners, women, and young people; it runs its own travel agency; and it has a section called "Team Sports PN" that organizes tournaments for members and supporters in various sports, such as football, athletics, and snooker (information from the party's Web site at www.pn.org.mt).

It is generally accepted that membership figures are declining across western Europe. From a survey of membership data in twenty-one European countries between 1980 and the late 1990s, Mair and van Biezen found that the trend was downward everywhere except Greece and Spain (and, for a more recent period, Hungary and Slovakia), in each of which parties were growing after a long period of authoritarian rule. The mean percentage of the electorate that belonged to a party in the west European countries was 10 percent in 1980 but only 6 percent in the late 1990s (Mair and van Biezen, pp. 11–12). The figure is less than 5 percent now if we exclude the small countries of Malta and Iceland from the calculations. Moreover, even the 1980 figures represent a decline from earlier decades. We can illustrate the decline by considering a few specific examples. In Denmark, over a fifth of all registered voters were party members in the early 1960s, but by the late 1990s only a twentieth belonged to a party (Damgaard, p. 123). In Britain, individual membership of the Labour Party fell from a peak of just over a million in 1952 to fewer than 300,000 in the early 2000s, and the drop in Conservative membership has been even more precipitous (Kingdom, p. 314). In France membership, low to begin with, has been declining further (Knapp, pp. 122, 127).

We can explain the decline in membership rolls by considering the reasons why people might join a party in the first place. In the 1960s Clark and Wilson suggested three main motives that might lead someone to join a party (see Ware, *Political*, pp. 68–78; Clark and Wilson). One is *material*, the desire to gain some tangible reward, such as a public office or a public resource controlled by the party. The material motive has been important in a few European countries, such as Austria, Belgium, and Italy; in Spain, too, "holders and seekers of public office make up a large proportion" of party membership (Colomer, p. 181; Holliday). Even so, it is generally a minor factor and is

TABLE 10.1

Party Membership as a Percentage of the Electorate

Country	% of Electorate That Belongs to a Political Party	Membership Trends in Recent Decades
Austria	17.7	Decline from 28% in 1980
Belgium	6.6	Slight decline in past twenty years
Cyprus	—	No information
Czech Republic	3.9	Decline from 7% in 1993
Denmark	5.1	Decline from over 20% in 1960s
Estonia	2.0	No information
Finland	9.6	Decline from 16% in 1980
France	1.5	Decline from 5% in 1978
Germany	2.9	Little change since 1960s
Greece	6.8	Figure has doubled since late 1970s
Hungary	2.2	Little change
Iceland	16.9[a]	Decline since 1980s
Ireland	2.7	Slight decline in past twenty years
Italy	4.0	Decline from 10% in 1980
Latvia	0.9	Stability since mid-1990s
Lithuania	2.4	Slight increase since mid-1990s
Luxembourg	—	Figure stood at 10% in late 1980s
Malta	30.0	Dramatic increase in early 1980s, stability since then
Netherlands	2.5	Now around half of the 1980 figure
Norway	7.3	Now around half of the 1980 figure
Poland	1.5	No significant or sustained changes
Portugal	4.0	Modest increase since 1980
Slovenia	4.7	No information
Slovakia	4.1	Slight increase since the early 1990s
Spain	3.4	Modest increase since 1980
Sweden	5.5	Slight decline in past twenty years
Switzerland	6.4	No information
United Kingdom	1.9	Now about a third of 1950s figures
Average	6.0	
Average excluding Iceland and Malta	4.6	

Sources: For Estonia and Slovenia: Norris, *Democratic,* p. 115; France: Andolfatto, p. 109; Iceland: Kristjánsson, p. 165; Ireland: Marsh, "Parties," p. 169; Latvia and Lithuania: Smith-Sivertsen, p. 231; Poland: Szczerbiak, "New Polish," p. 62. For Malta, data are from party Web sites (www.mlp.org.mt/min-ahna/organizzazjoni.asp; sites.waldonet.net.mt/alternativa/frames.htm) and from information supplied by the Nationalist Party (PN). For other countries, data are from Mair and van Biezen, p. 9.

[a] See caveat in text.

under attack in countries where "the party card" is still an asset when it comes to being given a public sector job. The second motive is *solidary,* referring to the desire for social contact and a sense of comradeship. With the rise of a wide range of leisure opportunities and the decline in cohesiveness among subcultures and communities, the solidary motive is of diminishing importance. The third motive is *purposive*—in other words, directed toward a specific end—referring to a desire to advance certain policy goals. The purposive motive, too, is under challenge: The attraction of joining a party in order to promote a particular issue is weakened by the rise of social movements, single-issue pressure groups, and community action groups, which provide other, perhaps more satisfying, ways of participating. For such groups, a particular issue is the members' top priority, whereas for a party any issue is just one among many and may get lost from view if the party enters government.

Across western Europe, then, membership levels are declining. In the postcommunist countries these levels were low to start with (for parties in postcommunist countries generally, see Bugajski). Under the communist regimes, many people felt that it was unwise or pointless to become politically active, and this pattern has generally continued since the collapse of communism. In some, such as Poland, the very concept of party partisanship had negative connotations going back before the communist era. Polish parties score very low on trust and are regarded as "selfish, quarrelsome, divisive and possibly corrupt" (Sanford, p. 195; Kostelecky, p. 153). Thus membership is low for both supply-side and demand-side factors: The great majority of Poles see no point in joining a party, and existing party leaders feel no burning desire to try to recruit members (Szczerbiak, "New Polish"). This applies in nearly all postcommunist countries. Particularly low membership in Latvia has been attributed partly to the "open-list" electoral system (see Chapter 11). This means that building support among voters is more important for candidates than having a strong base within the party organization. In neighboring Lithuania, the closed-list system means that candidates need support from within the organization to make sure that they are selected in a high position, so they have an incentive to recruit members who will back them, which in turn results in higher membership levels (Smith-Sivertsen). Even when membership is apparently quite high, we need to treat the figures with some suspicion. When Estonian membership lists were made public in 2002, it turned out that some "members" were unaware of their supposed membership, while some parties' membership claims surpassed the number of votes the parties won in the following year's election (Sikk, p. 16).

One reason why membership was low from the start in postcommunist countries is that nearly all the parties were founded after 1989 from the top down by elites looking to build support organizations, rather than emerging, as many of their western counterparts did in the early twentieth century, from significant social forces in society (Mair, pp. 183–87). A related reason is that by the time these parties were formed, parties no longer needed a lot of members. Therefore, rather like countries that missed out on the industrial revolution, skipping straight from an agricultural economy to a high-tech one, postcommunist countries simply arrived at once at the low membership levels to which western parties are gradually dwindling. Postcommunist parties emerging in recent times could be deliberately designed by elites as low-membership organizations, whereas most western parties retain an organizational structure that evolved many decades ago to meet the needs of ordinary members. We return to this later in the chapter.

