



CHAPTER 11

Voting, Elections, and Political Parties

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Elections and political parties are crucial aspects of modern democracies: It is through them that we as residents and as citizens of a country are represented in government. It's very hard to think of modern politics without parties to aggregate our interests and encourage voting. They are also important, if largely powerless, in most authoritarian

regimes, which use them to legitimate the rulers. In this chapter we will first explain some of the basic issues involved in studying voting and electoral systems. Then we will look at political parties: why they emerged, how they can be classified, what functions they perform, how they interact, and finally the challenges they face today.

▲ People gather at a polling centre to cast their vote during the Philippine presidential election of 2016 (Photo by Dondi Tawatao/Getty Images).

The Voting Paradox

Voting is a mechanism for making collective decisions, and as such it is a key ingredient in the concept of representation. It is also widely assumed to ensure that the majority preference is reflected in the ultimate decision. While this is the case when there are only two options, as soon as there are more than two it becomes extremely difficult to determine which one is “most preferred” and votes start to get split in a variety of different ways. A mathematical proposition known as **Arrow’s impossibility theorem** explains why: When a group of people are asked to choose one preference from three or more alternatives, it is impossible to conclude that any option is the one “most preferred” unless more than 50 per cent vote for it. Table 11.1 illustrates the problem.

None of the three alternatives wins a majority of first choices, but if we count only first choices, then C wins with 10 votes out of 22. If the first two choices are counted equally, then B wins, with 18 votes out of 44. However, it might be fairer to give extra weight to first choices over second ones, since that would reflect more genuine strength of preference. Suppose first choices are given two points and second choices are given one. In that case, A wins with 24 points out of a possible 66.

In fact, any of the three options could win, depending on the counting system used. But since none of them achieves a majority of the total votes or points available, whichever system is used, it would be impossible to conclude that the general preference is “clearly” in favour of one particular option. As you can imagine, this problem gets worse as the number of alternatives increases, whether we are talking about candidates for election or policy options. In practice, then, how we determine preferences depends on the procedure we use for counting votes. Any procedure we choose will have to be a compromise between theory and practicality. This also explains why referendums rarely offer more than two options: Forcing an either/or choice is the only way to ensure an unambiguous outcome.

As you can see, the method we choose for assessing votes is crucial and can really alter the outcome. To give one famous example, when Abraham Lincoln won the US presidential election in 1860 he was one of four candidates in the race, and different methods of counting the votes (used in various parts of the world today) could easily have given the presidency to either John C. Breckinridge or John Bell (Riker, 1982, pp. 227–32). If that had happened, history might have developed along quite different lines: the US Civil War might never have taken place, the South might have become a separate country, slavery might have continued for decades if not longer, and so on. In turn, any of these scenarios would have had implications for the world. The same holds true of the 2000 elections, when George W. Bush narrowly prevailed over his rival Al Gore.



See the discussion of the role of the state in Chapter 1, p. 31.



See the discussion of policy communities in Chapter 10, p. 214.

TABLE 11.1 | Hypothetical Distribution of Votes

Number of Voters	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice
8	A	B	C
4	B	A	C
6	C	B	A
4	C	A	B

KEY POINT

- The method used to assess votes plays a crucial part in determining the outcome.

Elections

An election can be defined most simply as a method of assessing preferences through votes. Elections are vital to democracy. According to Article 12 of the Universal Declaration on Democracy, “The key element in the exercise of democracy is the holding of free and fair elections at regular intervals enabling the people’s will to be expressed” (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1997).

There are two basic types of electoral systems with several subvariants; see Box 11.1. The first basic type is the simple **plurality**, first-past-the-post majority system, which is found in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. This has the advantage of simplicity. In theory, it allows voters to choose individual candidates based on their own merits, rather than simply on their ties to a party. Although it can produce minority governments, it often gives the winning party a clear majority of the seats, which can make for a more decisive style of governance than is possible when rival parties are in a position to water down the governing party’s policies. The first-past-the-post system can also facilitate a strong opposition and broadly based parties. It disadvantages extremist parties of either the right or the left. On the other hand, it can lead to large numbers of “wasted” votes for candidates who have no realistic chance of being elected, which may discourage their supporters from voting in future elections (International IDEA, 2007, pp. 36–7). This is especially true for supporters of smaller parties, such as the Green Party, which contests elections in most Western democracies although it has little hope of ever forming a government.

Most majoritarian systems today allow for only one member to be elected from each district. However, in the past both the United States and the United Kingdom had some

KEY CONCEPT BOX 11.1

Types of Electoral Systems

1. Majoritarian systems (first-past-the-post)
 - Single-member plurality systems (Canada, UK, US, India)
 - Two-round system (France)
 - Alternative vote (Australia)
 - Block vote (Singapore, Syria)
2. Proportional representation
 - Party list (Netherlands, Israel, Brazil)
 - Single transferable vote (Ireland)
3. Hybrids (New Zealand, Germany, Russia, Japan, Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly)

multimember constituencies, and “at-large” or “block” voting still occurs at the municipal level. In such cases, the entire city constitutes a single district and all voters choose from the same list of candidates for, say, the city council or school board. In some systems they will have as many votes as there are seats to be filled; this can produce very strong majorities if people vote consistently for the same group or party. In others they will have only one vote; this means that candidates can be elected with as little as 20 per cent of the vote, which may undermine their legitimacy. (An up-to-date list of countries practising these and the other alternative systems mentioned can be found at www.idea.int/esd/world.cfm)

