HOW PARTIES ORGANIZE

Change and Adaptation in Party Organizations in Western Democracies

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Party Organization as an Empty Vessel: Parties in American Politics

Richard S. Katz and Robin Kolodny

Conventionally, the United States is described as having two parties - the Democrats and the Republicans. At one level, this is accurate. In 1991, all one hundred senators, 434 out of 435 members of the House of Representatives, and the president and vice-president had been elected either as Democrats or as Republicans, as had 49 of the 50 state governors. Indeed, what was remarkable about the 1990 and 1992 congressional elections was the high number (that is, one) of candidates elected who were not Democrats or Republicans - the highest number since 1952. With a few minor exceptions, the Democratic and Republican labels dominate state and local politics as well. While many American ballots appear notable for the large number of candidates and parties, it is very rare that more than two candidates - the Democrat and the Republican - are of any real significance.

Not only do the Democratic and Republican labels dominate American politics today, they have done so for an extremely long time. The last president who was not either a Democrat or a Republican was elected was 1848, and in only five presidential elections since 1864 have the Democratic and Republican candidates failed between them to receive at least 90 per cent of the vote (1892, 89 per cent; 1912, 65 per cent; 1924, 83 per cent; 1968, 86 per cent; and 1992, 81 per cent). The last time (and the only time since 1860) that the Democrats and Republicans did not between them hold at least 95 per cent of the seats in the House of Representatives was 1896.

Yet the persistence of this two-party system is curious for two reasons. First, the parties themselves have undergone dramatic shifts, both in their ideological orientations and constituent support bases. Second, one of the most notable features of American politics is the degree to which competition is framed in terms of individual candidates rather than partisan affiliations. Neither of these phenomena is new, but arguably they have become more significant since 1960. Together they offer grounds for arguing, with only moderate exaggeration, that rather than having two parties, or six parties (the organizations associated with the Democratic and Republican national committees, plus those associated with the Democratic and Republican conferences/caucuses in each house of Congress).
How Parties Organize

gress — that is, going one step beyond James MacGregor Burns' (1965) idea that congressional and presidential parties ought to be considered separately, and considering as separate the parties in the House and Senate as well — or one hundred parties (the two parties independently organized in each state with the so-called national parties being no more than umbrella organizations), the United States actually has no political parties at all.\(^1\)

The view advanced here is that, from a structural perspective, American national parties are best understood as being two loose alliances, each consisting of three fundamentally independent organizations. From a more substantive perspective, each of the six organizations exhibits such a low degree of 'partyness' (Katz, 1986: 22-42) that they do not, in fact, constitute national parties.

A complete analysis of this view must contend with three sets of related questions. The first concerns the meaning of 'party' in American politics. What is the official conception of party, and how do the parties conceive of themselves? How do parties relate to American understandings about and expectations for democratic government? Most particularly, how are these conceptions of party manifested, both in the internal organization of the parties and in the role they play in the organization of government? Second, given the picture of party weakness and incoherence that will emerge in response to the first set of questions, why does the form of a two-party system persist in the absence of much substance? And why not just any two parties, but precisely the Democrats and the Republicans?

Obviously, as we move from the first set of questions to the second, the answers must become more speculative and interpretative. This is even more the case with the third set of questions: what are the consequences of the way American parties, and the American party system, are structured? What is the impact of this way of organizing electoral competition on the performance of the parties in government? And, most speculatively of all, to what extent are the trends of the 1980s likely to be reversed with the return, in 1992, of Democratic control of both the White House and the Congress?

As these questions are too interrelated to permit individual consideration of each, the discussion which follows will proceed somewhat fluidly. To begin, three fundamental aspects of American politics which have significantly influenced the place and meaning of American parties will be explored. These are the presidential system and the concomitant doctrine of separation of powers, a basic ambivalence about parties, and federalism.

Fundamental features of American politics

Separation of powers

One of the basic tenets of American political thinking is that 'ambition must be made to counteract ambition' (The Federalist Papers, no. 51). To further this, the executive and legislative branches were made quite distinct from one another, and yet with each one involved in the exercise of those powers that logically belong to the other. The election of the president, although held concurrently with congressional elections, does not depend on their outcome, and in any case only one-third of the Senate is chosen at the same time as the president, and the House of Representatives is renewed halfway through the president's fixed four-year term. Although appointments to the president's cabinet require confirmation by the Senate, this has evolved into a judgement on the nominee's competence and moral/ethical suitability, not the policies of either the president or the nominee, and once confirmed there can be no vote of 'no confidence' leading to resignation or replacement. Analogously, while it is possible to talk about 'presidential coat-tails' affecting the outcome of congressional elections, there has been decreasing evidence of such an impact. It continues to be the case that the president's party tends to lose seats in the House at mid-term elections, but the very regularity of this loss makes it doubtful that these elections can be treated as referenda on presidential performance. The president cannot dissolve Congress and call for new elections; members of the legislative branch are as independent of the executive as he is of them.

