CHAPTER 12

Political parties

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Reader's guide

Political parties are among the central institutions of modern democracy. But what is a political party? Why are parties central to democracy, and how are they organized? This chapter considers the definition, origins, and functions of parties. What role do parties play in the working of democracy? And what benefits do parties provide for those who organize them? The chapter then considers the ways in which parties are organized, regulated, and financed. It concludes with brief discussions of the role of parties in the stabilization of democracy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and of challenges confronting parties in the new millennium.

Introduction

At least since the early twentieth century, organizations that identified themselves as 'political parties' have been among the central actors in politics. Whether in power as the result of victory in free and fair elections or as a result of *coups d'état* or revolutions, the governments of most countries effectively were in the hands of party leaders: Winston Churchill as leader of the British Conservative Party; Indira Gandhi as leader of the Indian National Congress; Adolf Hitler as the leader of the German Nazi Party; Mikhail Gorbachev as leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; Ahmed Sékou Touré as leader of the Parti Démocratique de Guinée-Rassemblement Démocratique Africain.

When governments have not been in the hands of party leaders, most often because party government has been interrupted by a military takeover, the resulting juntas (see Chapter 6) have almost always immediately announced that their rule will be only temporary—until a regime of legitimate or honest or effective parties can be restored. And if, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, there is occasionally talk that the era of the political party is past, and that social movements and governance networks will supplant parties as the leading institutions channelling political participation and structuring government, experience to date offers little reason to suspect (or hope) that this will happen any time soon.

KEY POINTS

- Political parties are the central actors in democratic politics, as well as in many authoritarian and totalitarian regimes.
- It is unlikely that social movements or governance networks will replace the parties' many roles.

Definitions of party

Given their ubiquity, one might think that the definition of political party would be straightforward, but quite the reverse is true. Parties like the American Democrats, the Italian Fascists, or the Kenyan African National Union (KANU)—not to mention the myriad smaller parties like the Polish Beer Lovers or the British Official Monster Raving Loony Party—are so different in motivation, organization, behaviour, and relevance as to raise the question of whether a single umbrella category can encompass them all. Indeed there are many scholars who would argue that some of the 'parties' cited above should not be included.

Taking Robert Huckshorn's (1984: 10) definition that 'a political party is an autonomous group of citizens having the purpose of making nominations and contesting elections in the hope of gaining control over governmental power through the capture of public offices and the organization of the government' as an example, one might legitimately ask whether the 'party' in a single-party state qualifies. While it may use the form of elections to bolster its legitimacy, it does not contest elections precisely because it does not allow any other contestants. On the other side, only by assuming that they are delusional could one attribute the hope of gaining even a single office, let alone significant governmental power, to the myriad minor parties that appear on the ballots of many British, American, or Canadian constituencies.

Although it is only one among an almost endless list of proposed definitions of party (see Box 12.1 for more examples), it is instructive to unpack Huckshorn's definition in order to highlight the issues involved in defining party. Huckshorn explicitly combines four elements, common to many definitions, and implicitly adds another.

The first explicit element concerns the *objective of parties*: 'gaining control over governmental power through the capture of public offices and the organization of the government'. There has been, however, considerable disagreement concerning the underlying motivation for this pursuit of power. For some (Lasswell 1960), the pursuit of power reflects psychopathology; others (Downs 1957; Schumpeter 1962; Schlesinger 1991) emphasize the pursuit of office essentially as an employment opportunity. From a more public regarding perspective, one finds Edmund Burke's (1770) classic definition quoted in Box 12.1.

The second explicit element concerns *methods*: 'making nominations and contesting elections ... and the organization of the government'. This points to two separable arenas in which parties operate, the electoral and the governmental, and as will be noted below, one significant question in the understanding of parties in general, and any single party in particular, is: which came first?

The third explicit element of Huckshorn's definition is *competition*, expressed in the 'contesting' of elections and the 'hope [as opposed to the certainty] of gaining control'. But does the contesting of elections require free and fair competition among independent competitors or merely that the form of elections is observed? This is related to the fourth element, that the group of citizens be *autonomous*. At the extreme, these criteria appear to disqualify the parties of 'one-party' states, although on the other side these parties may claim to be facing real if clandestine and illegal, opposition from 'counter-revolutionary forces'. Moreover, these parties' structures also may play a significant role in the organization and control of the government, more conventionally understood.

The implicit element of Huckshorn's definition is that the group of citizens has some level of coherence that allows them to coordinate their actions and to maintain



Box 12.1 Definition of party

David Hume (1742)	Factions may be divided into personal and real; that is, into factions, founded on personal friendship or animosity among such as compose the contending parties, and into those founded on some real difference of sentiment or interest ... though ... parties are seldom found pure and unmixed, either of one kind or the other.
Edmund Burke (1770)	[A] party is a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed.
Walter Bagehot (1889)	The moment, indeed, that we distinctly conceive that the House of Commons is mainly and above all things an elective assembly, we at once perceive that party is of its essence: there never was an election without a party.
Max Weber (1922)	'[P]arties' live in a house of 'power'. Their action is oriented toward the acquisition of social 'power,' that is to say toward influencing communal action no matter what its content may be.
Robert Michels (1911)	The modern party is a fighting organization in the political sense of the term, and must as such conform to the laws of tactics.
Joseph Schumpeter (1950)	A party is not ... a group of men who intend to promote the public welfare 'upon some particular principle on which they are all agreed'. A party is a group whose members propose to act in concert in the competitive struggle for political power.
Anthony Downs (1957)	In the broadest sense, a political party is a coalition of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by legal means. By coalition, we mean a group of individuals who have certain ends in common and cooperate with each other to achieve them. By governing apparatus, we mean the physical, legal, and institutional equipment which the government uses to carry out its specialized role in the division of labor. By legal means, we mean either duly constituted or legitimate influence.
V. O. Key, Jr. (1964)	A political party, at least on the American scene, tends to be a 'group' of a peculiar sort. ... Within the body of voters as a whole, groups are formed of persons who regard themselves as party members. ... In another sense the term 'party' may refer to the group of more or less professional workers.... At times party denotes groups within the government. ... Often it refers to an entity which rolls into one the party-in-the-electorate, the professional political group, the party-in-the-legislature, and the party-in-the-government. ... In truth, this all-encompassing usage has its legitimate application, for all the types of groups called party interact more or less closely and at times may be as one. Yet both analytically and operationally the term 'party' most of the time must refer to several types of group; and it is useful to keep relatively clear the meaning in which the term is used.
William Nisbet Chambers (1967)	[A] political party in the modern sense may be thought of as a relatively durable social formation which seeks offices or power in government, exhibits a structure or organization which links leaders at the centers of government to a significant popular following in the political arena and its local enclaves, and generates in-group perspectives or at least symbols of identification or loyalty.
Ronald Reagan (1984)	A political party isn't a fraternity. It isn't something like the old school tie you wear. You band together in a political party because of certain beliefs of what government should be. (quoted in *Time Magazine*, 3 September)
Joseph Schlesinger (1991)	A political party is a group organized to gain control of government in the name of the group by winning election to public office.
John Aldrich (1995)	Political parties can be seen as coalitions of elites to capture and use political office. [But] a political party is more than a coalition. A political party is an institutionalized coalition, one that has adopted rules, norms, and procedures.

an identity over time. While this does not require a formal organization, it certainly is facilitated by one, so that both some minimal level of organization and some minimal level of unity have become part of the definition of party.