As a general rule, party members are not entirely socially representative of party voters. Anders Widfeldt analyzed surveys of the public across Europe in 1988–89; because these surveys inquired about party membership, Widfeldt was able to compare members of a party with other supporters of the party. He found that members were less likely than voters to be women: in thirty-four of the thirty-seven parties for which there were data, the proportion of men was higher among party members than among other party supporters. Likewise, young people were underrepresented among party members while the middle-aged were overrepresented, and working-class people were underrepresented in almost every party in comparison with their strength among other party supporters. Widfeldt concluded: "the members of political parties in western Europe are, on the whole, not socially representative of party supporters. Party members tend to be disproportionately male, middle-aged and middle-class" (Widfeldt, "Party," p. 165). There was no consistent pattern as to which parties had memberships that were closest to being a social cross-section of party supporters; in some countries, this might be true of right-wing parties while in other countries left-wing parties had this position.

These broad findings tally with information on some specific parties that have been studied in greater detail (Seyd and Whiteley, *Party*). The first academic study of British Conservative members discovered, to the horror of the Conservative head office, that the average Conservative member was aged 62 (Whiteley, Seyd, and Richardson, p. 50). As one writer colorfully put it: When voting slips were sent to members in a 1997 leadership vote, "sacks ... were returned marked 'Deceased'" (Kingdom, pp. 314–15). Many parties in the postcommunist countries, especially the former communist parties, suffer from the same problem. In the German PDS (the ex-communists of East Germany), for example, more than two-thirds of the eastern members were aged over 60 in 2001 (McKay, p. 54).

The decline in membership numbers means that parties have become less firmly implanted in civil society than they were in earlier decades, and it calls into question their ability to perform their linkage role. It is one reason why well-resourced parties nowadays spend their money on setting up focus groups; in an ideal world, parties would have their ears sufficiently close to the ground so as not to need focus groups to tell them what the public is thinking. At the same time, while it is easy to be cynical about parties that test out their policies on focus groups in the same way that a soft-drinks manufacturer would seek consumer feedback on a new product, we should not adopt too rosy a view of the past. Party members are not necessarily a reliable touchstone of what the voters are thinking, for their views may be out of line with those of voters, as we discuss later in this chapter. Moreover, although parties risk appearing unprincipled if they adapt their policies according to what focus groups tell them, few people would take such a purist view as to insist that parties are obliged to stick to a fixed set of "principled" policies regardless of what the voters think. Even so, falling membership numbers do pose problems for parties, as we explain later in the chapter.

The Activities of Party Members

What do party members do? In virtually all parties nowadays, members tend to be most active at election time, playing an important role in campaigning at the grassroots level. They may not be particularly successful when it comes to trying to persuade the floating

Box 10.1 Membership of Political Parties

France

Reliable figures on party membership in France are hard to come by, but all reliable estimates concur on figures that represent a low proportion of voters. Prior to the formation of the UMP in 2002, the 80,000 members of the Gaullist party (the RPR) in the late 1990s represented only 2 percent of those who voted for it at the 1997 parliamentary elections. The second mainstream right-wing party, the UDF, was a conglomeration of a number of smaller groups and parties, which together did not have as many members as the RPR. The FN, despite its electoral growth, had fewer members than the UDF. The Socialist Party, though it had slightly more members than the RPR, has never been a mass membership party. According to its own claims, the Communist Party has more members than the RPR and the Socialists combined, but given its record of electoral decline over the last two decades, analysts believe it has at most half of what it claims. Members in all parties, with the occasional exception of the Socialists, have a reputation for being deferential toward their leaders.

Germany

Party membership in postwar Germany has fluctuated somewhat but has been consistently low by general western European standards. The Social Democrats (SPD) had the largest number of members prior to the 1990s, but by the end of that decade they had been overtaken by the combined strength of the two parties in the main right-wing bloc, the CDU and CSU. The CDU in particular traditionally attached low priority to the recruitment of members but after losing office in 1969, it set about strengthening its organization so as to challenge the dominance of the SPD on the ground. Its membership more than doubled during its thirteen-year period in opposition; in government from 1982 to 1998, its membership fell slightly but not to the same extent as SPD membership. The FDP has far fewer members, and the Greens are smaller still. After the reunification of Germany in 1990, all the parties sought to extend their membership in the former East Germany, but only the Free Democrats had much success. Conversely, the East German PDS has made attempts to organize in the west, where its few members are much younger than its predominantly pension-age eastern members. The Greens, like their counterparts elsewhere, and despite (or because of) their ethos of membership participation in internal party decision-making, have relatively few members.

Italy

The party with the most members in postwar Italy was the Communist Party (PCI), which in the early 1990s was reborn as the PDS and then the DS (Democratic Left), with far fewer members than the PCI. In the late 1980s two of the government parties, the Christian Democrats (DC) and the Socialists (PSI), had over 2 million members between them, but these parties both disintegrated as a result of the scandals that convulsed Italian politics in the early 1990s, and the evidence suggests that most of their members drifted away from politics. The only party to show membership (as well as electoral) growth in recent years has been the far-right Alleanza Nazionale (AN). Particularly notable has been the rise of Forza Italia, founded by the media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi, which has been described as a "virtual party," having no real organizational structure and a small membership base yet able to poll over 20 percent of the votes at elections and play a leading role in government from 1994 to 1995 and again from 2001.

Latvia

Latvia is the only European country where less than 1 percent of the electorate are members of political parties (0.9 percent, or approximately 15,000 people). There are two major reasons for the low level of party membership in Latvia. First, party elites see no real need for members, and joining is not made easy. Applicants usually need to provide references from two or three existing members. Second, as in other postcommunist countries most people have very little trust in political parties and thus do not feel motivated to join them. Two parties—the Latvian Popular Front and the Christian People's Party—each claimed over 100,000 members in the early 1990s, but by the mid-1990s both had disappeared from the scene, an indication of the loose commitment implied by "party membership."

Continued

Box 10.1 Membership of Political Parties (Continued)

Netherlands

Over the last forty years, the membership of the Dutch parties has declined from a level that was never particularly high by general European standards. The drop has been most pronounced among the religious parties (now combined in the CDA); membership fell from about half a million in 1950 to around 77,000 some fifty-five years later. The membership of the Socialist PvdA halved from the early 1980s to the midpoint of the new century's first decade. In most parties, the activity of sections such as youth movements and women's groups has declined.

Poland

In reaction to the pervasive control of the communist party from the late 1940s onward, the Law on Political Parties adopted in 1990 banned all party activity from the workplace and required only fifteen signatures (raised to one thousand in 1997) for a political party to be registered. In 2002 there were 106 officially registered active parties, but most had few members. Overall, party membership in Poland remains low. Parties were mostly founded by political entrepreneurs rather than emerging from significant social forces, and thus, by design, they do not give a strong role to members in internal decision making.

Spain

The Spanish parties had exceptionally small memberships in the years after the return to democracy in the late 1970s, but, unlike most European parties, they have been gaining rather than losing members since then. The right-wing PP more than doubled its membership during the 1990s, and the Socialists (PSOE) also showed a steady increase. Even so, overall membership levels remain low. The legacy of dictatorship is sometimes suggested as an explanation for the phenomenon, as it led to a political culture that did not encourage active participation in politics, just as in communist regimes.