The alternative system is **proportional representation** (PR). Here the priority is to ensure adequate representation of the range of public opinion; whether the resulting government is strong or weak is less important. This system has the advantage of reducing the number of “wasted” votes. It also favours minorities and can encourage parties to try harder to appeal to voters outside their core districts. It may contribute to greater stability of policy and make coalition agreements more visible. On the other hand, it is more likely to lead to coalition governments and fragmentation of the party system. In such an environment, small parties will be able to negotiate a disproportionate say in policymaking. As well, holding coalition governments to account for individual decisions is more difficult under proportional representation (International IDEA, 2007, pp. 58–9).

Since first-past-the-post and proportional representation systems tend to produce different kinds of outcomes, both of which have much to commend them, a number of hybrids have been developed. In the **alternative member model**, for instance, some seats are elected on the basis of a simple majority and some on the basis of proportional representation. Germany, Japan, New Zealand, and Russia have all gone down this route. In New Zealand, Helen Clark of the Labour Party was able to win three successive terms of office using a hybrid voting model; she led a series of minority coalition governments from 1999 to 2008. John Key of the National Party then followed with one minority coalition and two majorities under the same system.

In one alternative system, which falls somewhere in the middle, a second round of elections is held in constituencies where the first round does not produce an absolute majority. In the second round, only the two most successful candidates remain on the ballot; this prevents strategic voting and ensures that there is no doubt about the preference of the majority. This is the system used in France and many of its former African colonies, as well as Iran and several former republics of the Soviet Union.

Around the world, according to Colomer (2004), the direction of electoral reform has been toward increasingly inclusive formulas that involve fewer risks for the parties involved. Thus the tendency has been to move from a majoritarian to a mixed or proportional system. Colomer’s explanation is party self-interest: When threatened by challenges from newcomers, parties generally prefer to minimize the risk of complete extinction, which is far greater under majoritarianism. The chances of survival are better under PR, even though the numbers of representatives elected are likely to be reduced (Colomer, 2004, pp. 4, 58; Farrell, 2001, Chapters 7, 8). While these two studies are over a decade old, they do bear out in practice.

Currently, 38 per cent of the world’s countries use some type of proportional system to determine their elected representatives versus 26 per cent of countries that use first-past-the-post. Altogether, 80 countries use a list proportional representation system, 45 use first-past-the-post (plus 19 with two-round elections), and 8 use a mixed-member proportional system (MMP). The number of PR and MMP systems has been growing in



PHOTO 11.1 | New Zealand's Labour Prime Minister Helen Clark concedes defeat in the election of November 2008 after three consecutive terms in office.

recent years, while the first-past-the-post countries have been declining (International IDEA, 2015a; 2015b; 2015c).

KEY POINTS

- The two most widely used voting systems are first-past-the-post and proportional representation.
- Each has its own virtues: first-past-the-post produces stronger governments, while PR produces more representative governments.
- Mixed or intermediate alternatives attempt to mitigate the disadvantages of theoretically purer systems.
- Voting systems have a big impact on party systems.

Political Parties

There is a paradox about political parties. On one hand, even authoritarian regimes generally agree on their importance. The Universal Declaration on Democracy includes in Article 12 “the right to organize political parties and carry out political activities” as one of the “essential civil and political rights” (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1997). On the other hand, some theorists question the logic of parties on the grounds that rational individuals will form groups to pursue their interests only when they can be sure that the benefits of membership will be greater than the costs. This is likely to be the case only for small groups in which the share of benefits that any individual member can expect will be relatively large. For big organizations

such as political parties, especially at the national level, the benefits that any individual member is likely to gain are bound to be very small, while the costs of membership are significant. Thus it is irrational for people to join anything larger than a (small) interest group.

Parties have also been criticized for promoting divisions in society rather than helping to mitigate them; for example, see the quotation from the former Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere in Box 11.2. This risk is particularly serious when political parties represent specific ethnic communities (as was the case in Uganda; see the Case Study in Box 11.4). The leaders of the People’s Republic of China use the same argument to justify the leading role of the Communist Party.

Carothers (2006, p. 4) expands on what he terms the “standard lament” about political parties in various countries where he has done research:

1. Parties are corrupt, self-interested organizations dominated by power-hungry elites who pursue their own interests or those of their rich financial backers rather than those of ordinary citizens.
2. Parties do not stand for anything—there are no real differences among them. Their ideologies are symbolic at best and their platforms are vague or insubstantial.
3. Parties waste time and energy squabbling with one another over petty issues for the sake of political advantage, rather than trying to solve the country’s problems in a constructive, co-operative way.
4. Parties become active only at election time, when they come looking for your vote; the rest of the time you never hear from them.
5. Parties are ill-prepared to govern and typically do a bad job, whether in government or in opposition.

KEY POINTS

- Parties are a vital element in modern political systems, especially in democracies.
- Yet the benefits of party membership are questionable, given the costs.
- Parties generally suffer from low public esteem and are often associated with corruption.