KEY POINTS

- Parties are ubiquitous in modern political systems.
- The definition of 'party' is contentious because it specifies which cases provide appropriate evidence for confirming or disconfirming empirical theories.
- Definitions centring on the objectives and methods of party, and emphasizing their role in political competition, reflect value-laden assumptions about the proper functioning of politics.

Origins of parties

Although there were earlier groups that might today be recognized as parties, the origins of modern parties lie first in the representative assemblies of the sixteenth–nineteenth centuries, and secondly in the efforts of those who were excluded from those assemblies to gain a voice in them. In both cases, parties arose in response to the fact that coordinated action is likely to be more effective than action taken by isolated individuals, even if they are in perfect agreement.

The earlier parties *were parties of intra-parliamentary origin*, evident, for example, in the British parliament in the seventeenth century—and even then the novelty was not the existence of factions but rather acceptance of the ideas that disagreement was not synonymous with disloyalty and that organization was not synonymous with conspiracy. Over time, these parties developed recognizable leadership cadres and became active in electoral campaigns. Their most significant contribution to the development of modern politics, as well as the greatest re-enforcement of their own strength, was to wrest control of the executive from the hands of the monarch and replace that control with responsibility to parliament, which ultimately meant that ministers would in fact be chosen by, and be responsible to, the parties (and especially their leaders) that controlled a majority of the parliamentary seats.

The rise of parliamentary government was far from equivalent to democratization, because well into the nineteenth, and generally into the twentieth, century, the right to participate in political life, including the right to vote, was highly restricted by a variety of economic, religious, and gender restrictions. The need to mobilize and organize large numbers of those excluded from legitimate participation to support leaders advocating for reforms—generally including the extension of political rights—gave rise to development of *parties of extra-parliamentary origin*. The ultimate success of these parties in inducing the parties of the *régimes censitaires* to broaden the suffrage then was instrumental in converting the liberal regimes of the nineteenth century into the liberal democracies of the twenty-first century. Indeed, as Schattschneider (1942: 1) famously remarked, 'the political parties created democracy, and ... modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties'.

The distinction between parties of intra- and extra-parliamentary origin (Duverger 1954) is not only a matter of timing, with parties of internal origin generally coming earlier—in the new democracies of East and Central Europe in the late twentieth century as well as in Western Europe and the Americas in the sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries. As will be discussed below, especially at their origins they often differ quite substantially in their organizations as well, and these 'genetic' differences tend to persist for many decades after parties of external origin win parliamentary representation, or parties of internal origin build membership organizations 'on the ground' (see Panebianco 1988).

Parties of internal and external origin have also tended to differ with respect to their social bases, with those originating in parliament representing the 'establishment' of upper and upper middle classes (or earlier, the nobility and gentry, and more recently, particularly in 'pacted' transitions to democracy in the former Soviet bloc, the clientele of the old regime), while those of external origin represent the middle, lower middle, and working classes, sometimes the adherents of dissenting religions, speakers of marginalized languages, the opponents of the old regime, etc.

In the late twentieth century, a new type of externally originating party has appeared in a number of countries—most notably and successfully in Italy. In these cases, a rich entrepreneur used his wealth and business empire in effect to create (or 'buy') a party in much the same way as he might create a chain of retail stores (Hopkin and Paolucci 1999). Although created outside parliament, these parties tend to look more like older parties of internal origin, both in their balance of power between the central party organization (dominated by the entrepreneur through party officials who are in reality his employees) and ordinary members (if any), and in their conservative, or at least pro-business, policy profile. In particular, they are created to be 'cheerleaders' and supporters of an already established (albeit in the economy rather than in government) leader, who has little interest in or need for input of ideas or resources from below. Like the earlier parties of internal origin, and unlike most leader-centred parties of external origin, they depend on the material

resources that the leader can mobilize, rather than on his or her personal charisma.

KEY POINTS

- Some parties originated within parliaments, while others originated outside parliaments with the objective of getting in.
- The subsequent power relations of a party generally favour leaders whose positions in public office, or in an external party organization, are analogous to the positions of the leaders who originally built the party.

The functions of parties

Political parties perform a number of functions (see Box 12.2) that are central to the operation of modern states, and particularly of modern democracies. Indeed, as observed above, parties often are defined at least in part by the performance of these functions. At the same time, however, it should be recognized that these are not the only things that parties do (for example, parties may serve as social outlets for their members), nor do all parties effectively perform (or even attempt to perform) all of these functions.

Coordination

Historically the first function of political parties, and still one of the most important, is that of coordination, within government, within society, and between government and society at large.

Coordination within government

Coordination within government (the 'party in public office') takes place in many venues. Most obviously, the coordination function is manifested in party caucuses (or groups, clubs, or *Fraktionen*) in parliaments, with their leaders, whips (party officials in charge of maintaining discipline and communication within the party's parliamentary membership, and 'newsletters' informing members of the expectations of their leaders), policy committees, etc. Parliamentary party groups also structure the selection of committee members and the organization of the parliamentary agenda. Whether in a system of formal separation of powers, like the US, or more pure parliamentary government, like New Zealand, parties provide



Box 12.2 Functions of parties

Coordination	Maintaining discipline and communication within the parliamentary caucus.
	Coordinating action of the parliamentary caucus in support of, or opposition to, the cabinet.
	Organizing the political activity of like-minded citizens.
	Patterning linkage between representatives in public office and organized supporters among the citizenry.
Conducting electoral campaigns and structuring competition	Providing candidates, and linking individual candidates to recognizable symbols, histories, and expectations of team-like behaviour.
	Developing policy programmes.
	Recruiting and coordinating campaign workers.
Selection and recruitment of personnel	Selection of candidates for elections.
	Recruitment and/or selection of candidates for appointed office.
	Recruitment and socialization of political activists and potential office-holders.
	Integration of new citizens into the existing political system.
Representation	Speaking for their members and supporters within or in front of government agencies.
	Being the organizational embodiment in the political sphere of demographically or ideologically defined categories of citizens.

the bridge between the legislative and executive branches. They also structure coordination between different levels (national, regional, etc.) of government. To the extent that parties perform this function comprehensively and effectively, it becomes reasonable to regard parties as organizations, rather than the individual politicians who hold office in their name, as central political actors.