Sweden

Sweden displays the familiar pattern of a decline in party membership in recent years, although the number of members has fallen less dramatically than in many countries. The largest party, the Social Democrats, used to have "indirect members" who were deemed to be party members because of their membership in trade unions affiliated with the party, but this practice was ended in 1990. Taking this into account, the largest decrease has been in membership of the Liberal People's Party (FP); the number of individual members of the Social Democrats has held up relatively well by comparison. At the end of the 1990s, nearly half of Swedish party members belonged to the Social Democrats.

United Kingdom

Party membership in Britain has declined markedly since the 1950s, even allowing for the patchy data available on membership. Research in the early 1990s discovered that the average Conservative member was aged 62; these members have a reputation for being more right-wing than Conservative MPs and are noted for their strong Euroskepticism. The party had an estimated 2 to 3 million members in the 1950s and 1960s, but this number had declined to only a third of a million by the end of the 1990s. Labour's figures followed a bell curve during the twentieth century. Up to the mid-1940s the party had on average around a third of a million members each year, but then membership rose to a peak of over a million in the early 1950s. Since then the pattern has been one of steady decline, back again to fewer than a third of a million in the early years of the new century. The membership of all the other British parties is small.

voters to come off the fence, let along trying to convert the supporters of other parties. But in most countries they have a part to play in mobilizing the faithful, by putting up posters, looking after party booths and handing out leaflets in public places, and even, in a few countries such as Britain and Ireland, going from house to house and knocking on doors to rekindle dormant loyalties and to show that the party has a local presence.

Between elections, undoubtedly, many party branches are not especially active. The more committed members attend branch meetings regularly, to discuss ways of expanding the organization at the local level or to decide their stance on issues due to arise at the next annual conference.

In most parties, only a small proportion of members can really be considered activists, that is, regular attenders at local branch meetings and participants in the party's internal affairs. Surveys in Britain, Denmark, and Ireland have found a majority of members reporting that they do not spend any time at all on party activities in the average month (Seyd and Whiteley, "British," p. 359; Pedersen et al., p. 375; Gallagher and Marsh, "Party," p. 413). It is also true that branch meetings may not be needed to bring members together these days; communication is possible by means of telephone, email, or—especially in rural areas—face-to-face contact in the course of daily life (Heidar and Saglie, "Decline," pp. 771–76; Heidar and Saglie, "Predestined," pp. 231–32; Gallagher and Marsh, *Days,* p. 103). Even so, the general impression is that most party organizations are nearly dormant most of the time, springing to life during election campaigns.

One concern for parties is that the humdrum nature of internal party life may mean that party organizations now attract only people who are interested in precisely that: party organization. Ware ("Activist–Leader," p. 79) quotes from a study of British Conservative members that concluded that "what all activists were interested in was not politics but organization." A few years earlier, a Conservative minister had put the point more pungently in his private diary, noting that his local party organization members were "boring, petty, malign, clumsily conspiratorial and parochial" (quoted in Kingdom, p. 313). Other parties, too, have concluded that the frequency of meetings meant that the organization was becoming "introverted" or "inward-looking" and was "literally talking to itself" rather than engaging with the public (Gallagher and Marsh, *Days,* p. 81). Members, or potential members, with ideas and enthusiasm find little to attract them in such an environment.

It was not always like this. As mentioned in Chapter 9, belonging to a party in the early years of the twentieth century could mean living within what was nearly a separate subculture in society. This was especially true of left-wing parties with a mass membership, such as the German SPD. Belonging to the SPD was almost a way of life. The party had its own newspaper, which members bought, read, and discussed with one another, and its branch offices all over Germany were centers of social activity for members, running stamp-collecting clubs and sports teams, organizing outings, and so on. It ran its own health service, paid for by members through a health insurance scheme, and it sought to look after members and their families from the cradle to the grave. In 1906 it founded a training school in Berlin for the political education of members, grooming the most committed to take up places in the ranks of its full-time employees. Given that many members worked in factories alongside fellow party members and belonged to trade unions associated with the party, they were almost cocooned from contact with the rest of German society.

But even in the heyday of mass parties, in the first half of the twentieth century, few European parties managed to encapsulate their members to this extent. Not only has the number of party members generally diminished, as we have said, but the commitment of those members may well have waned—though we should not imagine that a few decades ago party members behaved very differently, for the available evidence suggests that levels of activism among members were low throughout the twentieth century

(Scarrow, *Parties,* pp. 181–94). Certainly, some of the reasons why people might once have joined parties now have much less force. The modern welfare state has taken over many of the functions that party insurance schemes once performed. A rise in living standards, a huge increase in leisure outlets, and the advent of television have all combined to reduce the appeal of spending evenings playing table tennis in the local party hall. Fewer people are living in a party-dominated subculture, and the Maltese parties are now practically unique in Europe in their capacity to structure their members' leisure activities to a significant extent. Television has undermined much of the rationale for party newspapers, so few European parties nowadays run their own papers, and when they do, the papers often produce a loss. The dedicated party activist, spending much of his or her free time debating and propagating the party's policy and ideology, is becoming a creature of the past, maybe indeed of a mythical and nonexistent past.

All of this does not mean that ordinary members no longer play a role within European parties. On the contrary, they are important in giving these parties a character quite distinct from that of their American counterparts. The role of European party members in certain key areas gives parties a reasonable degree of coherence, as we see when we look at power within parties.

→ Power Within Parties

Who controls European parties? Who wields power within them? Who determines the packages they offer to the voters at elections and the policies they implement if they get into office? In reality, there is no single answer to this question. It is just not the case that all power lies in one place and every other part of the party is powerless. Usually, the internal affairs of parties are characterized by a continuous process of accommodation and mutual adjustment. When it comes to the crunch, most party members at every level would rather keep the party together as an effective body than precipitate a destructive split—although, of course, sometimes internal differences are so great that a split does take place and a new party is formed, a development that is more common in new party systems than in established ones. More commonly, there is a constant process of give-and-take, and the party remains together precisely because a balance of power is respected and no one element tries to achieve complete control. The various elements in the party organization—the leader, MPs, rank-and-file members, and so on—may jostle for position, but there is rarely open warfare of the sort that in the United States is prone to break out at primaries. After all, they all belong to the same party and can be assumed to have a broadly similar political outlook. They are bound to disagree on details, but the leader and parliamentarians usually have some freedom of maneuver, provided that they stay within the broad parameters of what is acceptable to the membership.

There are several important areas of activity where conflict can arise within a party, and where we might look in order to try to identify the most powerful actors within the party. Three, in particular, have the potential to be key battle sites. The first is the writing of the party's manifesto, the set of policies on which it fights elections. The second is the election of the party leader, and the third is the selection of the party's parliamentary candidates. We examine each of these in turn.

The Party Manifesto and Program

Two of the party's policy documents are especially significant: the party manifesto, the formal declaration in which a party tells the voters what it will aim to do if it gets into government, and the party program, the statement of the party's aims and aspirations, which is generally updated every few years. Party members often differ among themselves as to what should be put in these documents, partly because not all members have exactly the same policy preferences and partly because some members are more concerned than others with winning votes as opposed to maintaining ideological purity. Arguments about the party's policies often surface at annual conferences, where tension is sometimes apparent between parliamentarians and rank-and-file members. The rank and file, especially in radical parties, are inclined to suspect the deputies of being seduced by the clublike atmosphere of parliament, of forgetting their roots, and of being willing to betray the party's principles in order to get into the comfortable seats of power. The deputies, in turn, may view some members as being unworldly zealots who are unaware that compromises and bargaining are necessary in order to achieve at least part of what the party stands for and who are obsessed with policies that have no hope of ever being acceptable to the wider electorate.