Furthermore, the two houses conduct most of their business independently. Each party has two completely separate organizations and two completely independent sets of leaders, one in the House and the other in the Senate. To the (quite limited) extent that the congressional parties as organizations are capable of taking positions or reaching accommodations, the positions of a party in one chamber may well be repudiated by its nominal co-partisans in the other.

The veto power makes the president a major player in the legislative process, while his power of appointment gives him important leverage in local, as well as national, politics. At the same time, Congress retains tremendous power not only over the general content of legislation, but especially through detailed control of appropriations, over the particular geographic pattern of federal spending, and over the conduct of the bureaucracy. Thus it is both politically practical for Congress to act independently of the executive and reasonable for voters to apply different criteria to the choice of president and the choice of representatives. And once the voters do apply different criteria for different offices, it is also reasonable for politicians, both as candidates and in office, to respond accordingly.

One consequence of the separation of powers and independent election of the president, House of Representatives and Senate is the possibility of divided government (each party in 'control' of at least one of those organs). Divided government is not a new phenomenon: different parties controlled at least one of the three organs of government for twenty-eight of the hundred years between 1868 and 1968, but this was always a
relatively short-lived situation (in no case was there divided control for more than six consecutive years) and, moreover, one that could cut either way. Since 1968, however, divided government in the specific form of a Republican president and a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives (and usually in the Senate as well) became the norm, with the four years of the Democratic Carter presidency the only exception and with general consensus not only among political analysts, but among party politicians themselves, that there was little prospect either for the Democrats to win the White House or to lose control of the House of Representatives in the foreseeable future. While the election of Bill Clinton as president in 1992 proved this consensus to have been wrong, the belief that the Republicans were the natural party of the presidency and the Democrats the natural party of Congress has strongly shaped the organization and behavior of both parties. Even before this, however, the separation of powers was reflected in the organization of the parties, as will be discussed below.

Ambivalence toward parties

American political culture is profoundly ambivalent about political parties. The Founding Fathers wasted no time in organizing political parties to oppose one another, but 'if there was one point of political philosophy upon which these men, who differed on so many things, agreed quite readily, it was their common conviction about the baneful effects of the spirit of party' (Hofstadter, 1970: 3). On one hand, something to transcend the divisions wrought by the separation of powers is necessary if there is to be any effective government at all, while on the other hand, party can represent the seed of precisely the kind of national majority faction against which a large and diverse republic was supposed to protect.

Ambivalence about party is reflected in American attitudes toward representation. Members of Congress see themselves, and are seen by their constituents, primarily as agents of their districts or states, rather than as members of national organizations taking collective responsibility for government. Even presidential candidates, whose constituency is national, and who are expected to attend to the national interest, are seen more as individuals than as partisans. In most democracies to say 'I vote for the candidate, not the party' would be regarded as evidence of political immaturity; in the United States it is exactly the reverse. Indeed one explanation for the persistence of divided government in the 1980s stems from the different expectations of the people for the two branches of government coupled with their failure to see the collective records of the parties as more important than the individual records of the candidates. Given a choice between representing local interests and remaining loyal to the position of a national party, there is little doubt in the minds of either voters or members of Congress that party should give way. In contrast to the British understanding of elections as contests between cohesive teams, the American understanding is that there are many circumstances in which a member who placed party loyalty above constituency interests would be betraying the trust of the voters.

