POLITICAL PARTIES: PRINCIPAL ARENAS OF POLICYMAKING CONFLICT

Ralph M. Goldman

Professor Emeritus of Political Science, San Francisco State University, USA
Former President, Center for Party Development, Catholic University of America, USA

Keywords: elections, faction, legislative parties, military, nominating process, party-in-the-electorate, political parties, primary elections, transnational parties

Contents

Summary

Political parties are institutions less than 400 years old. They exist in less than 100 of the world's 189 nations. For the last 80 years, transnational parties have added a global dimension to party development. Parties are the principal campaign organizations enlisting voters to support their nominees for the offices of government Nations have devised a substantial variety of party systems, from democratic to totalitarian, from cadre parties like the Unity Party of Russia to catchall parties like Democrats and Republicans in the United States. The influence of parties is usually pervasive in a country's legislature, chief executive, judicial system, military establishment, and organized interests. Consequently, political party systems have become the battleground

for most life support public policies, as illustrated in brief case studies of Colombia, India, and Russia. Practices that should govern the rights and responsibilities of political parties are suggested.

1. Introduction

In most modern nations, citizens tend to have three principal concerns relevant to their personal lives: physical safety, employment, and income. Depending on the complexity of the national environment in which they live, each of these concerns, to one degree or another, raises specific issues of public policy. These policy issues may be grouped, roughly, as follows:

- Personal safety includes questions of human rights, domestic law-and-order, and national defense against external enemies.
- Employment raises questions of education, occupational skills, and working conditions.
- Income refers to issues of distribution of wealth, food and agriculture, shelter and construction, water supply, inflation, taxation, money supply, and other distributive processes.

Political parties, where they exist as functioning institutions, are the principal agents for engaging, arguing, and deciding the priorities and public resources to be allocated to each issue. Whether individual citizens recognize it or not, the decisions that come out of the party system have implications for all. For example, when a political party makes "full employment" a national policy goal, this goal will receive attention in its platform or manifesto, achievement through the efforts of its legislative party, and acceptance or rejection by the citizenry. A critical difference among party systems is whether the policy goal originates with the citizenry or from an authoritarian leadership. Either way, the political parties become the battleground of public policy and the institutional alternative to warfare.

The twentieth century has seen political parties in most nations, and even transnationally, evolve as the principal institution of public policymaking. Whether as adversaries in democracies or as instruments of dictators, parties have implemented the concept of popular sovereignty. At the same time, they have encountered negative attitudes among the general population. The reason for the latter is simple. Parties tend to be war-like. This characterization is unpopular in the minds of most electorates. Nonetheless, it is the political parties that vigorously contend over or dictate policies that affect all citizens

2. A Brief Institutional History of Parties

In the course of human history, modern political parties are still, for the most part, in early adolescence. Some historians refer to the informal cliques and factions of classical Greek city-states and the senates of the Roman republic as political parties. However, those ancient groupings had only vague similarities to modern parties. Their constituencies were minuscule, between one and three percent of the general population.

Conspiracy and violence were common, a pattern of elite competition that persisted throughout the Middle Ages and well into the Renaissance.

Political parties in their modern form first emerged in the British Parliament during the seventeenth century. It was a classic example of a process by which many nations make a transition from recurrent civil wars to enduring periods of nonviolent party competition: politics by ballots, not bullets.

Representative assemblies, particularly legislatures, have since been the principal breeding ground for parties and party systems. When legislative leaders in Great Britain, the United States, and elsewhere began to seek a broader base of support, as occurred during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the parties embarked upon electioneering activities, namely, campaigns for voter support, formal nomination of candidates, and extensions of the suffrage to constituencies not yet represented. These trends, particularly during the nineteenth century, were bolstered by the growing acceptance of philosophies of popular sovereignty, majority rule, and civil rights. In the earliest periods of a nation's development, leaders competing for a throne, territory, trade, or a strategic marriage repeatedly conducted their disputes by military means. A concurrent trend took place in the representative assemblies. The representative body may have been a legislature (Parliament in Great Britain), a dominant political party (Institutional Revolutionary Party—PRI—in Mexico), or a ruling cabinet or oligarchy (such as the Politburo of the former Soviet Union). As the representative body became increasingly inclusive of constituencies, it provided an arena for the rhetoric and voting behavior of the competing leaders. Party leaders were transformed into the principal negotiators of the policy decisions of the representative body, presumably in response to the wishes of their constituents.