Although some party activists may feel like fighting over every semicolon in the party's manifesto and program in the belief that they are taking part in a battle for the party's soul, others conclude, as indeed do most political scientists, that the manifesto is probably not the most important arena of intraparty conflict. Parties feel that they must have a manifesto to show that they are to be taken seriously—and they certainly would be criticized if they didn't have one. However, there is no real expectation that many people will read it; realistically, everyone, including the party, knows perfectly well that most voters don't bother to read manifestos. At most, the party hopes that some of the main, or at least most vote-catching, ideas will be highlighted by the media. And although a manifesto is in theory a commitment by the party to do certain things if it gets into government, in practice few voters are so naive as to believe that a party, once in government, feels bound to do everything mentioned in its manifesto and to do nothing not mentioned there. Parties always have good excuses for not fulfilling their manifesto pledges; they will be able to point to some unexpected development that threw their plans off course, such as a worldwide economic downturn. As we shall see in Chapter 13, even academics who have spent a lot of time on the question acknowledge that there is usually room for disagreement about the extent to which parties actually do what they promised to do.

Many election manifestos are drawn up by groups close to the party leadership, with little real membership involvement. If manifestos and policy programs are drawn up in such a way that the leadership is not keen on the result, then these documents are likely to gather dust from the moment they are published. If a particular party is in government, furthermore, its ministers, while always trying to keep the party supportive, are unlikely to feel bound by the details of a manifesto that they can dismiss as the dreams of some youthful enthusiasts who were hired by head office for their theoretical expertise but who lack any experience of the real world. Examples abound of parties, especially left-wing parties, where membership participation in drawing up supposedly key documents has meant very little. For example, the Spanish Socialists engaged in a

massive exercise from 1987 to 1990 to draw up a new program, involving 950,000 people and 14,900 debates, but once it was adopted little more was heard of it (Gillespie, "'Programa 2000,'" pp. 93–94). In other words, the content of manifestos and programs can hardly be said to determine the behavior of the party's ministers if the party gets into office. Most members are well aware of this and do not believe that, even if they have a major input into the manifesto, they will really be determining the behavior of their party ministers in a future government. Thus, in many cases, they may not care deeply about the contents of the manifesto.

Election of the Party Leader

A second important area of potential conflict is the election of the party leader. The leader of any organization can be expected to be more powerful than other members, and leaders of political parties are especially important because, during election campaigns, the focus of the media is often on them. In the case of some parties it may be hard to say who exactly the leader is: There may be a party chairperson, a party president, and a parliamentary leader, with different people holding these positions and no clear designation of one as "the" leader. For some of these parties, such as the Norwegian center–right Høyre, it is conventional to see the real leader as the person who would become prime minister if the party came to hold that position in a future government (Heidar, p. 133). The same is true in Belgium and the Netherlands. Even this, though, is not an acid test: In both France and Italy individuals who have become prime ministers were not necessarily the most important politicians in their parties. In Denmark, there is considerable variation among the parties as to the official position that the "real" leader holds (Bille, "Power," p. 140).

Among the parties for which we can clearly identify the leader, there are several distinct methods of selection (Scarrow et al.; LeDuc). In some parties—examples can be found in Denmark, Ireland, and the Netherlands—the parliamentary group, comprising the party's elected deputies, plays a major or indeed exclusive role in choosing the leader. In many other parties—including a number in Austria, Finland, Germany, Norway, and Sweden—a party congress or convention picks the leader. A model that is becoming more common allows a direct vote for the party leader among the entire membership, a method used in some or all parties in Belgium, Britain, France, and Ireland (for Britain, see Quinn). The motive for this system may be to encourage new members by giving them a meaningful role within the party or, to take a more cynical view, to bypass the influence of supposedly more "extreme" party activists, something that we discuss more fully later.

In any case, and whatever the leadership selection method, the leader's job will be very difficult if he or she does not have the confidence of the party's parliamentarians. This was shown in October 2003 when Britain's Conservative MPs voted out Iain Duncan-Smith, who had been chosen as leader by the members just two years earlier in a decision that rapidly came to seem a mistake. Widely regarded as "not up to the job," Duncan-Smith became a figure of fun in the media. After his removal from office, MPs prevented members from having any say in choosing his successor by rallying behind a single candidate, Michael Howard. Under the party's rules, members choose the leader but MPs propose candidates, so the members' power of choice can be rendered worthless if the MPs collectively agree on just one name.

Selection of Parliamentary Candidates

A third area of prime importance for politics within parties is candidate selection (Pennings and Hazan; Gallagher and Marsh, *Candidate;* Narud et al.). The selection of the individuals who are entitled to use the party's label when they stand for election plays a crucial role in the political recruitment process. Only the people selected as candidates can become members of parliament, and in almost every country, most or all government ministers are present or former members of parliament. After the 2001 election in the United Kingdom, for example, 578 of the 659 MPs elected represented either the Conservative Party or the Labour Party. Each of these parties nominated 641 candidates, one in each mainland British constituency. The people who selected these 1,282 Conservative and Labour candidates, therefore, exercised an enormous power over who could and who could not get into the House of Commons and, beyond that, into government. Moreover, many seats in Britain (approximately 500 of them) are known to be "safe seats" for one or the other party, and in these cases selecting the candidate is tantamount to picking the MP. In some other countries, too, the candidate selectors can reasonably be seen as choosing members of parliament. For example, in a number of European countries, as we shall see in Chapter 11, the electoral system presents voters with a number of "closed" party lists, each list containing the names of candidates in a fixed order that the voters cannot alter. If a party wins, say, five seats in a particular district, these seats go to the top five names on the list, and it is the candidate selectors who determine which individuals are chosen to occupy these positions.

In 1997 Tony Blair became prime minister of Britain, swept into office with a huge majority on a powerful wave of personal popularity. However, in order to attain this position, Blair first had to become a Labour MP, and in order to do so, he had to be selected as a Labour candidate somewhere in a seat that his party had a chance of winning. By far the most difficult hurdle that he had to overcome was the last. In the early 1980s, he made unsuccessful attempts to be picked as the Labour candidate in a number of constituencies where Labour might win the seat. Finally, shortly before the 1983 election, he sought to be selected as the party's candidate in the safe Labour seat of Sedgefield in the northeast of England, a constituency with which he had no previous connection. He had first of all to persuade the skeptical members of a Labour branch in the constituency to nominate him for inclusion on the panel from which the short-list would be picked. The branch did this, but all seemed lost when he was omitted from the short-list of six that was drawn up by the handful of people who comprised the constituency executive committee. However, one of the members of the branch that had nominated him was so impressed by Blair that he persuaded the committee at a late stage to add Blair to the short-list. The 119 members entitled to make the decision then met all seven people seeking the nomination, and they picked Blair as the Labour candidate; he duly won the seat at the election and, given that it was a safe Labour seat, became in effect an MP for life (Rentoul, pp. 91–137). If he had not managed to secure selection as a Labour candidate by a small number of people in one of the proverbial smoke-filled rooms, either in Sedgefield or in another constituency that was winnable for Labour, he could never have become prime minister.