Coordination within society

In addition to structuring coordination among like-minded public officials, political parties are among the institutions (along with interest groups, NGOs, and the like) that organize and channel the political activity of citizens. Even in the absence of a formally organized 'party on the ground', party names and histories serve as points of reference and identification for citizens whose knowledge of and involvement in politics is often both sporadic and shallow. Where there are more formal organizations, these provide venues for political education, discussion, and the coordination of collective action.

Coordination between government and society

The third coordination problem addressed by political parties is the linking of the party on the ground as a group of active citizens supporting a particular political tendency (whether based on a coherent ideology, a common social grouping, a vague orientation, etc.) and the party in public office as a group of officials claiming to represent the same tendency. Within party organizations (see below), this function often is performed by a party central office. Whether this linkage takes, or is supposed to take, the form of control over the party in public office on behalf of the party on the ground, or direction of the party on the ground as an organization of supporters of the party in public office, varies among parties, as indeed does the effectiveness of the linkage whichever way it runs, as well as the level of coordination and discipline within either the party on the ground or the party in public office.

Contesting elections

A second major defining function of political parties is the conduct of electoral campaigns, and of political competition more generally. Parties provide most of the candidates in elections, and an even larger share of those with any real chance of being elected. In many political systems, parties are the formal contestants of elections—the ballot clearly identifies parties as the things among which the citizen is asked to choose—but even when the object of choice formally is individual candidates, the most relevant characteristic of those candidates usually is their political party affiliation. Ordinarily (the US, in which the organization and funding of campaigns is based primarily on individual candidates, being a notable exception) most of the funds required for a political campaign are raised and spent by parties, whether nationally or at the constituency level; campaign workers are recruited and directed by parties. The policy positions advocated in a campaign are generally those that were formulated and agreed to within parties. Between elections as well, parties generally act as the primary protagonists in political debates.

Recruitment

A third major function of parties is the recruitment and selection of personnel, with the balance between recruitment (finding someone willing to do the job) and selection (choosing among multiple aspirants) depending both on the party and the nature of the position to be filled. The selection function is most significant with regard to candidacies for important offices, like the presidency, membership in the national parliament, or a regional governorship, and within parties whose candidates have a high probability of success. For minor offices (especially those that are unpaid), hopeless constituencies, or positions at the bottom of a party list of candidates, the primary function often is recruitment—avoiding the embarrassment of not being able to fill the position, or of filling it with someone who obviously is not up to the job (Sundberg 1987).

Taken together, these three functions of coordination (especially within the party in public office), conducting electoral campaigns (especially the formulation and presentation of policy programmes, platforms, or manifestoes), and recruitment of candidates for both elective and appointive office, to the extent that they are performed in a coordinated way, and to the extent that party elected officials effectively control the state, make the parties the effective governors, and give rise to the idea of 'democratic party government' (Rose 1974; Castles and Wildenmann 1986). Of course, not all democratic governments are democratic in this way. In the US, for example, the coherence of parties is much lower than in most other democracies, making individual politicians rather than their parties the real governors. In Switzerland, the referendum makes the citizens, and the variety of groups (including but by no means limited to parties) that can organize petitions demanding a referendum, the ultimate deciders of individual questions at the expense of party government.[1]

Parties have also been active in integrating new citizens into the political system. While this function was (and still is) particularly prominent in systems with rapidly expanding electorates, either because of suffrage expansion or significant immigration, the natural process of maturation means that there are always new

citizens coming to political consciousness. Party youth movements often play a significant role in integrating the most politically interested and active members of each new generation into the existing party system. More generally, if frequently to a lesser degree than in the past, parties contribute to the connection of citizens to the established political order through the provision of services, ranging from ombudsman-like intervention with the bureaucracy to jobs and social services.

Representation

Finally, parties perform a variety of functions that may be classified as representation. First, parties speak and act for their supporters, in electoral campaigns, in the corridors of power, in the media and other public fora of discussion. Direct democracy being impossible in any but the smallest communities, parties serve as agents of the people, doing things that the people do not have the time, the training and ability, or the inclination to do for themselves. Parties also represent citizens in the sense of being the organizational embodiment in the political sphere of categories of citizens, as with a labour party, a Catholic party, the party of a language group or region, or even possibly a women's party.[2] Parties may, by analogy, represent the organizational embodiment of ideologies.

KEY POINTS

- Political parties play a central role in coordinating among public officials, among citizens with common political preferences, and between citizens and officials.
- Political parties are generally the central participants in elections, responsible for both the candidates and the issues among which voters will choose.
- Political parties are central participants in the recruitment of political personnel, both for the elective and appointive office.
- Political parties serve as representatives, both of social groupings and of ideological positions.

Models of party organization

Types of parties

Cadre or elite parties

The earliest 'modern' parties were the **cadre** (or elite or caucus) parties that developed in European parliaments. Because, particularly in an era of highly restricted suffrage, each of the MPs who made up these parties generally owed his election to the mobilization of his own, personal, clientele or the clientele of his patron, there was little need for a party on the ground, and certainly not one organized beyond the boundaries of individual constituencies. Hence, there was also no need for a party central office. Within parliament, however, the advantages of working in concert both to pursue policy objectives and to secure access to ministerial office led to the evolution of parliamentary party organizations, frequently cemented by the exchange of patronage (either personally for the MP or in the form of benefits for his personal supporters, patron, or constituency for which the MP could take credit).

As electorates expanded, elite parties in some places developed more elaborate local organizations—most famously the 'Birmingham caucus' of Joseph Chamberlain—and some greater coordination (frequently taking the form of centrally prepared 'talking points' and centrally organized campaign tours by nationally known personalities) by a central office, but the heart of the organization remained the individual MP and his or her personal campaign and support organization. At the level of the electorate, the concept of 'party membership' remained ill-defined. In the twenty-first century, parties that approximate the caucus format remain significant in the US and to a certain extent in Japan (the Liberal Democratic Party) and on the right in France.

Mass parties

The **mass party** developed from the second half of the nineteenth century (although some argue that the Jacobins of the French Revolution really were the first mass party, e.g. Mavrogordatos 1996). In contrast to the intra-parliamentary origins of the caucus party, the 'genetic myth' of the mass party identifies it as a party of extra-parliamentary origin.[3] In the initial absence of either elected officials (a party in public office) or a network of local organizations (a party on the ground), the mass party begins with a core of leaders who organize a party central office with the aim of developing a party so as to be able to win elections and ultimately gain public office.