Among the principal matters to be decided by the representative body were the structure, resources, and functions of the military. Gradually, the military were converted from combatants in civil wars into agents of shared security under rules set down by elected civilian (party) representatives. This critical transition from warfare to party politics occurred in seventeenth century Britain, nineteenth century United States, twentieth century Mexico, and, recently, in such countries as Argentina, Chile, South Korea, Taiwan, and many others.

The fundamental principle of civilian, hence political party, control of the military is widely practiced in modern political systems, both democratic and totalitarian. Thus, despite their readiness to employ armed force for repression and aggression, Lenin, as leader of the Bolshevik revolution, and Mao Tse-tung, as leader of China's Communist revolution, made clear their views on the party-army relationship. In the words of Mao: "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. . . . Our principle is that the Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party."

Two seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophers paved the way for party systems of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. John Locke argued that the State is the principal custodian of natural rights and the consent of the governed protecting these rights. Jean Jacques Rousseau made the case for the "general will" of the people as the ultimate sovereign. Great Britain and the United States, where the views of these

philosophers were exceptionally influential, developed prototypic party systems that included the two essential components of modern party systems, namely, candidates formally nominated for public office and mass electorates that could reflect the "general will."

The notion of party government caught the imagination and aspirations of popular movements throughout Europe during the nineteenth century. Following the French Revolution, it was increasingly evident that political parties could implement different conceptions of popular sovereignty. Parliaments in France and other nations sought to limit the power of their emperors, kings, and prime ministers by promoting party development. Mid-nineteenth century mass movements, seeking economic equality by engaging in class conflict, became the precursors of Marxist and other radical parties in Germany, Scandinavia, Russia, and elsewhere. However, party development did not proceed smoothly. During the last decades of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century, Europe's parliamentary inexperience, imperial ambitions, spreading industrialization, multiparty politics, and World War I produced not only economic chaos, but also the seeds of the totalitarian parties of the 1920s and 1930s.

The fascist and communist parties of the twentieth century are perhaps best characterized as civilian policing organizations, exercising pervasive control over their political systems, armed forces, and the personal lives of their citizenry. The most extreme of these were Mussolini's Fascists in Italy, Stalin's Communists in the Soviet Union, and Hitler's National Socialists in Germany. Imitators proliferated in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. The Communists, through the voice of their transnational Communist International (Comintern), were explicit in their goal of overthrowing capitalist regimes and establishing a world state. This transnational goal coincided with the break-up of colonial empires after World Wars I and II, and led to parties of "national liberation" that captured control of many former colonies, particularly in Africa and Asia. In 1946, there were approximately fifty sovereign nations and as many party systems. By the year 2000, the number of nations reached 189. About 100 nations have functioning party systems.

During the half century following World War II, another type of political party came into prominence, namely, transnational parties. The membership of transnational parties consists of ideologically compatible national parties, observer groups, and, in some instances, individuals. The members collaborate in the advancement of their programs at international governmental agencies and within each other's nations. The transnational parties produce policy manifestoes, frequently help with the national campaigns of their member parties, and, at times, informally influence national members' nominees and programs.

In the absence of regional or world governments, most of these transnational parties do not have the two defining elements of true parties, namely, formal nominees and eligible electorates. The significant exception is the transnational parties of the European Community and its European Parliament. In the elections of representatives to the supranational European Parliament, transnational parties coordinate the campaigns of the nominees of their national affiliates. In the daily operation of the Parliament, the transnational parties are represented by Party Groups, that is, official caucuses.

The best known and oldest of the transnational parties have been the Communist and the Socialist Internationals. Active in the 1860s, the First International, or International Working Men's Association, organized trade unions and affiliated parties in several countries. In 1889, a coalition of trade unions, reformist Marxist parties, and revolutionary groups merged to become the Second International, or Socialist Worker's International. In 1917, Lenin founded the Third International, or Communist International (Comintern). The latter was technically disbanded in 1943 and succeeded by the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) for about a decade. Each of these transnational parties wrote detailed manifestoes that influenced public policymaking in many countries.