Aspiring politicians who do not meet with the approval of these powerful gatekeepers, the major parties' candidate selectors, can start their own party, with very limited

chances of success, or find that their political careers are dead in the water. Candidate selection is thus a crucial step in the political recruitment process. For this reason, it is also a key area of internal party activity. If one section of a party, such as the party leader or the national executive, has control over the selection process, then this section can almost be said to control the party. Candidate selection is thus a vital matter in every individual European political party; it is also important—indeed, it is one of the key factors—in making European political parties very different from American parties.

European parties control their own candidate selection—albeit, as we shall see, with considerable variation as to who exactly within the party can be said to occupy this controlling position. The only European country with parties that use American-style open primaries, in which anyone who wishes to participate can do so, is Iceland, where primaries have been used since 1914 and have become common since the early 1970s. At the 1983 election, it was found that 29 percent of voters had taken part in a primary at that election, and 46 percent had participated in a primary at some time in their lives (Hardarson, pp. 156–65). In every other country in Europe, the power to choose candidates is kept within the party.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the importance of candidate selection in affecting the composition of parliament, the process is regulated by law in only a few countries. In Finland, parties are legally obliged to open up the process of candidate selection to a direct vote of all their members. In both Germany and Norway the law ensures that candidates are selected by local party organizations, and the parties' national executives have no power to overturn the decisions reached locally. Parties in every other country are in effect treated as private bodies and can make whatever arrangements they wish when they pick parliamentary candidates, reflecting a strong constitutional norm of freedom of political association.

The furthest that any party outside Iceland goes down the road toward opening up its selection process to all and sundry is to adopt "party primaries" (sometimes known as OMOV, standing for one member one vote), which allow each paid-up party member a direct say in the choice of parliamentary candidates. This method of choosing candidates, though still employed by only a minority of parties, is becoming more common (Bille, "Democratizing"; Scarrow et al.; Caul Kittilson and Scarrow). It is a method employed in Austria, Britain (by Labour and some of the smaller parties), Finland (where it is obligatory under law), Ireland (by the second and third largest parties, Fine Gael and Labour), and the Netherlands (by Democrats 66). In addition, in some other countries, such as Belgium, Denmark, and Germany, there is provision for party primaries, though in practice other methods of candidate selection are sometimes employed. More commonly, candidate selection involves interplay between the local and central party organizations, with the balance varying from case to case (Bille, "Democratizing"). Often, the key decisions are taken locally, with national actors sometimes attempting to influence the process. In other parties, the balance is different, in that the ultimate decisions are taken nationally, with local organizations trying to influence the outcome.

The nature of the candidate selection process is determined partly by the electoral system. If a country is divided into single-member constituencies, then, quite obviously, each party will select only one candidate in each constituency, whereas in proportional representation (PR) systems based on multimember constituencies, it is common for several candidates from the same party to be picked. The evidence from many countries, as we discuss in greater detail in Chapter 11, is that under PR the selectors aim to

"balance the ticket," ensuring that both men and women are represented, along with individuals who will appeal to different sectoral or geographical interests within the constituency (Gallagher). However, the degree of centralization of the process is difficult to explain in terms of the political institutional features of a country, and one of the few identifiable patterns is that large parties tend to have a more centralized procedure than small ones (Lundell). In addition, there is often considerable variation between different parties in the same country—as, for example, in Poland—a sign that neither institutional nor cultural features of a country can entirely determine the nature of candidate selection (Szczerbiak, "Testing"; Szczerbiak, *Poles,* pp. 58–62).

Does it matter who selects the candidates? It could indeed matter if different actors within the party have different values and priorities. In that case whoever gains control of candidate selection could ensure that only those people holding certain political views are picked as candidates and, hence, have a chance of becoming parliamentarians. In addition, variations in this essentially private process might have a discernible impact upon the sociodemographic composition of parliament, if these variations lead to differences in the proportions of women, young people, and ethnic minorities in parliament.

When we try to identify the values that selectors impart to the candidate selection process, we find that selectors everywhere tend to appreciate certain characteristics in aspiring candidates: Having local roots is always welcomed (even in Britain, though it is by no means essential there), as is possessing a solid record as a party member. Sometimes, though, parties are willing to offer a candidacy to nonmembers who have proven appeal in the hope of thereby boosting the party's votes. Another universal pattern is that incumbent MPs are only rarely deselected—that is, they are nearly always picked to run again.

Most candidates in most parties are of higher socioeconomic status than the voters for the same parties, but this is not necessarily due to bias on the selectors' part. British candidate selectors are sometimes accused of favoring wealthy, upper-class men when making their choices, though an investigation of the selection process at the 1992 election concluded that the backgrounds of successful seekers after a nomination were not very different from the backgrounds of unsuccessful ones, and so, apart from some possible discrimination against women by Labour selectors, there was little evidence of bias on the part of selectors (Norris and Lovenduski). In the Netherlands, a feeling that ordinary members overvalued long and faithful party service led to changes in candidate selection in several parties in the 1990s; the national party organizations increased their power and declared their aim of ensuring the selection of more women and young people (Leijenaar and Niemöller, pp. 119–25). Beyond this, how far the selectors' own views impinge on the nature of the candidates they select is a rather underresearched question. In some cases, there are suspicions that the members deliberately pass over aspiring candidates whose views are not the same as their own. In Britain's Conservative Party in recent years, it has become difficult for anyone without Euroskeptic views to gain selection as a candidate, and as a result the parliamentary party has become overwhelmingly Euroskeptic (Webb, *Modern,* p. 185). In the 1980s, there was a widespread perception that members of the Labour Party were left-wing "extremists" and that they were picking candidates of a similar persuasion and thereby potentially making the party unelectable. However, a study of British Labour Party activists found that although they saw themselves as further to the left than Labour voters, they deliberately selected

Box 10.2 Selection of Parliamentary Candidates

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arties in France tend to be dominated by a small num-er of prominent individuals (notables), a fact that ıanifests itself in the candidate selection process. Be-ɔre the formation of the UMP in 2002, the two main ght-wing parties, the RPR and UDF, usually fought ections in tandem, so they made arrangements about hich of them would contest each constituency. The :ntral authorities of the parties, especially the ıtional executives, played a decisive role in this :gotiation and were also important in picking the ındidates, though they were always sensitive to the ews of local notables. Communist Party candidates e chosen by the national executive. Local members ıve rather more say in the Socialist Party, although :re too some central involvement is necessitated by e factionalized nature of the party; the factions are quired to reach some overall arrangement about aring the candidacies in order to preserve party ity. As in most countries, local roots are very impor-ıt; most parliamentary deputies are simultaneously uncillors (usually mayors) of their town or village, d resentment is created when candidates are "para-uted" by the central party authorities into a con-tuency with which they have no links.