KEY QUOTE BOX 11.2

Nyerere on Party Politics

Julius Nyerere of Tanzania considered the British-style party system intentionally divisive and fundamentally un-African. In 1963, he argued that

To try and import the idea of a parliamentary opposition into Africa may very likely lead to violence—because the opposition parties will tend to be regarded as traitors by the majority of our people, or at best, it will lead to the trivial manoeuvrings of “opposing” groups whose time is spent in the inflation of artificial differences into some semblance of reality. (quoted in Meredith, 2005, p. 168)

Emergence of Parties

Historically, there were two phases in the development of political parties. Originally they emerged within the parliaments of the first democracies. Factions developed as independently elected representatives formed groups to create and pass legislation. These were called *caucus parties*, loose organizations of like-minded representatives, which in the American case were at first loosely split between Federalists and anti-Federalists. Later, as the voting franchise expanded to include nonproperty-owning white males, parties became involved in efforts to structure the vote in popular elections. In most countries these two stages were combined, because the multiparty model was imported from abroad at the same time as the parliamentary model, but in the case of party pioneers, such as Britain and the United States, it is possible to separate the two stages.

Another way of thinking about the birth of parties is to think about the roles or functions they perform—in other words, the systemic needs that parties meet. Thus in the United States it is often suggested that parties first developed in Congress because the task of finding a new coalition each time a proposed bill was being considered for legislation was extremely time consuming. Forming blocs of relatively like-minded representatives simplified the negotiating process and at the same time increased the influence of individual members over legislation.

It was easier for a group to have an impact because together its members were more likely to have the deciding vote over a particular bill together than as individuals. Voting as a group also enabled them to demand greater concessions in the bill itself, or to trade concessions in one bill for advantages in another—a practice that American politicians call *log rolling*. In addition, since legislation is an ongoing activity, group commitments encouraged greater confidence than those of individuals: A group of legislators could be held to their word (or punished) more easily than an individual could. Thus a relatively coherent group of legislators provided greater predictability for other legislators.

Curiously, the American founding fathers had a distinct antipathy for any kind of party or faction, which they regarded as incompatible with real democracy. In *Federalist Paper No. 10*, James Madison attacked “factions” on the grounds that they could oppress or exploit the people as a whole. He defined a faction as follows:

A number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.

Nevertheless, by the Third Congress (1793–4) like-minded legislators had begun to form groups to smooth the passage of bills. Even in a period when Congress met for only one or two months per year and had a tiny legislative load compared with today, this predictability was an important benefit (Aldrich, 1995, pp. 68–96).

Later, parties began to form outside Congress to mobilize support for candidates first in presidential and then in local elections. This happened for the first time in 1828, when supporters of General Andrew Jackson’s presidential candidacy formed what they called the Democratic Party. The effectiveness of the party was indicated not only by the fact that he won this election, having lost the previous one in 1824, but by a significant increase in the voter turnout (from 30 per cent of the electorate to more than 50 per cent). The lesson

was clear: Party organization motivated supporters to vote. In 1840, after opponents followed suit by organizing the Whig Party (which lasted for about 25 years), the turnout rate rose to more than 78 per cent. The emergence of **mass parties** changed the course of elections and stimulated greater interest in politics in general, at least as measured by turnout. Thus, as Aldrich (1995, pp. 97–125) points out, they strengthened democracy.

The effectiveness of the American parties, together with Britain's growing party democracy, made political parties a vital element in the extension of democracy elsewhere in Europe and around the world. Meanwhile, industrialization was overturning traditional patterns of authority and driving increasing numbers of people into urban areas, where parties could more easily mobilize support. Political issues associated with industrialization provided the subject matter for a new, more popular democracy in which mass parties became the norm and the franchise was extended to include first all male citizens and eventually all female citizens as well. This was the era when party membership was highest. This period also entrenched a social divide that is still extremely important: the division between capital and labour. Though not all party systems revolved around this division many did, among them the Canadian and British systems (Conservatives versus Liberals in Canada, Labour versus Conservative in Britain).

To cope with the increase in party membership and to ensure greater coordination in their activities and also among party-elected representatives, the number of full-time party officials also increased. While this brought greater professionalism to political parties, it also complicated the practice of democracy in internal party decision making. How much weight should be given to the views of ordinary party members as opposed to those of party officials? Should they all be treated as equal? Could they be?

Since World War II, parties in Europe have evolved further toward what have been termed *catch-all parties*. These are parties that devote less attention to ideology and more to strategies to win over the median (or middle-of-the-road) voters who make the crucial difference in general elections, even if that means appealing to voters who would instinctively support a different party. In practice this trend has had the effect of increasing the party leadership's power to make strategic decisions. An early indication of the change came in West Germany in 1959, when the Social Democratic Party renounced Marxist ideology and committed itself to a market economy and liberal pluralism.

More recently European and American parties have undergone a further mutation as they have turned into **cartel parties**. As party membership has declined, this has strengthened the authority of the party machine, which has become increasingly professional in its handling of all the media alternatives for putting out its message. We can see this evolution in the dominant American parties since the 1960s. Previously, parties were dominated by local machines such as that of Chicago's Democratic Mayor Richard M. Daley. The party machine made the careers of elected office holders by promising favours to supporters in return for campaign contributions and votes. Today parties have turned into organizations of media-savvy professionals ready to serve whichever candidates rise to prominence. Thus parties have become candidate centred rather than machine centred, and this has been the case for some time (Aldrich, 1995).