As recently as the 1990s, transnational communists collaborated informally as ideological factions. Affiliates range in size from the massive Chinese Communist Party to the tiny Movement for Democracy of Togo. The variety of communist party names has become confusing to the uninitiated, particularly with the adoption of "socialist" in the names of many after the demise of the Soviet Union. Over all, there are more than 100 communist parties in touch with each other transnationally.

The Socialist, or Social Democratic, International was reconstituted in 1951, and has a membership of more than seventy national parties as well as several regional associations. Christian Democratic parties, particularly those in Europe and Latin America, established a transnational organization in 1961 and several regional associations thereafter; approximately sixty national parties are affiliates. The Liberal International was founded in 1947, acquiring more than forty party affiliates by the 1990s. The International Democrat Union, or Conservative International, was established in 1983 and, within a decade, had a membership of more than twenty national parties. Green parties have had modest success creating their own transnational party. Whether the emergence of transnational parties presages the development of a comprehensive world party system remains a tantalizing prospect for the future.

3. Types of Party System and their Policymaking Consequences

Political parties are social organizations whose principal objective is to place their avowed leaders into the offices of government. Political parties therefore recruit and nominate prospective governmental officials. The minimal observable requirements for classification as a party are two roles: *nominees* for government offices and voters who make up a party-in-the-electorate.

The majoritarian interpretation of politics views parties as the prime implementers of the principle of popular sovereignty and discoverers of the preferred policies of the majority. Another interpretation sees parties as alternatives to armies as the organized means of contest between political elites. If the military dominate in the latter interpretation, parties simply become the civilian "branch" of the army.

Some definitions classify parties as merely one among many types of social groups, albeit with their own set of actors. This description obfuscates the differences between political parties and organized interests or "pressure" groups such as unions, chambers of commerce, and agricultural associations. Interest groups do not formally offer

nominees to voters. Eligible citizens do not register with interest groups in order to vote, but do so as members of a political party.

Analysts have described and classified party organizations in a variety of ways. A persistent typology is based on the number of parties in a party system, that is, one-party, two-party, and multiparty systems. Each type appears to be associated fairly consistently with certain other attributes. One-party systems and dictatorship seem to go together. Two-party systems, of which there are few, appear to prefer single-member districts for the selection of representatives. Multiparty systems, proportional representation, and cabinet instability are correlated.

This numerical classification system has become obsolete with the quadrupling of the number of nations that have been established since the end of World War II. One-party systems, for example, may be characteristic not only of dictatorship, but also of an early stage in the development of a more elaborate party system, as in the case of the Era of Good Feelings (1812-1824) in the United States, the period of Kuomintang dominance in Taiwan, or the Mexican experience with PRI. In two-party systems, factional competition in the dominant party may be more important than inter-party competition, as in the case of Japan. To further complicate classification, hybrids with characteristics of both two-party and multiparty systems have been created in France, Italy, and Israel.

Some analysts classify parties according to organizational structure. They identify proto-parties, that is, groups that are little more than parliamentary personal cliques or factions, such as those in eighteenth century England or numerous Central American and African countries in recent decades. Cadre parties are rudimentary electoral organizations led and financed by notable public figures in order to elect compatible parliamentary representatives, for example, the New Society Movement of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines and the Unity Party of Russia's Vladimir Putin. Mass parties, usually on the ideological left, are those organized so as to broaden suffrage, propose programs of public policy, and solicit the support of large numbers of voters. The membership of dictatorial parties is exclusive, based on ideological orthodoxy and members' loyalty, as is usual in communist and fascist parties. "Catchall" parties are a combination of mass and cadre forms of organization, with little ideological orthodoxy, and giving substantial attention to group interests, as is exemplified by the Democratic and Republican parties in the United States.

Another typology focuses on the degree of participation and mode of communication among party members. In this analytical category, all parties are presumed to have an inner circle of leaders, usually identifiable as officeholders, legislators, party officials, and financial contributors. The inner circle communicates with activists or militants, that is, persons who attend party meetings, serve as missionaries for the party's messages, and perform the routine tasks of party work. Beyond the activist circle are party members who have formally identified themselves with the party through the payment of dues, voter registration, or similar formal, but limited, acts. The outermost circle consists of party sympathizers and loyal voters who constitute an ever-changing party-in-the-electorate. Modes of communication among these elements vary. Proclamations or directives from the inner circle are common in dictatorial parties and political machines such as New York's Tammany Hall in its hey-day. Broad party

platforms, legislative voting records, and well-publicized leadership statements are the usual means in catchall parties.