In contrast to the cadre party, which generally claimed to be speaking for the 'national interest' (although often based on a highly truncated view of who constituted 'the nation'), mass parties claimed to represent the interest only of a particular group (most often a social class),[4] and frequently built on the pre-existing organizations of that group (e.g. trade unions). Their primary political resource was numbers, with many small contributions of labour and money substituting for the few, but large, contributions available to elite parties. Both as a reflection of their sub-cultural roots and as a way of mobilizing their supporters, mass parties often pursued a strategy of 'encapsulation', providing a range of ancillary organizations (women's groups, after-work clubs, trade unions) and services (a party press, party-sponsored insurance schemes) that both helped isolate supporters from

Table 12.1 Models of party

	Elite, caucus, or cadre party	Mass party	Catch-all party	Cartel party	Business firm party
Period of dominance	Rise of parliamentary government to mass suffrage.	Drive for mass suffrage to 1950s.	1950s to present.	1970s to present.	1990s to present.
Locus of origination	Parliamentary origin.	Extra-parliamentary origin.	Evolution of pre-existing parties.	Evolution of existing parties.	Extra-parliamentary initiative of political entrepreneurs.
Organizational structure	Minimal and local. Party central office subordinate to party in public office.	Members organized in local branches. Central office responsible to an elected party congress.	Members organized in branches, but marginalized in decision-making. Central office subordinate to party in public office.	Central office dominated by party in public office, and largely replaced by hired consultants. Decisions ratified by plebiscite of members and supporters.	Minimal formal organization, with hierarchical control by the autonomous entrepreneur and his/her employees.
Nature and role of membership	Elites are the only 'members'.	Large and homogeneous membership. Leadership formally accountable to members.	Heterogeneous membership organized primarily as cheerleaders for elites.	Distinction between member and supporter blurred. Members seen as individuals rather than as an organized body.	Membership minimal and irrelevant.
Primary resource base	Personal wealth and connections.	Fees from members and ancillary organizations.	Contributions from interest groups and individuals.	State subsidies.	Corporate resources.

Source: Adapted in part from Katz and Mair (1995) and Krouwel (2006).

countervailing influences and made party support a part of the citizen's enduring personal identity rather than a choice to be made at each election.

Naturally, all of this required extensive organization. The archetypal mass party is organized on the ground in branches that, like other types of voluntary organizations of citizens, have a formally defined membership, made up of people who have applied for membership, been accepted (and potentially are liable to expulsion), and have certain obligations to the organization (most commonly including the payment of a subscription or fee) in exchange for which they acquire rights to participate in the organization's governance, especially by electing delegates to the party's national congress (or convention or conference).

The national congress in principle is the highest decision-making body of a mass party, but as a practical matter can only meet for a few days every year (if that often), and therefore elects a party executive committee and/or chairman or president or secretary who is effectively at the top of the party hierarchy. The executive also manages the staff of the party central office. Again in principle, the representatives elected to public office under the party's banner are agents of the party, on the presumption that voters were choosing among parties and not individual candidates, and so are subject to the direction of the party congress and executive, which are also responsible for formulating the party's political programme or manifesto.

In reality, of course, things are often rather different with, as indicated by Michels' (1962) 'iron law of oligarchy', the very structures of internal party democracy leading to the domination of the party by its elite—a result that is less surprising when one remembers that the extra-parliamentary elite initially were the creators of the party. Moreover, in many parties that approximate the ideal type of the mass party, ancillary organizations as well as the parliamentary party and the central office staff are guaranteed representation in the national congress and/or the national executive, increasingly making the question of whether authority in the mass party flows from the bottom-up, or from the top-down, an open one.

Catch-all parties

The mass party originated primarily as the vehicle of those groups that were excluded from power under the *régimes censitaires*. It proved highly effective, however, first in securing broader rights of participation for its clientele groups and then in winning elections under conditions of broadly expanded suffrage, and in many cases this forced the cadre parties of the right to adapt or risk electoral annihilation.[5] Simply to become mass parties was not appealing, however. In general the social groups that they would represent were not large enough to be competitive on their own under mass suffrage and thus they had to be able to appeal across group boundaries. Moreover, the party in public office did not find the idea of ceding ultimate authority to a party congress and executive, even if in name only, attractive. The result was to create a new party model, with much of the form of the mass party (members, branches, congress, executive), but organized as the *supporters* of the party in public office rather than as its masters.

At the same time, many mass parties were forced to change, both by pressure from a party in public office increasingly able to claim responsibilities and legitimacy based on a direct relationship with the electorate rather than one mediated by the external party organization, and by changes in society (e.g. breakdown of social divisions, spread of mass media) that made the strategy of encapsulation less effective and the resources provided by the parties' *classes gardées* less reliable and less adequate.

The result was (1) a reduction in the role of members relative to professionals, (2) a shedding of ideological baggage, (3) a loosening and ultimate abandonment of the interconnection of party and a privileged set of interest organizations (again, particularly unions), and (4) a strategy that reached across group boundaries for votes and resources. Particularly looking at these changes in mass parties of the left, Kirchheimer (1966) identified this new type as the **catch-all party**. In fact, however, in both strategy and organization, Kirchheimer's catch-all party looks very much like that just described as the adaptation of the old cadre parties. As the catch-all party developed, it was accompanied by greater attention to the function of contesting elections, to the detriment of other party functions such as integrating or representing groups or opinions in politics or formulating and debating policy. It was also accompanied by increased reliance on political professionals—pollsters, media consultants, etc. (see Chapter 19)—leading to the idea of the electoral-professional party as an alternative to, or simply a variant of, the catch-all model (Panebianco 1988). Although most parties identified as being electoral-professional in fact have formal membership organizations, the emphasis has shifted so much toward the party in public office and the central office (or hired consultants who are not regular members of the party staff) that the membership is effectively superfluous, or maintained primarily for cosmetic reasons (i.e. the belief that having a membership organization will make the party look less elitist or oligarchic).

Cartel parties

By the last quarter of the twentieth century, even the catch-all model was under considerable pressure. Increasing public debts confronted ruling parties with a choice between dramatic increases in taxes and dramatic cuts in welfare spending. Globalization reduced the

ability of governments to control their economies. Cognitive mobilization and the growth of interest groups, NGOs, etc., gave citizens both the abilities and opportunities to bring pressure to bear on the parties themselves, and on the state without requiring the intermediation of the parties. Party loyalties, and memberships, began obviously to erode. Shifts in campaign technology increased the cost of electoral competitiveness beyond the willingness of members and other private contributors to provide—at least without the appearance, and often the reality, of corruption that, when revealed, made parties even less popular.

These developments have inspired a number of adaptations and other initiatives. Katz and Mair (1995) have suggested that in many countries catch-all parties have been moving in the direction of what they call the 'cartel party'. This involves at least four major changes in the relationships among the parties, the citizenry, and the state, and between parties and their members.