This historical outline suggests that analysis of any modern party can usefully be divided between its activities in three arenas: (1) the party-in-government (including parliament); (2) the party-in-the-electorate (that is, its strategies for winning popular support and votes); and (3) the party's internal organization (Aldrich, 1995). All parties that seek election have to establish their own balance of these three roles, which will depend in part

on the political system in which they operate, the policy goals they set for themselves, and the attitudes of ordinary citizens toward them.

KEY POINTS

- The first parties emerged to structure the work of legislatures.
- Later variations included mass parties (designed to structure the votes of electors), catch-all parties (which make it their priority to win votes regardless of ideological appeal), and cartel parties (dominated by party professionals).
- All parties seeking electoral success have to balance three sets of roles: vis-à-vis government, the electorate, and their own internal professionals.

Functions of Parties

The modern **political party** performs an extremely wide range of functions in the pursuit of political power. As Ware defines it, “A political party is an institution that (a) seeks influence in a state, often by attempting to occupy positions in government, and (b) usually consists of more than a single interest in the society and so to some degree attempts to ‘aggregate interests’” (Ware, 1996, p. 5).

In general there are seven functions that a party may perform, though not all parties perform all seven. The balance between them varies depending on the type of state the party operates in (democracy or authoritarian regime); see Box 11.3. In democracies the most important roles that parties perform involve choice, whether between individual political actors or between policies (points 6 and 7 in the box). In authoritarian regimes the second function, “integration and mobilization of citizens,” tends to be the most important—though the interpretation of those activities is generally more top-down than bottom-up. While it may be almost unthinkable for a democracy to exist without political parties, it is not impossible; see the Case Study of Uganda in Box 11.4. The majority of states without party systems are Islamic. Even communist regimes, which never tolerated challenges to the leading role of the Communist Party, organized regular elections at all levels of the state as a way of re-engaging citizens’ commitment to the goals of the regime

KEY CONCEPT BOX 11.3

Functions of Political Parties

1. Legitimation of the political system
2. Integration and mobilization of citizens
3. Representation
4. Structuring of the popular vote
5. Aggregation of diverse interests
6. Recruitment of leaders for public office, which (normally) facilitates nonviolent choice between individuals
7. Formulation of public policy, facilitating choice between policy options

CASE STUDY 11.4

Uganda as a No-Party State

Uganda is a rare example of a state that has attempted to practise democracy without political parties (Mugaju & Oloka-Onyango, 2000). Since gaining its independence from Britain in 1962, Uganda has gone through civil war, genocide, and revolution. Put together as a colony from a variety of former tribal kingdoms and principalities, it had no tradition of democracy, even after some 70 years of British rule. This was not unusual: Colonial regimes in general discouraged democratic accountability among the people they ruled. Although parties were formed and a number of elections held in preparation for independence, democratic values did not take root.

Within two years of Milton Obote's election as the country's first prime minister, Uganda was effectively a one-party state. In 1971 Obote was overthrown by General Idi Amin, who declared himself president for life. Gradually the country slid into tyranny, chaos, violence, and economic collapse. In 1979 Amin was overthrown and Obote was reinstated as president. This time he attempted to restore a multiparty system, but the party leaders refused to co-operate with each other and violence returned. It is estimated that 1 million Ugandans were killed between 1971 and 1986, when Yoweri Museveni of the National Resistance Movement was sworn in as president. In an effort to prevent further sectarian violence, he announced that political parties would not be permitted to contest elections. In the place of the ethnic division and antagonism exacerbated by party politics, the new regime would promote unity, mutual tolerance, and democracy through a system of local councils in keeping with local traditions of tribal consultation. Although parties were not banned outright, from 1986 onward their representatives were permitted to stand for election to parliament only as individuals.

A new constitution, adopted in 1995 after nearly a decade of military and transitional rule, set a limit of two five-year terms for any president. As Museveni's second term drew to a close, however, the regime floated the idea of a third term. This provoked unease at home and abroad among foreign governments that gave aid to Uganda. In the end a referendum approved adoption of multiparty democracy. Thus the reintroduction of open political parties was a response to both domestic and external pressure.

When a general election was held in early 2006, Museveni won a majority amid allegations of electoral irregularities, but the Supreme Court upheld his victory by a vote of four to three. He won a fourth term in 2011 with 68 per cent of the vote (Kron, 2011). In 2015, former Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi said he would run against Museveni as an independent presidential candidate in the 2016 election to deny the long-running president a sixth term in office (Winsor, 2015). Critics have alleged that little has changed in the way the country is ruled. Whether the era of nonparty politics did indeed lay the foundation for a more enduring democracy in Uganda remains to be seen.

and also of demonstrating their popular legitimacy to the rest of the world. Authoritarian regimes too have devoted considerable resources to holding regular elections and mobilizing support for the ruling parties, even though there was never a realistic possibility of political alternatives winning power; a recent example were the rigged elections in President Bashar al-Assad's Syria. Assad claimed to have gained 97 per cent of the vote in 2007 and 88.7 per cent of the vote in 2014, although the country had disintegrated into warring factions. Assad took over from his father Hafez al-Assad, who ruled from 1970 to 2000 and claimed never to have dipped below 99 per cent support on voting day



Daniela Carevic/Stockphoto

PHOTO 11.2 | Kampala, Uganda. While Uganda has attempted to practise democracy without political parties, this has not kept the country from corruption and civil war. In 2012, \$12.6 million in donor funds earmarked for rebuilding impoverished Northern Uganda were embezzled from the Office of the Prime Minister. In 2014, Transparency International rated Uganda’s public sector as one of the most corrupt in the world.