Another fundamental classification is based on differences among democratic, authoritarian, and totalitarian parties. The differences lie in the degree to which the party system is open to competition for public offices and to peaceful transfers of power between parties. A democratic party system is one in which organized groups of political leaders openly compete with each other for control of the offices of both their party and the government. This competition is conducted in a manner that is public, nonviolent, and in accordance with practices that provide personal security to the leaders themselves as they pursue their role as representatives of particular constituencies. In a democratic system, party leaders who lose open and fair elections will peacefully relinquish the offices of party or government to the winners.

Such nonviolent transfers are a rarity in authoritarian and totalitarian party systems where leaders tend to compete conspiratorially and violently. An authoritarian party system is one in which one party is overwhelmingly dominant, but permits the existence of minor parties and may allow some small degree of civil liberty, as in Mainland China. Taiwan and South Korea, when under military rule and autocratic leaders during the decades after World War II, are other examples.

Totalitarian parties emphasize the totality of control. A totalitarian party is the only legal or official party permitted in the political system. These parties seek to eliminate or completely control all real or potential dissident groups and to subordinate all governing institutions to the party. Totalitarian parties are deeply involved in the daily lives of their citizens: their education, ideological loyalty, and even family life and behavior. The German Nazis and the Soviet Communists are the best known examples.

4. Party Functions and External Relationships

Modern political parties, particularly in competitive systems, have primary, secondary, and indirect functions. Primary functions, as noted, include the nomination of candidates for public office and the mobilization of voters to elect these nominees. The principal consequence of these activities in an effective party system is to implement the concept of popular sovereignty by systematically putting political leaders in touch with and accountable to their constituents.

In their pursuit of public offices, parties engage in numerous secondary activities. High among these is the programmatic function. Parties act as associations for influencing the content and conduct of public policy. This usually means adhering to a set of ideological principles or advancing certain group interests. To do so, parties prepare platforms or manifestoes.

When a party controls government offices, its leaders are usually the principal decision-makers in the adoption of public policies. They are expected to allocate public resources to their preferred policies and constituencies. This includes enactment of statutes and regulations that implement favored social and economic policies, distribution of job patronage to party workers and supporters, awarding of government contracts and

services to friendly constituents, promotion of a particular ideology, assignment of tax advantages to supportive groups, and recognition of particular party loyalists in order to promote their careers. The availability of these rewards of party victory has been seriously diminished by various reforms, particularly in the United States, where civil service, administrative accountability, and campaign finance reforms have limited job and policy patronage. Weakened by reforms, both American parties are circumspect in pursuing policies that favor their supporters.

Parties engage in activities that often serve civic functions indirectly. Parties reinforce people's political values by repeatedly citing these values as rationales for their programs and actions. To a substantial degree, party competition, where it exists, prevents fraud and corruption by motivating each party to maintain a keen watch over the conduct of other parties.

Parties encourage political participation by helping socialize citizens to their civic roles and by telling citizens how government is organized, how to use governmental services, how public policies affect their lives, and how to influence the conduct of public officials. Until recently, the socialization of new immigrants was a major activity of the parties in the United States, particularly by urban machines. With the demise of urban machines and the growth of government welfare programs, the civic education of immigrants has been taken up by community and ethnic interest groups, further weakening the influence of the parties.

When party leaders behave as political brokers arranging transactions among the multitude of interests in society, or as negotiators of a transition from civil war or dictatorship to more democratic systems, their activities in effect implement a system of conflict management that channels political controversy along nonviolent lines.

Modern party systems are almost always in some interlocking relationship with other political institutions: as managers of election systems; as controllers of military and other national bureaucracies; as debaters and agenda managers in legislatures; as recruiters of judicial personnel; as coalition builders among organized interest groups; as communicators with and through the media; and as civic educators. Usually it is the party system that must draw together the prerogatives and policy positions dispersed among these institutions in order for the political system to achieve working consensus.

A political system's constitution, which declares goals, organizes the government, and assigns duties and prerogatives, will do much to shape inter-institutional relationships. As a consequence, a party system may emerge informally or extra-constitutionally among these institutions, as in the United States. Some constitutions, however, explicitly provide for a party system, as in Russia.