1. The mainstream parties, that is, those that are in power, or are generally perceived to have a high probability of coming to power in the medium term, in effect form a *cartel to protect themselves both from electoral risks* (e.g. by shifting responsibility away from politically accountable agencies so that they will not be held to account for them or by minimizing the difference in rewards to electoral winners and electoral losers) *and to supplement their decreasingly adequate resources with subventions from the state* (justified in terms of the parties' centrality to democratic government or of insulating parties from corrupt economic pressure).
2. The parties reduce the relevance of their role of representation, in favour of a part of their role as governors, defending policies of the state (including those made by bureaucrats, 'non-political' agencies like central banks, and even previous governments made up of other parties), in effect becoming *agencies of the state rather than of society.*
3. Cartel parties tend to increase the formal powers of party members, and indeed in some cases to allow increased participation by supporters who are not formal members. They do this, however, as a way of *preserving the form of internal democracy while disempowering party activists*—who are perceived to be more doctrinaire and policy-oriented, and hence less willing to accept the limitations implicit in a cartel. For example, leadership selection might be moved from the party congress, which allows a forum for internal opposition to be organized and expressed, to a direct mail ballot of the full membership.
4. In part simply extending the trends evident in the catch-all party, cartel parties also tend to replace the staff of the party central office with hired consultants, both *further privileging professional expertise over political experience and activism,* and *removing another possible source of challenge* to the leaders of the party in public office.

Anti-cartel parties

Although both Duverger (the principal elaborator of the idea of the mass party) and Kirchheimer (the elaborator of the idea of the catch-all party) presented their models as somehow representing an end-state of party development, each of the models has generated its own challenger. In the case of the cartel party, Katz and Mair (attributing the idea to Lars Bille), identify what they call the anti-party-system party as the cartel party's challenger. Parties of this type have also been identified as 'left-libertarian' or 'new right' parties, or as 'movement parties'. They tend to expect a much deeper commitment from their members than either catch-all or cartel parties, and in this way are similar to the mass party, but they are organized around an idea rather than a social grouping (although the idea may be differentially attractive/popular among different groups). Two of their primary appeals, however, are simply to a sense of frustration that substantive outcomes appear to change little, if at all, regardless of which of the mainstream parties wins an election, and to a sense that all of the mainstream parties are more interested in protecting their own privileges than in advancing the interests of ordinary citizens.

Particularly in their early days (before they faced the temptations of joining the cartel and enjoying public office), both Green Parties on the left and Scandinavian Progress Parties on the right exemplified anti-cartel parties.

Business-firm parties

An alternative form of challenger to established parties is represented by what Hopkin and Paolucci (1999) have called the 'business-firm party'. The prototypical example is Forza Italia, a 'party' created by Silvio Berlusconi—a businessman who became prime minister in Italy—essentially as a wholly owned subsidiary of his corporate empire, and staffed largely by its employees. While there may be an organization on the ground to mobilize supporters to cheer on the leader, it is only 'a lightweight organisation with the sole basic function of mobilising short-term support at election time' (1999: 315), and indeed in the case of Forza Italia the members of these organizations originally were not members of the party. Although Forza Italia developed from a previously existing firm, Hopkin and Paolucci argue that essentially the same model will typify 'purpose-built' parties in the future.

Parties in the US

Parties in the US present yet another model. From a European perspective, they appear to have much in

common with the nineteenth-century cadre party, and Duverger famously identified them as a historical throwback or case of 'arrested development'. What they have in common with the cadre party are (1) a weak central organization, (2) a focus on individual candidates rather than enduring institutions, and (3) the absence of a formal membership organization. Where they differ profoundly, however, is in being extensively regulated by law, to the extent that Epstein (1986) reasonably could characterize them as 'public utilities', and in allowing the mass 'membership' (see below for an explanation of the quotation marks) to make the most important decision, that of candidate selection.

Reflecting the federal nature of the country, the basic unit of party organization is the state party. The national committees of the two parties, which control the national party central offices and elect the national chairmen, are made up of representatives of the state parties. The national conventions are not policy-makers, even in form; they are called for the purpose of selecting—and effectively since the 1950s merely confirming the selection of—presidential candidates. Moreover, reflecting the separation of powers in the American constitution, both the parties have separate organizations in each House of the Congress, which not only serve as the equivalent of parliamentary party caucuses but also maintain their own, independent, fundraising, and campaign-mounting capacity, almost as if they were separate parties.

The three key features of the American legal system of party regulation are (1) the use of primary elections, (2) the vacuous definition of party membership, and (3) the candidate-centred nature of party regulation. In the decades around the turn of the twentieth century, reformers intent on breaking what they saw as the corrupt and excessive power of party bosses, 'democratized' the parties by putting power into the hands of ordinary party members (who they identified as party voters) through the use of primary elections.

Virtually all of the party's candidates for public office, as well as the vast majority of delegates to its national nominating convention, are also chosen in primary elections, or in party caucuses which are essentially the same in terms of rights of participation. Unlike so-called primaries in other countries, these are public elections, run by the state and structured by public law rather than party rules. The second element of these reforms was to deny the parties the right to define or control their own memberships. Rather than having formal members (who make an application to join, pay a membership fee, and in theory could be rejected or expelled), American parties only have 'registrants', that is voters who have chosen to affiliate with one of the parties in the process of registering to vote.

American law generally treats registrants as if they were members in a more substantive sense, but the party has no control over who registers as a 'member', and the member takes on no obligation by enrolling. Moreover, some states do not have partisan registration, and even in some states that do have partisan registration any voter can claim the right to participate in a party's primary elections (open primary) without even the pretence of prior registration in it. Generally, the choice between open and closed (only party registrants may participate) primaries is determined by state law, although the parties have won (in court) the right for each party to determine for itself whether to allow voters who are not registered as 'members' of any party to participate in its own primary. Finally, even when ostensibly dealing with parties, American legal regulations focus on candidates as individuals. The overwhelming majority of the money spent in American campaigns is controlled by the candidates' own committees, and in general the parties are regarded merely as a privileged class of 'contributor'.

Even though eligibility for the public support given to finance presidential campaigns is based on the vote shares of their parties' candidates in the previous election, the money itself is given to the campaign committees of the candidates, not to the party organizations. The right to call oneself the candidate of a party is won in its primary election, with the party organization unable to bar any qualified voter who presents the requisite number of petition signatures and/or fee from competing and often is barred even from expressing a preference among the primary candidates (although party 'clubs', which are formal membership organizations but are not formally part of the party, may do so).

Membership

Although the original parties of intra-parliamentary origin had no members other than the MPs who aligned themselves with a party caucus, virtually all modern parties claim to have a membership organization. The modes of acquiring membership, the role played by members both in rhetoric and in practice, the size of the membership organization (and indeed the degree to which it is an organization at all), however, vary widely among parties.

As suggested above, the prototypical membership-based party is the mass party. In its simplest form, the members of a mass party are individuals who have applied and been accepted as members of local branches or sections. In some parties, this form of direct individual membership is or was supplemented by indirect membership acquired as part of membership in an affiliated organization. Most commonly these were trade unions affiliated with social democratic parties, such as the British Labour Party.