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ndidate selection is regulated by law, which ensures ıt the central authorities of the parties have very lit-power. Selection is carried out by local conventions ısisting of delegates from party branches within the ıstituency. Once these local bodies have made their ɔice, the central bodies cannot enforce changes. ere is very little variation between the parties. Al-ıugh the German electoral system provides two ıtes to parliament (see Chapter 11), the parties do look for different qualities in the candidates they ninate for the list seats and for the constituency ts; indeed, there is considerable overlap between two sets of candidates.

ıly

: electoral system adopted in the mid-1990s, which ɔased primarily on single-member constituencies, has led to negotiations and deals among parties of the left and right as to which among a number of allied parties should present a candidate in each specific constituency. These deals are especially complicated on the left, because the center–left is more fragmented than the center–right. Once the allied parties have decided which one will contest which seat, candidate selection itself is a relatively oligarchic process. Candidate selection in the DS (the former communists) is similar to that in the old PCI. National leaders have the choice of the safest seats, and the provincial and regional organizations make selections that require approval at national level. In the main right-wing party, Forza Italia, the dominance of the leader Silvio Berlusconi is reflected in the way candidates are picked, and, similarly, within the Lega Nord the leader, Umberto Bossi, retains considerable power over candidate selection as over other matters of internal party life. In the Alleanza Nazionale, candidate selection is mainly under the control of the leadership group around the party leader, Gianfranco Fini.

Latvia

Party membership in Latvia is particularly low, and this, combined with the open-list electoral system (see Chapter 11), presents opportunities for would-be candidates who have a degree of personal support among party voters. Because candidate selection in Latvia has not been extensively researched, the extent of leadership control of the process remains difficult to determine. The high degree of turnover of candidates from one election to the next leads Pettai and Kreuzer to conclude that candidate recruitment remains weakly institutionalized and wide open to entrepreneurial newcomers.

Netherlands

There is some variation among the Dutch parties. The largest two, the CDA and the PvdA, took some power away from party members in the 1990s. The central party organization exercised greater influence with the aim of selecting more women and young candidates than had been picked by the members, who had tended to place a high value on service to the party organization. In the liberal VVD, the national executive was already the most important actor; this party has been affected less than the CDA and PvdA by demands for democratization since the 1970s. A fourth party, Democrats 66, in contrast, places heavy stress on internal democracy and gives a mail-in ballot in the candidate selection process to every paid-up member.

Poland

In most of the Polish parties the first stage of the candidate selection procedure is almost completely decentralized; central involvement consists at most of issuing general guidelines about the type of qualities that local parties should look for. In most cases the initial local candidate lists are composed without any interference from the party leaders. However, under electoral law candidate lists can be submitted only by a nationally approved plenipotentiary, and in addition most parties' statutes give the leadership the right to make changes to the local selections. The extent to which the center actually does intervene varies from party to party. In the PSL (Peasant Party) and the successor to the former Solidarity movement, local selections are left more or less untouched. In some other parties the center might "parachute" in a candidate without local connections or veto someone whom it feels will damage the party's image, and sometimes it alters the order of names on the list. Even though Poland has an open-list electoral system, the top two positions on the list are regarded as most likely to attract preference votes. The most centralized party is the Labor Union (UP), where central interest in the process is great and intervention is frequent.

Spain

Because Spanish parties are leader dominated and have few members, it is not surprising to find that candidate selection is largely controlled by the leadership group. Although the leadership usually feels it wise to pay some regard to the feelings of the local party organization when settling on its lists around the country, it nonetheless retains a fairly free hand in deciding who should carry the party flag. Local activists occasionally show their displeasure with the centrally made selections by running dissident lists in the election, but these rarely achieve any success.

Sweden

As in the other Scandinavian countries, central government and the central party authorities are less powerful in Sweden than across most of Europe. Local government is important, and the local party branches do not welcome or indeed expect any attempt by party headquarters to dictate to them. In all the Swedish parties, candidate selection is carried out at the constituency level by conventions composed of delegates from the party branches in the constituency and is firmly under the control of the local party organization. Even the Left Party deviates from the usual communist pattern of central control—a strong testimony to the Swedish concern for local autonomy.

United Kingdom

Candidate selection in Britain used to be dominated by local party activists, but in recent years there has been a movement toward giving ordinary members a direct voice. In the 1990s Labour adopted a "one member one vote" system, known by the acronym OMOV, allowing each member a direct vote in the selection process. This method is also employed by Britain's third party, the Liberal Democrats. The Conservative Party combines centralization and membership involvement. It maintains a list of about eight hundred centrally approved aspirant candidates, who have to go through a rigorous screening procedure, and constituency organizations are expected to draw up a short-list from these names; ordinary members make the final choice from this short-list. Aspiring Conservative candidates who do not share the Euroskeptic attitudes of party members face an uphill struggle to win selection. Candidate selection in Britain is unusual in one respect. Most parliamentarians elsewhere have roots in the constituency they hope to represent, but in Britain selectors often pick someone with no previous connection with the constituency—though even in Britain local roots are becoming more important.

Labour candidates whose views were more moderate than their own so as not to damage the party's electoral chances (Bochel and Denver, p. 60).

It may, indeed, not matter greatly exactly *who* within the party chooses the candidates, but it does matter a lot that it is *someone* within the party, and not the voters at large, who chooses them. Even if different actors within the party have different priorities and views on some issues, they all belong to the same party and are thus likely to have a broadly similar political outlook. Epstein (pp. 219, 225) points out that it is not necessary for the leadership to pick all the candidates directly, because the results of locally controlled selection are usually perfectly acceptable to it. Local party activists, just like the national leadership, want deputies who are loyal to the party line as defined nationally. For political parties, keeping candidate selection firmly under their own control has two great advantages. First, it helps retain the loyalty of ordinary party members. Deciding who will be allowed to use the party's name and resources in the election campaign is often the only real power members have, so allowing them to do this increases the party leaders' ability to retain a substantial body of cooperative members. Second, it enables the parties to behave as cohesive and disciplined bodies in parliament and in political negotiations with other parties, and this in turn means that the party label conveys valuable information to voters at election time (Bowler). European party organizations control access to their label at elections and can withhold it from parliamentarians who are not sufficiently loyal to it in parliament. Their American counterparts, lacking this power, cannot do this. The threats and blandishments of interest groups, political action committees (PACs), and constituents at large may all have to be taken seriously by American Congress members, but in Europe individual MPs must put the party first, last, and always. Defying the party line in parliament may lead to deselection at the next election, and MPs will have little chance of reelection without the party label. Outside the party there is no salvation, or at least no long-term prospect of a political career.