In constitutional democracies, parties are organizationally and legally subordinate to the government they seek to control, hence are subject to the same laws as other political groups. In contrast, in totalitarian and authoritarian systems, parties usually hold a status superior to the government and are exempted from or only perfunctorily constrained by constitutional and legal strictures.

-
-
-

TO ACCESS ALL THE **23 PAGES** OF THIS CHAPTER,
Visit: http://www.eolss.net/Eolss-sampleAllChapter.aspx

Bibliography

Banks A.S., ed. (biennial). Political Handbook of the World, Binghamton, New York: CSA Publications. [This reference work describes current constitutional and party developments in every country in the world.]

Belloni F.P. and D.C. Beller, eds. (1978). Faction Politics: Political Parties and Factionalism in Comparative Perspective, Santa Barbara, CA, ABC-Clio Press. [A study of factions in dominant-party, alternating-party, and single party systems.]

Delury G.E., ed. (latest edition). The World Encyclopedia of Political Systems and Parties, 2 vols., New York, Facts on File, Inc. [A comprehensive survey of party systems worldwide.]

Downs A. (1957). An Economic Theory of Democracy, New York: Harper and Row. [This is a classic explanatory theory of the way economic factors influence party behavior in competitive systems.]

Duverger M. (1969). Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State, New York: 3d ed., Methuen. [A seminal classic on the tendency toward oligarchy in party organizations.]

Gillespie J.D. (1993). Politics at the Periphery: Third Parties in Two-Party America, Columbia, SC, University of South Carolina Press.

Goldman R.M., ed. (1983). Transnational Parties: Organizing the World's Precincts, Lanham, MD, University Press of America. [A collection of articles dealing with the emergence of transnational parties.]

Goldman R.M. (1990). From Warfare to Party Politics: The Critical Transition to Civilian Control. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press. [A study of the dynamics of transitions from civil wars to party politics.]

Goldman R.M. (1993). How to Build and Maintain a Democratic Party System, Washington, DC, Center for Party Development, Catholic University of America. [Essay on guidelines for leaders seeking to establish democratic parties.]

Greenwood Historical Encyclopedia of the World's Political Parties, 4 vols., Westport, CT, Greenwood Publishing. [Historical volumes on parties in the Americas, Europe, Asia, and the Pacific.]

Krieger J., ed. (1993). The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World, New York, Oxford University Press. [650 entries make up this encyclopedic guide to international relations and national domestic politics throughout the world.]

Maisel L.S. ed., (1991). Political Parties and Elections in the United States, 2 vols., New York, Garland Publishing. [A comprehensive encyclopedia of personalities, events, legal cases, organizations, and other topics pertinent to the party system of the United States.]

Party Politics, Sage Publications, London. [A quarterly journal devoted entirely to the study of parties and party systems worldwide.]

Sartori G. (1976). Parties and Party Systems, New York: Cambridge University Press. [An authoritative comparative study of party systems.]

Spaulding W.H. (1998). Is the Comintern Coming Back? Lanham, MD: University Press of America. [A complete listing and analysis of Communist-affiliated parties throughout the world and their factional orientations.]

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), Administration and Cost of Election. [Details of election administration. A 5,000-page encyclopedia available free of charge on World Wide Web.]

Wekken G.D. et al., eds. (1993). Building Democracy in One-Party Systems: Theoretical: Problems and Cross-Nation Experiences. Westport, CT: Praeger. [Collection of scholarly papers describing various political environments in which democracy manifest itself in one-party systems.]

White J.K. and D.M. Shea (2000). New Party Politics: From Jefferson and Hamilton to the Information Age. Boston: St. Martin's Press. [Comprehensive textbook on United States party system.]

Biographical Sketch

Professor Goldman's doctorate in political science is from the University of Chicago. He is professor emeritus at San Francisco State University and adjunct professor at The Catholic University of America in the District of Columbia. He served as dean for faculty research at San Francisco State University.

His professional career has encompassed teaching, research, academic administration, and practical politics. He is author or co-author of more than a dozen books, including: From DNA to Culture: The Synthesis Principle in Human Development; The Future Catches Up: Selected Writings of Ralph M. Goldman, 4 vols.; From Warfare to Party Politics; The United Nation in the Beginning; The National Party Chairmen and Committees; and The Politics of National Party Conventions.

His career information is in Who's Who in America.