Especially with the rise of urban (and occasionally rural) political machines in the late nineteenth century, a second ambivalence about political parties came to the fore, that is a perception that party organizations illegitimately interposed themselves between the people and their representatives, and, moreover, were fundamentally corrupt and self-serving. This feeling had two particular roots beyond the obvious experience with organizations like Tammany Hall in New York. One was the belief that the relationship between representative and constituent should be direct and should also exist between the representative and all citizens in the constituency, not just those who had voted for the winner; hence it should not be mediated by divisive organizations like parties. The other was the identification of party with those who voted for it, rather than with formal members or even less with committee members or other party officials, many of whom held no publicly elected office at all. More generally, antipathy toward party organizations in the Populist and Progressive eras of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was part of a wider antipathy toward all concentrations of power. At the same time, the Populists and Progressives recognized that parties were necessary to structure elections, especially in a context in which many offices were to be filled. Thus they adopted the same approach toward political parties that they applied to railroads and other 'public utilities'; while nominally left in the private sector, they were subjected to a battery of regulations that in some respects appended them to the state apparatus. Like the separation of powers, this ambivalence about party and particularly the imposition of state authority on parties, is reflected in their organizations.

Federalism

The most fundamental point about federalism as a factor conditioning the character of American parties is simply that the states are extremely important, both as loci for political careers and as independent decision-makers. Although there are more than 500,000 directly elected officials in the United States, fewer than 600 of these hold office at the federal level (Department of Commerce, 1991), and only two, the president and vice-president, contest elections which are truly national in orientation. The vast majority of appointive offices also are located in state and local governments. Moreover, while the presidency clearly is the top political job, career histories suggest that a state governorship is generally considered preferable to a seat in the House of Representatives and in some cases the Senate. One reason is that the states are, in fact, quite powerful. The national government has few supervisory powers with regard to the
states beyond those embodied in the 'strings attached' to various federal programmes of grants-in-aid. The states remain important loci of power and independent decision-making in a wide range of policy fields, including many of the most emotionally charged.

The second point about American federalism is that it has engendered conflicts of interest between the federal government and the governments of the states. While this is true to some extent in all federal systems, its significance is heightened in the United States by the fact that those in office in the states generally do not expect to move to the national level, and thus are singularly unlikely to be sympathetic to the federal position. In particular and most recently, as the Reagan and Bush administrations tried to balance the federal budget by shifting responsibilities, but not the revenue to discharge them, to the states, the interests even of Republican state governors diverged significantly from those of the president of their own party.

**Separation of powers, federalism and party organization**

Although it is common in talking about American national parties to look particularly at the national committees of the parties and their staffs, the separation of powers and federalism that characterize American government are also reflected in the organization of the parties. With regard to separation of powers, it is more accurate to say that the United States has six parties at the national level rather than two, three parties calling themselves Democratic and three calling themselves Republican, but all in fact independent. Often, the national committee (corresponding to the central committee or national executive of the typical European party) of each party is taken to be 'the' party organization, and at least implicitly credited with the functions and achievements of other independent party organs (for example, Cotter and Bibby, 1980). In fact, there is a proliferation of party bodies, most of which are not responsible to others, and the party national committees are only the 'national executives' of the presidential parties. Each of the national party labels is also applied to an organization in each house of Congress (here referred to as 'caucuses', although officially all but the House Democratic Caucus are 'conferences'). These are not just the 'parliamentary' wings of a single national party, however, but autonomous organizations with their own professional bureaucracies that independently perform most of the functions normally associated with parties writ large – policy formulation, fund-raising, organizing and managing campaigns, recruiting candidates, etc. There is no claim that the party platform adopted by the national presidential nominating convention is binding on either of the corresponding congressional parties, let alone on their individual members, nor is the presidential party represented in the caucuses when (and if) they adopt policy positions. While the three 'branches' (House, Senate and presidential/national committee) of each party would prefer to have more rather than fewer candidates with the same party label elected in the other arenas, and share some expectation of mutual sympathy, aid and understanding and, at least in general terms, some extremely vague ideological orientations, the similarities end there. Both their constituencies and their objectives are quite distinct. One consequence is that the two party national committees, or the two party organizations in one of the houses of Congress, resemble one another far more in both structure and in operation than do any pair of 'branches' in the same party.

The federal nature of American government is also reflected in the organization of the parties. Genetically, the parties of the national committees are loose federations of state parties that came together in the last century to nominate and support presidential candidates, while the congressional parties are equally loose alliances of congressmen and senators formed even earlier to organize their respective chambers and allocate such things as committee assignments and staff. In all of this, the state remains the basic unit. In both presidential parties the national nominating convention and the national committee are made up of delegates and officers of the state parties. The primacy of the state parties is illustrated by the fact that although their representatives in the conventions or national committees can amend the rules, and thus alter the structure, of the national party, the national party cannot impose any uniformity of either policy or structure on the state parties (except with regard to their delegations to the national conventions and committees – and even this right has only been asserted effectively since the 1970s).