For parliamentarians, this system has the advantage of protecting them from the risk of being picked off one at a time by outside interests who might put pressure on them to defect from the party line, and from the threat of being targeted at the next election by powerful and well-funded single-issue groups. Whatever an interest group might threaten to do to a deputy who doesn't vote as the group wants, it is nothing compared with what the party will do if the deputy doesn't vote as *it* wants. At the same time, the prospect of being deselected by the candidate selectors is a remote one for deputies who are loyal to the party. Most European parties have adopted a style of organization that keeps deputies on a fairly long leash held by the ordinary members but does not go so far as to make them mere poodles of unelected activists. Clearly, one could argue either in favor of the European model of strong and disciplined parliamentary parties or in favor of the U.S. pattern of greater independence of the individual Congress member. Regardless of which has more advantages, it is beyond dispute that disciplined and cohesive political parties are central to European parliamentary democracy and that party control of candidate selection is essential to this. U.S.-style direct primaries are incompatible with strong political parties (Ranney), and, in the last analysis, all of the differences that are to be found within Europe are probably less significant than the differences between European and U.S. candidate selection practices as a whole.

Sources of Party Finance

Because European parties do so much more as party organizations than U.S. parties, they need more resources. This is not to suggest that there is more money floating around in European politics than there is in the United States—almost certainly, the reverse is true. But in the United States a significant proportion of political funds is raised and spent by and on candidates rather than parties, whereas in Europe parties are much more central in raising and spending money, as in everything else.

European parties need money for two main reasons. First, they need it to run their organizations: to pay their head office staff and their telephone, postage, and other bills; to hold annual conferences and other meetings; and in some cases to support research institutions linked to the party. Second, they need cash to fight election campaigns, and this has become the main item of expenditure for nearly all parties. In the past, parties in most European countries were not allowed to buy television advertising space, though this is now possible in a growing number of countries (including Austria, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden). Even where television advertising by parties is still illegal, parties find plenty of other ways to spend money at election time: on newspaper and poster advertising; on the public relations firms that increasingly design election campaigns; on private focus group and survey research; perhaps on a helicopter to whisk the party leader around the country on the campaign trail; on fax machines and mobile phones to keep candidates in touch with party headquarters; and on balloons, buttons, and general razzmatazz.

Parties get their money from a variety of sources (general overviews are given in Fisher and Eisenstadt; Katz, pp. 124–32; Pinto-Duschinsky; Williams). Dues paid by members play a role but nowadays rarely produce more than a quarter of a party's income; the Netherlands, where membership dues comprise about half of party revenues, is a notable exception (Koole, "Party"). A second source of income is a party's request or insistence that its parliamentary deputies and government ministers pay a proportion, perhaps as much as 10 percent, of their official salary into party coffers. Third, parties may engage in fund-raising activities, such as the garden fetes and church hall bazaars for which the British Conservatives are famous. Some parties publish their own newspapers, but these days, as mentioned, they are more often a drain on a party's coffers than a contributor to them.

Besides these three sources arising "internally"—that is, from the party's own activities—there are also two important "external" sources of money. First, major interest groups back political parties whose policies they think will help them. In particular, business gives money to right-wing parties, and trade unions give money to left-wing parties. Second, in the great majority of European countries the state gives public money to political parties. Moreover, in almost every country there are benefits in kind, including free party broadcasts and mailings during election campaigns, as well as grants to the parliamentary groups to enable them to pay for secretarial and research assistance.

These two external sources of funding, contributions from interest groups and from the state, are related, because concern about the consequences of parties becoming financially dependent on interest groups is one of the factors that has brought about the rise of state financing. Obviously, neither business corporations nor trade unions give money to parties simply as a charitable exercise. At the very least, they hope to help their chosen

party get into government and implement policies broadly sympathetic to their own needs. Some sponsors may have more tangible benefits in mind. A business or a wealthy individual may give money to a party in the hope (or even on condition) that once in government, it will give the donor special access to decision makers or even that the party's ministers will make a specific decision, perhaps on a tax liability or a request for land use planning permission, that will repay the investment several times over. This is particularly likely to happen when, as is the case in many countries, there are no laws, or at most ineffective laws, compelling parties to disclose their financial sources.

The first European country to introduce state funding of its parties was West Germany in 1959. The German scheme has subsequently been expanded and altered several times and now involves huge sums of money (Scarrow, "Explaining"; Saalfeld). Parties winning more than 0.5 percent of the vote in an election receive €1.3 for each of their first 4 million votes and €0.7 for each additional vote, which adds up to a lot of money given that around 50 million votes are cast at postunification German elections. The result is that the German parties are awash with funds, and even after covering the costs of exceptionally large party bureaucracies and research institutes, they have enough left over to help like-minded parties in the poorer postcommunist countries. In Germany's case, the past history of dictatorship may create a heightened willingness to spend a lot of money on preserving the institutions of liberal democracy.

Other countries have rather more modest schemes, although the principle is the same—parties receive money in approximate proportion to their electoral strength. In some countries all the money is paid by the national government to the parties' national headquarters, while in others, especially in Scandinavia, a significant part of the cash flows from local government to the parties' local organizations. With expenditure rising constantly and most other sources of revenue proving erratic or unreliable, state-supplied income now looms large in the finances of parties in countries that have public funding schemes. In many countries that have state funding, this source of party income exceeds all other sources combined (Mair, pp. 141–42). This applies to most parties in postcommunist countries as well, though these parties have two other potential sources of income. Some benefited from the less than transparent distribution of state assets at the end of the communist era, and some secured admission to one of the main European party groups (such as the socialist or the Christian democratic group), which had the potential to bring significant material benefit (Lewis, *Political Parties,* pp. 111–12, 122; Lewis, "Political Parties," pp. 171–72). For example, at Poland's 1997 election, different parties were in receipt of assistance from counterparts in Britain, France, Sweden, and the United States (Szczerbiak, "'Professionalization,'" p. 86). Although the financial resources of postcommunist parties are not great in absolute terms, the parties' low number of members means that their ratio of head office employees to members is much higher than in the west (van Biezen, p. 207).

The pros and cons of public funding of political parties have been debated in many European countries. One argument, as we have said, is that it frees parties from having to dance to the tune of wealthy financial backers and thus reduces corruption in politics generally. In practice it certainly does not eliminate the sleaze factor entirely, as periodic scandals demonstrate. In Italy, for example, an extensive scheme of state funding of parties did not prevent a number of parties from engaging in corruption on a massive scale, in the "Tangentopoli" or *mani pulite* affair of the 1990s, which we outlined in

Chapters 4 and 7. In Portugal, a degree of corruption coexists with state funding, aided by the indifference of citizens (de Sousa). In postcommunist countries, too, the laws on transparency read well on paper but are laxly enforced, leading to a general impression among many voters of ongoing corruption. Defenders of state financing maintain that there would be even more of this kind of thing if parties were entirely dependent on private sources. Critics suggest that it will lead to a decline in party membership and make leaders less accountable to members as parties realize they no longer need members' dues, but the evidence is that the introduction of state finance makes no difference to membership trends (Pierre et al.). Right-wing critics argue that party funding should be left to the market and is none of the state's business; left-wing critics claim that state funding turns parties into mere agents of the state or "public utilities" instead of the autonomous forces they should be (Lipow, pp. 49–65).