(*Today’s Zaman*, 2014). Thus legitimation of the political system, whatever its basic structure, remains the single most common function of political parties.

How parties perform these functions depends on three things:

1. The constitutional framework within which they operate: As we saw in the discussion in Chapter 8 on the constitutional distinction between federal and nonfederal regimes, the degree of central authority in a state has a major impact on the organization of political parties. The relative powers of a party’s central apparatus and local organizations reflect the relative powers of the corresponding government authorities.
2. The way the nation organizes elections: Countries that use primaries (preliminary elections) to select candidates for election have to organize their activities to a different timetable than that of other countries.
3. The communication technologies available to them: As television and advertising have become more powerful, parties have increasingly come to rely on them (rather than door-to-door canvassing by party activists) to get their messages to the public, even though this has greatly inflated election costs. Now the Internet is beginning to offer new possibilities for more personalized campaigning, with candidates contacting voters individually to respond to their particular concerns.

See Chapter 8, pp. 173–75,
for a discussion of
federalism.

For a discussion of the
impact of the media on
politics see Chapter 12.

KEY POINTS

- Political parties perform an extremely wide range of functions.
- These are structured by the constitutional framework of the political system, the national system of elections, and the technologies available for communicating with voters.

Typologies of Political Parties

Developing a typology of political parties allows a political scientist to think more systematically about their activities, which can help to make more meaningful comparisons. Box 11.5 presents a typology of political parties in various regions of the world by Gunther and Diamond (2003) based primarily on the ways in which and the extent to which parties organize themselves; in this case, the least organized types are at the top of the table and the most organized at the bottom.

Below is a different typology based on nine general types of political programs. It is an extension of one developed for Western Europe by Beyme (1985, pp. 29–158), adapted for a larger context:

1. Liberal or radical parties stand for equal legal and political rights, as well as free trade.
2. Conservative parties tend to support traditional forms of social relations, including hierarchy. They often appeal to nationalism as well. Recently, however, some conservative parties have veered toward more radical, neoliberal, free-market economic policies.
3. Christian democratic parties were established after World War II as a third, Catholic-influenced way between liberalism and socialism. While such parties endorse more traditional authority relations, preferring women to stay at home and raise children, they have accepted a significant role for state-provided welfare.
4. Socialist or social democratic parties advocate workers' control of the means of production. Usually they have had close connections with trade unions. They also advocate state welfare systems. Unlike communist parties, they accept the need for market capitalism but call for state regulation and planning as well.

KEY CONCEPT BOX 11.5

Typology of Political Parties

Basic Category	Variants	Subvariants
Elite based	Traditional local notables (esp. 19th century) Clientelistic	
Electoralist	Personalistic Catch-all Programmatic	
Movement	Left-libertarian Postindustrial extreme right	
Ethnicity based	Exclusive ethnic Congress/coalition movement	
Mass based	Religious Nationalist Socialist	Denominational Fundamentalist Pluralist Ultranationalist Class/mass based Leninist

Source: Gunther & Diamond (2003, p. 173)

5. Communist parties were inspired by the Russian Revolution of 1917 and sought to spread the communist alternative to socialism based on the teachings of Marx and Lenin. Such parties were distinguished by their doctrine of unconditional loyalty to the party (“democratic centralism”) and strict party discipline.
6. Regional parties stand for the interests of particular regions of countries and often seek, whether overtly or covertly, to establish their own states. They have experienced a surge in popularity in Europe over the last 20 years. Perhaps the most successful has been the northern Italian separatist party Lega Nord, which has occasionally participated in national coalition governments.
7. Environmental parties are a relatively recent phenomenon, initially developing out of interest groups such as Friends of the Earth. Typically, they win support from younger and middle-class voters and tend to be skeptical of free-market economic policies. They advocate consensus-based decision making and social justice. Green parties have recently formed part of coalition governments in both Germany and New Zealand.
8. Nationalist parties flourished in former colonies, as the new regimes sought to establish their national values. The end of the Cold War removed some alternative poles of political organization, allowing freer rein for nationalists in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Because such parties’ ideology is based on a concept of the whole nation, as opposed to the interests of a part of it (for example, a particular class or region), they seek to dominate the political system, which can make co-operation with other parties difficult.
9. Islamic parties are a relatively new phenomenon, since many secular regimes in the Middle East did not tolerate them. In Iran, all the parties represented in the Majles (parliament) today are Islamic, but they represent a fairly wide spread of opinions. Like nationalist parties, Islamic parties seek to speak for the whole of society rather than a specific part of it, and therefore they too aim for a dominant position in the political system. Since the Arab Spring, Islamic parties in a number of countries now have a chance to compete in multiparty elections and are gaining popularity.

KEY POINTS

- Typologies facilitate more systematic comparison between party activities.
- They vary depending on the nature of the features they highlight.