Affiliated membership might come automatically and inescapably as part of union (or other group) membership, or it might require an explicit choice by the potential member either to acquire party membership ('contracting in') or to decline party membership ('contracting

Box 12.3 Types of American primaries

Closed primary	Only those who have registered in advance as 'members' of the party may participate.
Modified primary	Those who have registered as 'members' of the party, and—at the party's discretion—those who are registered as 'independent' or 'non-affiliated' voters may participate.
Open primary	All registered voters may participate in the primary election of the one party of their choice.
Blanket primary	All registered voters may participate, choosing if they wish among the candidates of a different party for each office. The candidates of each party with the most votes become the nominees.
Louisiana 'primary'	All registered voters may participate, choosing among all of the candidates for each office. If a candidate receives an absolute majority of the votes, that person is elected, and the 'primary' in effect becomes the election for that office. Otherwise, the two candidates with the most votes, regardless of party, become the candidates for the (run-off) general election.

out'); membership rights such as voting for members of the party executive might be exercised by the individual, or indirectly through representatives of the affiliated organization. With the development of the catch-all party model and the weakening of social class as the basis of party politics, affiliated memberships have been dropped by some parties, for example the Swedish Social Democrats, leaving only individual membership.

Particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, Communist and Fascist parties developed their own forms of membership organization. For the Communists, the dominant form was the cell, based on the workplace rather than on residence; for the Fascists, it was the militia.

Membership remains important to the self-understanding of many parties, and the idea that party leaders should be responsible to a membership organization has been widely embraced as a necessary element of democratic governance, although there are prominent dissenters from this view (e.g. Sartori 1965). Traditionally, membership has been measured in three ways.

1. The most obvious is simply a raw *count of members*. This is useful for organizational purposes: is membership growing or shrinking? How much income should be expected from membership fees? Are representative institutions necessary, or can all members attend a party congress and speak for themselves?
2. In comparative terms, however, this measure suffers from its dependence on the scale of the system. If every citizen of Luxembourg were a party member, the absolute number of members would still be less than 25 per cent of German party membership, which represents less than 3 per cent of the German electorate. More generally comparable across space and time is the *ratio of party membership to the size of the electorate*.
3. Finally, comparisons between parties may be based on their *organizational density* (the ratio of members to the party's own voters), the problem here being that an increase in this ratio can be the result either of an increase in membership (an indicator of party strength) or of a decline in vote (an indicator of party weakness).

Regardless of how membership is measured, however, and despite its perceived importance, party membership has generally been declining, often in absolute terms but almost always in relative terms (see Table 12.2 for examples). Although some scholars (e.g. Katz 1990) argue that members may cost a party more than they are worth—and that the value to a citizen of being a party member may also exceed its cost—this has commonly been regarded as a problem, for which, however, no real solution has yet been found.

Regulation

Whether or not they reflect the merging of parties with the state, an increasing number of countries have enacted special 'party laws', either supplementing or replacing legal regimes that treated parties as simply one more category of private association. In some cases, these party laws are embedded in the national constitution, while in others they are ordinary statutes or bodies of regulations.

Justifications of special party laws generally can be categorized into three groups. The first is the *centrality of parties to democracy*. In several cases (Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Italy), this is specifically acknowledged in the national constitution, while in others it has been acknowledged either in the law or in the parliamentary debates when the law was enacted. In general, the importance of parties to democracy has been a justification for giving the parties special rights, protections, or privileges beyond those that would normally be granted to an 'ordinary' private association.

Table 12.2 Party membership

Country	Membership/electorate %			
	Time 1	%	*Time 2*	%
Austria	1980	28.48	1999	17.66
Belgium	1980	8.97	1999	6.55
Czech Republic	1993	7.04	1999	3.94
Denmark	1980	7.30	1998	5.14
Finland	1980	15.74	1998	9.65
France	1978	5.05	1999	1.57
Germany	1980 (West only)	4.52	1999 (whole)	2.93
Greece	1980	3.19	1998	6.77
Hungary	1990	2.11	1999	2.15
Ireland	1980	5.00	1998	3.14
Italy	1980	9.66	1998	4.05
Netherlands	1980	4.29	2000	2.51
Norway	1980	15.35	1997	7.31
Portugal	1980	4.28	2000	3.99
Slovakia	1994	3.29	2000	4.11
Spain	1980	1.20	2000	3.42
Switzerland	1977	10.66	1997	6.38
United Kingdom	1980	4.12	1998	1.92

Source: Mair and van Biezen (2001).

The second, albeit closely related, justification is the *power of parties*. Because of their central position in democratic government, a party that is anti-democratic or corrupt may pose a particularly serious threat to democracy. Hence, if their importance justifies special privileges, the dangers they pose justify special oversight and restrictions.

Third, a party law may be justified as a matter of administrative convenience or necessity. Most commonly, this justification has revolved around the twin problems of ballot access (the right to place candidates on the ballot) and control over the party's name or symbols (particularly on the ballot), although the related question of the right to form a parliamentary group may also be involved. (Alternatively, this may be regulated by the parliament's own Rules of Procedure—see Chapter 7.)

Where there is a party law, one of the first issues to be dealt with is the definition of party—to determine whether a group is entitled to the privileges and subject to the regulations of the law. Unlike the definitions discussed above, legal definitions generally are procedural and organizational, and may indeed distinguish between parties in general and parties that are entitled to special treatment. For example, while the Canada Elections Act defines a party simply as 'an organization one of whose fundamental purposes is to participate in public affairs by endorsing one or more of its members as candidates and supporting their election', the 'real' definition is that of a 'registered party'. To be a registered party, an organization must file an application declaring that it meets the definition of party just quoted, but also declaring its full name, a short-form name or abbreviation (that will appear on the ballot), its logo (if any), plus the names, addresses, and signed consent of the party's leader, officers, auditor, chief agent, and 250 electors. Finally, it must endorse at least one candidate.[6] In other countries, official recognition may require that the party 'offer sufficient guarantee of the sincerity of their aims' (German Law on Political Parties of 1967, § 2(1)), and/or adhere to prescribed norms of internal democracy.

Continuing with the Canadian example, once a party is registered it acquires a number of privileges, including: (1) contributions to the party become eligible for tax credits; (2) the party's name appears on the ballot; (3) if it has received at least 2 per cent of the valid votes nationally or 5 per cent of the valid votes in the districts in which it had candidates, half of its election expenses can be reimbursed by the federal treasury and the party can receive a quarterly subvention based on its vote at the previous election. The requirements for ballot access in Canada are the same for party and non-party candidates (except that a candidate wishing to have a party

designation on the ballot must submit a letter of endorsement from the party leader in addition to the required signatures and deposit), but in some countries the candidates of a registered party, or a party that already has some level of representation in parliament, may be given a place on the ballot without having to satisfy the requirements imposed on non-party or new-party or very-minor-party candidates.

On the other hand, acquiring official status often also subjects a party to a number of obligations. Canadian registered parties, for example, are required to submit frequent, and audited, financial reports. German law requires membership participation in the selection of party leaders and that candidates be selected by secret ballot, requirements that are not imposed in equivalent detail on other private associations.