Supporters of state financing emphasize that not all parties can find wealthy interest groups willing to give them money. Parties whose policies appeal to no wealthy interest group—Green parties, for example, or center parties—may receive only small sums from members and sympathetic individuals. Private money may wield undue influence in intraparty battles. For example, in the days leading up to the ousting of Iain Duncan-Smith as British Conservative leader in 2003, several large donors had stated that they would stop giving money to the party unless he were replaced. Moreover, state financing, besides coming without strings attached, is awarded according to a predetermined formula and thus seems to make competition "fairer." Critics of state funding, though, observe that this line of argument can be used to rationalize a situation in which the parties already in parliament form a tacit "cartel," using their control of the state to vote themselves public money in a manner that reinforces their position by placing parties outside the cartel at a disadvantage (Katz and Mair, "Changing," pp. 15–16). The evidence is, though, that challenger parties fare no worse in countries that provide state funding than they fare elsewhere (Pierre et al.).

Although some people claim that political parties are private bodies and as such have no right to expect money from the public purse, others point out that they fulfill a public function: They are essential to the workings of a democracy and therefore need to be sustained. Furthermore, the role of government has expanded greatly since the nineteenth century, and government is controlled by a ruling party or parties. Unless parties have the money to explore and expand policy options and to conduct research into the feasibility of their ideas, the country as a whole could suffer from the inadequately thought-out policies they promote.

The flow of money into a party is likely both to reflect and to reinforce the balance of power within the party. For donors other than the state, there is little point in giving money to people or groups within a party who have no power. It makes sense, obviously, for them to give money to those who wield the power and can make the policy decisions that the donors wish to see. By doing this, of course, they further strengthen those to whom they give money. The pattern in Europe generally since the 1960s has been one of a dramatic increase in the amount of money going to central party bodies, both to the parliamentary party and to the head office (Katz and Mair, "Ascendancy"; Farrell and Webb).

Although every European party would no doubt like more money to finance its activities, most parties with reasonable levels of electoral support have sufficient

resources to get their message across at elections. Individual party candidates fight elections on a national party platform and thus do not need much money to mount a personal campaign. The need for a personal campaign arises only when a preferential electoral system pits two or more candidates of the same party against each other (see Chapter 11). Even in those cases, the amounts of money involved are not huge. The elected candidates in a Finnish constituency in 1999 spent an average of just over €11,000 each, for example, a sum that would not get anyone far in a U.S. campaign (Ruostetsaari and Mattila, p. 100). Moreover, a European candidate who flaunts his or her wealth on a personal campaign rather than fighting as part of the party's team might well incur disapproval, perhaps from voters as well as from party members. Consequently, candidates do not need huge sources of private funding to bankroll their election campaigns and are less dependent than their U.S. counterparts on nonparty groups. Once again, we see in Europe the dominance of party over candidate, in marked contrast to the situation in the United States.

→ The Changing Shape of European Parties

Political parties, like other organizations, change and adapt in response to changes in their environment. There have been many attempts to assess evolving patterns of European party organizations. In the 1950s the French writer Maurice Duverger argued that during the nineteenth century most parties had been what he termed "cadre parties," which were dominated by local notables who in most cases were the parties' MPs. At local level these notables had their own support groups, but the people in these groups were not really "party members," for they did not pay a membership fee and had no formal rights within the party. These parties, said Duverger, were swept aside later in the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century by the "mass party." He maintained that the mass party, with a large number of fee-paying members, a sizable permanent bureaucracy in the head office, and a clear policy program, was the "new" or "modern" form of party, and he foresaw a convergence toward this model (Duverger, p. 427).

In contrast, Leon D. Epstein, writing in the 1960s, believed that mass parties belonged only to particular places and periods. He identified a number of "counter-organizational tendencies"—such as the increasing use of the mass media, especially television, during election campaigns, which reduced the need for thousands of ordinary party members to go out spreading the word in order to get the message across—that, he argued, would increasingly undermine the rationale for the existence of large-scale mass political parties (Epstein, pp. 233–60). In a similar vein, Otto Kirchheimer argued that changes in European society were bringing about changes in the type of party likely to flourish. Class lines were becoming less sharp, and the growth of the welfare state and the mixed economy had cut the ground from under the feet of old-style antisystem socialist parties, which had been dedicated to a radical transformation of society, with members living within a virtual subculture. The type of party best suited to current conditions was what Kirchheimer called "the postwar catch-all party" that tried to win votes from nearly all sections of society and would concentrate on general, bland issues such as better health and education services. Panebianco (pp. 262–74) elaborated this idea with the "electoral–professional" model, emphasizing in particular the central role of professionals with the expertise to perform certain tasks, such as designing election campaigns.

From this point of view, a party does not really need a large number of committed members. In the 1980s, Gunnar Sjöblom took this line of thought one step further and argued that members might actually be a handicap to a party, or at least to its parliamentarians. He suggested that various changes in society, such as increased mobility and the growing role of the mass media in conveying political messages, were leading to greater volatility among voters. People were suffering from "information overload"; they were confused by a never-ending stream of reports about proposals, decisions, and speculation; and they were increasingly likely to vote on the basis of "political paraphernalia"—trivial factors such as the style or appearance of the party leader (Sjöblom, p. 385). In this situation, members with a strong commitment to certain principles were a definite liability to the vote-hungry parliamentarians, who wanted the party to be able to change tack rapidly to take advantage of the shifting winds of public opinion. Party members trying to drum up support by faithfully plugging a traditional message were likely to have a counterproductive effect. Consequently, argued Sjöblom (p. 395), "it may be to the advantage of a party to have few and/or passive members." Indeed, the deputy leader of the Spanish Socialist Party said in the 1980s that he would sooner have ten minutes of television broadcasting time than ten thousand members (Gillespie, *Spanish*, p. 366).

This argument seems to become even more persuasive when we think about the types of people who might make up the bulk of party members. We pointed out earlier that the factors that motivate people to join a party might be categorized as material, solidary, or purposive, and although each of these motives seems to be losing power, the first two may have lost more of their force than the last. If this is the case, people joining for the third reason will form an increasing proportion of members, their ideological commitment no longer diluted by the more pragmatic members who joined for less explicitly political purposes. There is a plausible argument, backed up with evidence, to the effect that party members tend to be more "extreme" in their views than party voters (May). (The evidence is less clear-cut on the question of whether members are also more extreme than MPs, as May also claimed.) For example, in Sweden members of the main left-wing party hold views farther to the left than that party's voters, and members of the main right-wing party hold views farther to the right than that party's voters (Widfeldt, *Linking*, p. 263). This line of argument was expressed colorfully in the 1930s by an observer of the British Labour Party who claimed that its local constituency organizations were "frequently unrepresentative groups of nonentities dominated by fanatics and cranks and extremists" (quoted in McKenzie, p. 194). In addition, even if researchers feel that the jury is still out on whether May's law is true, party leaders might well believe it to be true and thus want to reduce the power of activists. Certainly, it is quite plausible that members impose programmatic "costs" on the party leadership by demanding that the party adopt certain policy stances as the price of their continued loyalty, and it may be that the policies they demand are sometimes ones that the voters as a whole do not find attractive (Strøm, "Behavioral"). Members, then, might saddle the party with vote-losing policies, in which case parliamentarians might prefer to dispense with members and instead communicate with the public entirely through the mass media.

This possibility suggests that parties will be less keen than in the past to recruit members, and as we have seen in this chapter, party membership levels have indeed been falling across Europe in recent decades. This does not necessarily mean that parties are