Party Systems

Any state with more than one political party also has a party system, defined by Giovanni Sartori as “the system of interactions resulting from interparty competition” (1976, p. 44). These interactions are affected by three factors:

1. The nature of the political system as a whole. Clearly, a state’s constitution will have a major impact on the competition between parties, as parties have to operate according to its rules. Parties operate differently in liberal democratic regimes, where electoral success does lead to changes of government, than they do in more

authoritarian regimes, where rulers will not contemplate electoral overthrow and where opposition parties, if tolerated, have to be much more careful in their criticisms. It also matters whether a regime is presidential or parliamentary.

2. The pattern of basic social cleavages that underlie the differentiation between parties. The pattern of relations between political parties is partly determined by the fundamental cleavages in society. As originally theorized by Lipset and Rokkan (1967), there were four fundamental cleavages that structured the rise of the new mass parties in Europe in the late nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century. Since then these “frozen” cleavages have remained the basis of Western European party systems:
 - a) Centre versus periphery: Different communities within the same state vied for power both at the centre and in regional authorities (sometimes these were also based on different linguistic communities, but not necessarily).
 - b) State versus church: This cleavage was particularly important in Catholic states, where a significant part of the challenge to the Church’s temporal powers was mounted by anti-clerical liberals and radicals.
 - c) Land versus industry: The growth of industrialization and of industrial capitalists posed a challenge to more traditional rural elites.
 - d) Owner versus worker: The rise of capitalism pitted the interests of the new industrial workers against those of their employers (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967).

All Western European states were affected to varying degrees by these divisions, and similar cleavages can be seen in North America and other parts of the world.

3. The channels open for competition between the parties, primarily the electoral system.

In his classic work *Political Parties*, Maurice Duverger argued that first-past-the-post electoral systems tend to produce two-party systems; this later became known as **Duverger’s Law**. By contrast, he argued, proportional representation tends to produce multiparty systems (Duverger, 1964). While these are more generalizations than uniform “laws” (in the past, for example, Venezuela had both proportional representation and a two-party system), there is no doubt about the logic of the argument.

Given these factors, most typologies of party systems focus on the numbers of parties they contain. One version gives the following classifications (Ware, 1996, p. 159):

1. Predominant party systems, where one party dominates the national legislature. Among developed democracies, Japan offers the only example, but single-party dominance can also be seen in Russia and is common in sub-Saharan Africa, where nonruling parties are short of resources (Doorenspleet, 2003, p. 205). Some authoritarian regimes, such as Indonesia under Suharto (1968–98), have explicitly favoured this system on the grounds that representation of different interests and groups within a single party promotes social cohesion, whereas unrestricted party competition would jeopardize it (Reeve, 1985).
2. Two-party systems, as in the United States.
3. Systems with three to five parties, as in Canada, France, Germany, and the UK.
4. Systems with more than five parties, as in Belgium, Denmark, and New Zealand.

The nature of the party system in place can play a big part in determining how well a democracy operates; the two-party model has generally performed very well, whereas highly fragmented systems such as Italy’s since World War II have not. Yet it is almost



See Chapter 9, p. 191, for a discussion of presidentialism versus parliamentarism.

impossible for a democracy to change a dysfunctional party system once it has become established, even when voters are well aware of its flaws.

Take the case of Japan. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) held power almost continuously from 1955 to 2009 and then took control again in 2012 under Shinzo Abe. The brief exception during this early period came in 1993, when a series of scandals involving the LDP's connections with big business led to the election of a reformist coalition. The reformers attributed much of the LDP's reputation for corruption to Japan's multimember constituency system, in which candidates from the same party had to compete against one another as well as against other parties. In an effort to break this pattern and establish a genuine two-party system, more than half the country's constituencies were converted from multi- to single-member plurality (first-past-the-post) voting. It was thought that reducing the competitive pressure would reduce campaign expenses and strengthen opposition to the LDP (Rosenbluth & Ramseyer, 1993). Yet the LDP managed to upset those calculations, and after 11 months in the political wilderness regained power in 1994, adapted to the new circumstances, and continued to win the majority of seats in the lower house of the Diet (parliament) until 2009, when it lost power for a three-year period.

KEY POINTS

- In genuine democracies, party systems are not designed and imposed: rather, they develop as the product of sociological and institutional interactions.
- This means that, once formed, they are difficult to reform.

Problems Facing Parties

Political parties today face serious problems. In Western Europe the traditional parties and party systems survive, but party membership is declining. In general, the mass parties that were typical of the inter- and postwar eras are a thing of the past. Although parties do not always maintain close records of members, in part because of the need to appear strong to outside observers, the trend seems clear throughout Europe (see Table 11.2). In Spain, one of the two exceptions to this general trend, we should note that the base year of 1980 was only five years after the death of the dictator Francisco Franco and only two years after the adoption of a new constitution.

This means that by the end of the 1990s party membership across Europe averaged only 5.7 per cent of the population—approximately one-third of the percentage three decades earlier (Mair, 2005, p. 15). In their 2012 study, van Biezen, Mair, and Poguntke noted an even further drop to 4.7 per cent on average. There was, however, wide variation, from a high of 17 per cent in Austria and Cyprus to levels below 1 per cent in Latvia and Poland.

Many political leaders have devoted time and effort to uncovering the reasons behind Europeans' lack of enthusiasm for party activism. In Britain, the Power Inquiry (held between 2004 and 2006) recommended a number of measures, including the adoption of a more "responsive electoral system—which offers voters a greater choice and diversity of parties and candidates—to replace the first-past-the-post system," a minimum voting age of 16, and state funding for parties through a voucher system that would allow each voter in a general election to assign £3 to his or her preferred party (Power Inquiry, 2006).