Finance

As is implicit in the preceding section, one field in which state involvement in the affairs of parties has been particularly prominent is that of finance. Traditionally, this has taken the form of regulation, and most specifically of prohibitions—against taking money from certain sources, or using it for certain purposes. Although they were directed at candidates rather than parties *per se* (which the law did not explicitly recognize), the British Corrupt Practice Prevention Act of 1854 and the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act of 1883 were early examples. Often these were supplemented by requirements of public disclosure of sources of income, objects of expenditure, or both. In recent decades, these regulatory regimes have in many countries been supplemented by programmes of state support for parties. Some of these take the form of 'tax', while in other cases parties receive either partial reimbursement of expenses or subventions directly from the state, frequently accompanied by even more invasive regulations justified as monitoring the use of public money.

Regulation of spending

Regulation of party spending has been more-or-less synonymous with regulation of *campaign* spending—although, of course, parties spend money on many things that are at best indirectly related to campaigns (for example, social events that help cement member commitment but have no overt connection to a campaign). These regulations take three general forms: bans on particular forms of spending; limitations on total spending; required disclosure of spending.

Aside from bans on such obviously corrupt practices as vote buying or bribery, the most significant prohibition of a specific form of expenditure (more recently in some countries, this has been a limitation rather than a total ban) concerns the buying of advertising time in the broadcast media. Limitations on total spending generally are based on the size of the electorate and the type of office involved. Expenditure reports are frequently required, and provide some element of transparency, but differ widely among countries with regard to the categories of expenditure that are reported, the degree of detail (e.g. specific recipients or only category totals), the frequency and currency of reports, and the degree to which reports are audited or otherwise subject to independent verification.

Beyond these questions of reporting, all forms of regulation of party spending confront a number of inter-related problems concerning exactly whose spending is to be controlled. Is it parties as organizations, or candidates as individuals, or everyone, including those without formal ties to either candidates or party organizations? To exclude parties (or to include national party organizations but not their local affiliates) is likely to make regulation nugatory, but to include them requires a level of official recognition that until recently was rare in countries with single-member district electoral systems. To include everyone may be seen as an unacceptable limitation on the political speech rights of citizens, but to include only formal party organizations and their candidates risks the explosion of spending by organizations (such as the American 527s in the 2004 presidential election)[7] that are simply the party in another, but now un- or less regulated guise.

Once party and campaign spending are equated, a further problem becomes the definition of the campaign. This involves two questions. First, when does the campaign begin? If the regulated campaign period is too short, its regulation may be of little consequence. Japan, for example, has a very short formal campaign period during which virtually everything is prohibited, but it is preceded by a real campaign subject to very little regulation. Second, what activity is campaign activity? As with the question of regulating non-party spending, an excessively broad definition of campaigning may subject all political speech to burdensome regulation, but an excessively narrow definition, such as the American 'magic words' doctrine (only messages containing words or phrases like 'vote for', 'elect', 'Smith for Congress', 'vote against', 'defeat', and referring to a specific candidate, count as campaigning) may defeat the purpose of the regulations.

Regulation of fundraising

Contribution limits are designed to prevent wealthy individuals or groups from exercising undue influence over parties (although, of course, the meaning of 'undue' often is in the eye of the beholder). In various places, foreigners, corporations (sometimes only public corporations or only firms in heavily regulated industries; in other cases all businesses), or trade unions are barred from making, and parties from accepting, political contributions. Anonymous contributions also are generally barred, perhaps from fear that the anonymity will be in name only.

Regardless of who is allowed to make contributions, there may also be limits on the size of contributions from an individual donor, either to an individual recipient, in aggregate, or both. Both kinds of limits are, however, relatively easy to evade: rather than making a corporate contribution, a corporation can 'bundle' (collect centrally and then deliver together) what appear to be individual donations from its officers or employees; an individual can give many times the individual legal limit by 'arranging' to have donations made in the name of his or her spouse, children, and other close relatives. Moreover, the definition of 'contribution' itself is problematic. Money is obvious, but should in-kind contributions be included (and how should they be valued)? What about the donation of services? And perhaps most vexing of all, if a person or group independently advocates the election of a party or candidate (what in the United States are called 'independent expenditures'), does that count as a contribution subject to limitation, or free speech that must be protected? Finally, whether or not contributions are restricted, their subversive (of democracy) effect may be limited by requirements of public disclosure.

Public subventions

A growing number of countries provide support for parties, through their tax systems, through the direct provision of goods and services, or through direct financial subventions. In some cases, these supports are specifically tied to election campaigns (or alternatively limited to non-campaign related research institutes) while in others they are unrestricted grants for general party activities (see Chapter 7).

The earliest and most common public subventions are the provision of staff to parliamentary parties or their members, ostensibly to support their official functions but often convertible to more general political purposes. Particularly in countries in which broadcasting was a public monopoly, parties generally are given an allocation of free air time; other examples of free provision of services include the mailing of candidates' election addresses (e.g. UK), free space for billboards (e.g. Spain, Israel, and Germany), free use of halls in public buildings for rallies (e.g. UK, Spain, Japan), and reduced rates for office space (e.g. Italy). Although these raise some problems, the more contentious question was the direct provision of money, which is nonetheless becoming nearly universal.

Public support for parties raises two questions (beyond the somewhat specious question of whether people should be compelled through their taxes to subsidize causes with which they do not agree). First, is the primary effect of state subventions to allow parties better to perform their functions of policy formulation, public education, and linkage between society and the government? Or is it to further the separation between parties and those they are supposed to represent by making the parties less dependent on voluntary support? Second, do systems of public support (in which the levels of support are almost always tied to electoral support at the previous election),[8] as well as rules limiting individual contributions, further fairness and equality, or do they unfairly privilege those parties that already are dominant?

KEY POINTS

- Party organizational types have evolved over time as suffrage was expanded and societies changed.
- Rather than reaching an end-point, organizations continue to evolve, and new types continue to develop.
- Party membership, and involvement of citizens in party politics more generally, appear to be declining virtually throughout the democratic world.
- Parties are increasingly the subject of legal regulation, which while justified in the name of fairness may also contribute to the entrenchment of the parties that currently are strong.

Parties and the stabilization of democracy

Parties were central to the transition from traditional monarchy to electoral democracy in the first wave of democratization (primarily in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), but they have also been central actors in the third wave (see Chapter 5). In the older democracies, where the liberal rights of contestation were established before suffrage was expanded to the majority of citizens, parties helped to integrate newly enfranchised citizens into the established patterns of competition. While enfranchisement generally led to the rapid growth of parties (most often socialist) appealing specifically to the new voters, even what are now identified as 'bourgeois parties' found it in their interest to appeal to the new voters—for example as citizens, or Christians, or members of a peripheral culture rather than as workers.