TABLE 11.2 | Membership Trends in European Parties, 1980–2000

Country	Period	Change in Numbers	Per cent Change in Original Membership
France	1978–99	–1,122,128	–64.59
Italy	1980–98	–2,091,887	–51.54
United Kingdom	1980–98	–853,156	–50.39
Norway	1980–97	–281,891	–47.49
Austria	1980–99	–446,209	–30.21
Sweden	1980–98	–142,533	–28.05
Germany	1980–99	–174,967	–8.95
Greece	1980–98	+375,000	+166.67
Spain	1980–2000	+808,705	+250.73

Source: Mair, P., & van Biezen, I. (2001). Party membership in twenty European democracies, 1980–2000. *Party Politics*, 7(1), 5–21.

State funding for political parties has become increasingly common around the world in recent years as a way of supporting the vital functions that parties perform in democracies while reducing their dependence on contributions from big business. Critics warn that it's important to ensure that such support does not serve to protect established parties from new challengers and prevent newcomers from winning seats in parliament, as happened in Venezuela (International IDEA, 2003; see the Case Study in Box 11.6). State funding can also encourage party fragmentation rather than consolidation by giving dissident factions the funds they need to set themselves up as new parties, as happened in Japan in the 1990s and more recently in New Zealand. Other critics argue that public funding is a waste of taxpayer money, since the public is forced to pay for election campaigns while politicians get to determine their length. In the 2015 Canadian election, Prime Minister Stephen Harper called a very long election campaign: 78 days instead of the typical 37 days. This was estimated by Elections Canada to have cost taxpayers about \$500 million, considerably more than the \$375 million normally devoted to federal elections (Gillis, 2015).

The United States has a similar problem, though it is not one of resources. In the 2004 presidential election the two parties declared combined expenditures of US\$880 million—an increase of two-thirds since 2000. Even more was spent (much of it on media campaigning) in the 2008 election that saw John McCain and Barack Obama battle it out. The US Federal Election Commission (2009) reported that more than \$1.6 billion was spent by all candidates, which was increased still further in 2012 to \$2 billion when Obama won against Mitt Romney. At least the same amount is spent every two years on elections to Congress and state legislatures. Although there is no shortage of volunteers willing to help on campaigns without pay, the trend toward declining party membership is evident in the United States as well. Meanwhile, party professionals are playing bigger roles in shaping party image and designing campaign strategy. With billionaire candidates like Donald Trump, it is doubtful that this upward trend will change (see Box 11.7).

New democracies have no trouble forming new political parties, but many of these parties are not particularly viable. New parties often find it difficult to establish a clear image, raise funds, bring in large numbers of members, and compete in elections. An added complication is the absence of the obvious social cleavages that can help to create a party system. With the Cold War over and the emergence of postindustrial economies in which social identities are more fluid, the old divisions between capital and labour are no longer central to political systems (van Biezen, 2003, pp. 37–8).

CASE STUDY 11.6

Venezuela and the Downfall of Liberal Democracy

For half a century Venezuela had the reputation of the most stable and most liberal democracy in South America. Yet recent years have seen this tradition pushed aside in favour of a more populist democracy. It is a reminder that while liberal democracy may seem to be the most desirable form of political system, it is not invulnerable. What happened in Venezuela?

In 1958, dictator Pérez Jiménez was overthrown in a military coup and democracy was re-established. The leaders of the three main parties signed a pact that committed them to observing the same basic rules of the political game for the sake of preserving democracy. Subsequently, Venezuela evolved into a state with two effective parties: Acción Democrática and Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente. The concept of “pacted democracy” became a model for the establishment of a successful democracy, especially in Latin America, and for many years it underpinned US policy for promoting transitions to democracy there.

The two parties extended their reach into a wide range of other organizations (professional associations, peasant federations, state enterprises), which helped both to strengthen their control and also to increase their membership. Although both parties exercised very strict control over their members, they sought consensus between themselves wherever possible, though this did not prevent energetic competition for power; the presidency changed hands regularly.

This system worked well for nearly two decades, reinforced by prosperity based on oil wealth. In the mid-1970s, however, the economy began to stagnate and decline, partly because of falls in the international price of oil, but also because of corruption and waste. Popular dissatisfaction grew, and the parties responded not by reforming but by becoming more isolated from the public.

In 1998 former Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chávez, an outsider to both parties, was elected president. He promised what he called a “Bolivarian” revolution, associating his own socialist program with Simon Bolívar, the nineteenth-century liberator from Spanish rule, even though Bolívar has traditionally been seen as a liberal admirer of the American Revolution. Chávez aimed at sweeping away corruption and redistributing wealth to ordinary people. He attacked the “partocracy” (*partidocracia*) that kept all power in the hands of the two parties; their state funding was abolished. What emerged was a populist regime that promoted social polarization rather than consensus. Chávez introduced a new constitution that removed many of the checks on the powers of the president. Attempts to overthrow him, first through a coup and then by holding an election to recall him from office, both failed. The old party system fragmented and was replaced by a multiparty system with numerous small parties overshadowed by Chávez’s Fifth Republic Movement (now the United Socialist Party of Venezuela).