In immigrant societies such as the US, Canada, Australia, or in South America, the parties also contributed to the integration of arrivals into their new country. The degree to which parties (and other institutions) could perform this function successfully was strongly influenced by the magnitude of the load placed upon them by the rapidity of suffrage expansion. Where the franchise was broadened in several steps spaced over decades, as in the United Kingdom, the existing parties generally were able to adapt, with the result that would-be demagogues or revolutionaries found a very limited market. When franchise expansion was more abrupt, as in France in 1848 or Italy in 1913, the twin dangers that

masses of new voters would be mobilized by radicals and that this possibility would be perceived by others to be a threat requiring drastic measures often led to the collapse of democracy.

This function of integration and stabilization is also potentially important in the new democracies of the late twentieth century. Particularly in the formerly communist bloc (but not only there), the process of democratization has differed from that in the earlier waves in that political mobilization of the citizenry preceded the development of public contestation (Enyedi 2006: 228). Moreover, the levels of literacy, general education, access to mass media, and international involvement far exceed those of earlier waves. Coupled with this has been a deep distrust of the whole idea of political parties, rooted in the unhappy experience of the communist party state. Among the results have been extremely low rates of party membership (giving rise to the idea of a 'couch party'—one whose membership is so small that they could all sit on a single couch) and quite high electoral volatility. Not only has the attachment of voters to particular parties been problematic, so too has the attachment of elected politicians, with parliamentary party groups showing such low levels of stability that in some cases parliamentary rules have been changed specifically to discourage party splits or defections.

A second major area in which the role of parties in stabilizing democracy is in doubt is the Islamic world, where the question is whether the electoral success of Islamist parties helps to integrate their followers into democratic politics, or alternatively threatens to undermine democracy altogether (Tepe 2006). The underlying conflict of values—the will of God as articulated by clerics versus the will of the people as articulated at the ballot box—is hardly unique to the Islamic world (and indeed was important throughout the nineteenth century in Europe), but now appears particularly pressing there.

KEY POINTS

- Parties have played, and continue to play, a vital role in stabilizing democracy by integrating new citizens (whether new because they have come of age, immigrated, or benefited from expansion of the rights of citizenship) into the existing political system.
- Whether the electoral success of anti-democratic parties helps to moderate them and to integrate their followers into democracy, or instead serves to undermine democracy, is an unresolved but pressing issue.

Conclusion

Political parties remain central to democratic government in the twenty-first century. It is still parties that contest elections and identify most of the candidates. It is still parties that structure the coalitions required to enact legislation and support governments. Nonetheless, parties face a number of potentially serious challenges.

As already suggested, party membership is declining almost everywhere (Mair and van Biezen 2001). One result has been to force parties to become more dependent on financial contributions and other forms of support from corporations and organizations of special interests, and more recently to 'feed at the public trough' through direct public subventions. This decline in party involvement has not been limited to formal members, however, but is also reflected in declining party identification, and perhaps most significantly in the growth of hostility not just to the particular parties that happen to exist in a given country at a given time, but to the whole idea of parties and of partisanship. One manifestation of this is the growth of anti-party-system parties; another is the number of new parties that eschew the use of that word in their names and even of existing parties that try to 'rebrand' themselves without the party denomination (e.g. 'New Labour' instead of 'Labour Party').

The growing popularity of such ideas as 'consensus democracy' (Lijphart 1999) and 'deliberative democracy' (e.g. Guttmann and Thompson 2004; Budge 2000), like the complaint of former President Carter that the 2004 US presidential election campaign was 'too partisan', are reflective of a desire for amicable agreement that denies the existence of real conflicts of interest. But if one accepts Finer's (1970: 8) definition of politics as what happens when 'a given set of persons ... require a *common* policy; and ... its members advocate, for this common status, policies that are *mutually exclusive*', this is in effect to want to take the politics out of democracy.

Although rarely put overtly in these terms, the alternative to contentious and partisan politics is generally some form of government by experts or technocrats. Often these 'reforms' have been advocated and enacted by the parties themselves as a way of avoiding responsibility for unpopular but unavoidable decisions or for outcomes that are beyond their control. Even when the parties remain centrally involved in policy, increasingly their role (and the basis upon which they compete) is defined in terms of management rather than direction. By reducing the policy stakes of elections, however, the parties have also decreased the incentives for citizens to become active in the parties (Katz 2003) and given ammunition to those who ask why the state should provide subsidies and other special privileges (Mair 1995).

The role of parties as representatives of the people, or as links between the people and the state, has been challenged as well by the increasing range of organizations that compete with them as 'articulators of interest'. Rather than being forced to choose among a limited number of packages of policy stances across a range of issues—some of which may be of little interest, and

others of which he or she may actually oppose—the modern citizen can mix-and-match among any number of groups, each of which will reflect his or her preferences more accurately on a single issue than any party could hope to do. With improved communications skills, and especially with the rise of the internet, citizens may feel less need for intermediaries at all; they can communicate directly with those in power themselves.

Many parties have themselves tried to adapt to more sophisticated electorates and to new technologies, giving rise to the possibility of 'cyber parties' (Margetts 2006; see also Chapter 19). In its initial stages, this may be little more than the use of mass e-mailings to 'members' (now of mailing lists rather than of real organizations) and the use of the mechanisms of e-commerce to facilitate fundraising from individuals. In a more developed form, exemplified by Barack Obama's 2008 campaign in the United States, it is likely to include chat-rooms, discussion list-servers, and extensive fund-raising facilities. In theory, the technology might allow what would amount to a party meeting that is always in session. To date, however, there has been more evidence of people at the grass roots using the internet to send messages to those in positions of authority than there has been evidence of those in authority actually listening. And as with the party congresses of the last century, even if the internet (or simply the regular mail) is used to allow party members or supporters to make decisions, real power will continue to rest with those who frame the questions. It remains unlikely that the internet will somehow lead to the repeal of the iron law of oligarchy.

Overall, then, there are two challenges facing parties at the beginning of the twenty-first century. One is the increasing complexity of problems, the increasing speed of social and economic developments, increasing globalization—all making the problems facing parties as governors less tractable. The other is the increasing political capacity of citizens (cognitive mobilization) running into the ineluctable limitations of individual influence in societies of the size of modern states—expectations of effective individual involvement, even if restricted to the minority who are politically interested, often are unrealistic. Both challenge widely held views of how democratic party government should work. How parties adapt to these changing circumstances, whether by redefining their roles or by altering public expectations, will shape the future of democracy.



1. Is a group that nominates candidates in order to put pressure on other parties, but not with a real hope of winning an election itself, properly called a political party?
2. Is 'political party' better understood as a category, into which each case either does or does not fit, or as an ideal type, which each case can more or less closely approximate?
3. Is democracy conceivable without political parties?
4. What is the 'iron law of oligarchy'?
5. How do cartel parties differ from catch-all parties?
6. Does the United States have 'real' political parties?
7. Is the regulation of political parties' finance compatible with political freedom?
8. What is the meaning of 'left' in political terms?
9. Do political parties play the same role in new democracies as in the established democracies?
10. Must a democratic political party be internally democratic?



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