Aided by the additional wealth that came from increasing world oil prices, Chávez won a second term of office in January 2007 and continued as president before he died in 2013. His vice-president, Nicolás Maduro, took over after his death and has continued his policies, even though many of them have proven to be economically misguided, leading to high inflation, recession, and a shortage of many basic consumer goods.

Sources: Coppedge (2002); Corrales and Penfold (2007); Gott (2005); McCoy & Myers (2004); Neuman (2015).

Taiwan is an exception that proves the rule. Since 1987 Taiwan has become one of the most successful new democracies. It has a stable party system, with two major parties and one or two minor ones, together with almost 250 microparties. The two main parties—

KEY QUOTE BOX 11.7**Is the United States Still a Democracy?**

In July 2015, former US president Jimmy Carter lamented on the state of American democracy now that almost unlimited funds can be spent on federal elections. Two US Supreme Court decisions, *Citizens United* (2010) and *McCutcheon* (2014), have opened the floodgates for money even from outside the country to pour into domestic judicial and political campaigns. Carter had this to say:

Now it's just an oligarchy with unlimited political bribery being the essence of getting the nominations for president or being elected president. And the same thing applies to governors, and U.S. Senators and congress members. So, now we've just seen a subversion of our political system as a payoff to major contributors, who want and expect, and sometimes get, favors for themselves after the election is over. . . . [T]he incumbents, Democrats and Republicans, look upon this unlimited money as a great benefit to themselves. Somebody that is already in Congress has a great deal more to sell. (quoted in Zuesse, 2015)

the Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)—confront each other over a vital political issue, but it is not one of the four issues that, as we saw earlier in this chapter, Lipset and Rokkan (1967) identified as traditional dividing lines. It is unique to Taiwan: the issue of independence from mainland China. The DPP calls for formal independence and the KMT opposes it, although there is not complete unanimity within either party on the issue of reunification. Although both parties have a variety of other policies to appeal to voters, some of which overlap and cut across the basic cleavage and thus preventing the antagonism from becoming irreconcilable, the fundamental difference with respect to independence serves to stabilize Taiwan's party system. Because other new democracies lack an analogous cleavage, their party systems are more volatile.

Despite the many differences between parties in the established Western democracies and the newer democracies in other parts of the world, there does seem to be one area in which they converge. In all cases, the jobs of establishing the party's "brand" and designing its platform are increasingly handled by party professionals. This trend reflects a combination of factors, among them declining party membership and growing dependence on the state for party funding. Since the 1960s the Democratic and Republican parties in the United States have both changed from mass parties to candidate-centred cartel parties in which party professionals play a dominant role (Aldrich, 1995, p. 254). This allows relative outsiders to penetrate the party leadership process, like we've seen in 2016 with Donald Trump, Carly Fiorina, and Ben Carson, who have never held political office.

KEY POINTS

- Political parties are facing a range of new challenges.
- In various parts of the world the balance between rank-and-file party members and party professionals is tipping toward the latter.
- Despite the generally negative public attitudes toward them, parties continue to play a vital role in the formulation and legitimation of public policies.

Conclusion

Today, as ever, parties and party systems are in transition, though their future shape is not clear. There seems little chance that the old mass parties will return. Yet parties will continue to play an important role in determining how policy choices are presented to the public. Indeed, parties with access to the necessary resources will have an increasing impact on the presentation of policies, managing a widening variety of media strategies. Fundraising will also continue to be a crucial role for parties. They will also continue to play important roles in structuring the work of parliaments. They will act as recruitment channels for ministerial positions, and they will certainly continue to legitimize—or be used for the purpose of legitimizing—political regimes.

Although they often receive bad press and are sometimes accused of intensifying social divisions, efforts to replace them with alternative organizational forms (such as “movements”) have generally failed. Political parties structure the formulation of public policies, but their leaders still have to make choices about priorities, and they can change them. They make mistakes, antagonize people, seem self-interested, but without them a politics dominated by narrower interest groups would be even less attractive (Fiorina, 2002, p. 541). It’s hard to imagine how states would function without parties.

Key Questions

1. Why did New Zealand change from majoritarian voting to a mixed-member proportional representation system?
2. How stable is the party system in Canada? What might upset it?
3. How can young people become more interested in voting and in other forms of political participation?
4. How appropriate is state funding of political parties? How valid are the objections?
5. Are parties’ programs becoming more difficult to distinguish from each other? Are they becoming less “ideological”?
6. Are parties in other parts of the world becoming more “American”? If so, in what ways? Does it matter?
7. Is the American system too dominated by money to actually be democratic, as former President Jimmy Carter suggests?
8. How well do the typologies presented in this chapter fit the party system in your country?

Further Reading

Anderson, D., & Cheeseman, N. (Eds.). (2013). *Routledge handbook of African politics*. London: Routledge. A comprehensive and systematic introduction to African politics. Part IV focuses on democracy and electoral politics.

Boix, C., & Stokes, S.C. (Eds.). (2009). *The Oxford handbook of comparative politics*. New York: Oxford University Press. This book offers a detailed discussion of theories of political parties and their role in the democratic system. Section 4 on “Mass Political Mobilization” is excellent and contains six chapters on parties, voting behaviour, clientelism, activism, and other issues.