The importance of the state as a political unit is also manifested in the congressional parties (particularly in the House of Representatives, given that there are only two senators from each state). The state delegation, for example, is the basic unit of representation for both the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) and the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC – see p. 43), and while not every state is directly represented on the caucus committees on committees (which assign members of their parties to the standing committees of the corresponding chamber), state delegations (for example, Democratic Representatives from Michigan) are still the basic units grouped to form the constituencies of members of the committees on committees.

While parties are defined at both the national and state levels, the state role is by far the more important. It is the fifty states, rather than the national government, that primarily regulate the conduct of elections at the federal, state and local levels. States started regulating parties far earlier, and the range of party structures and activities governed by state regulations is far broader. Federal involvement in the definition of party really only dates marginally from 1946 or more substantially from 1971, and is primarily the indirect consequence of the regulation of campaign finance.
State conceptions of parties

In broad terms, the states’ ‘official conceptions’ of parties are concerned with two subjects – the nature of the party system, and the organization and operation of individual parties within that system. With regard to the first of these, the states have attempted to institutionalize not just a two-party system, but a system dominated precisely by the Democratic and Republican parties. Although only Delaware and Oklahoma explicitly put the Democrats and Republicans first and second on the ballot, all but four (Alabama, Idaho, Mississippi, Virginia) of the other states using party-oriented ballots implicitly achieve the same result by requiring parties to be listed in order of their voting strength at the last election, by requiring that the ‘major’ parties be listed first, or by allowing an elected state official (that is, a Democrat or a Republican) to determine the order of parties on the ballot. In all states, parties with a set number of registrants and/or votes in the previous election (usually only the Democrats and Republicans) are guaranteed a place on the ballot. New or minor parties generally need to submit petitions signed by substantial numbers of voters before every election. The magnitude of this bias is particularly acute when these state requirements are cumulated to the presidential level. For example, for a new party presidential candidate to have appeared on the ballot in all fifty states plus the District of Columbia in 1992 required at a minimum a total of over 640,000 petition signatures, plus an additional 79,300 registrants (in states for which the number of registrants required is smaller than the number of nominating petition signatures).

Along with advantageous ballot access, the ‘major’ parties are also subject in most states to detailed party laws, establishing their structures and controlling their choice of candidates. In both respects, these laws generally reflect the Progressive era’s hostility to closed party organizations, and tend to treat parties more as semi-public agencies for the organization of elections than as private bodies (agencies of civil society) advocating particular programmes. Moreover, in regulating even the selection and behaviour of state delegations to the national party conventions, they implicitly assert both the confederal nature of the parties and the superiority of state over national authority in the control of parties.3

In general terms, each of the ‘major’ state parties (regulation of ‘minor’ parties often is different or non-existent – indicating that they are not considered ‘real’ parties) has a state central committee (ranging in size from under two dozen to nearly 1000, often with an executive committee, and chosen by county committees, state conventions or primary elections), a state chairman (formally elected by the central committee or a state convention, although frequently in effect named by the governor for his/her own party) and one or more lower tiers of county, city, ward, district or precinct committees (most often filled by primary elections) (Beck and Sorauf, 1992). Since participation in the primary elections or local caucuses that form the base of all the many state variants on this theme is open to any voter who meets quite minimal requirements (themselves set by state law rather than by the parties and in some cases allowing participation by people who need never make any pretense of party affinity or affiliation), the possibility of a strong, stable and professional party organization might appear to be limited. In addition, the independence of American elected officials from their party organizations, and the use of the direct primary to determine partisan nominations, means that the party organizations have very restricted direct relevance to government or policy. On the other hand, elections of party officials and participation in party caucuses is generally of such low salience that a relatively stable group of party activists usually remains in control.

Although this structure might suggest strong affinity between American party organization and the mass membership party model, there is a fundamental difference with regard to the notion of party membership. The states generally adopted the Progressive era equation of party registration, or even more of party voting, with party membership. However, party affiliation on the electoral register differs from membership in several important respects. The parties exercise no control over registration; they cannot impose requirements or expel disloyal ‘members’. Although affiliation with a party entails a public declaration of intent to affiliate, no other form of commitment is required; party registrants pay no dues, generally make no declaration of loyalty and need attend no meetings (indeed, there rarely are any meetings). Registrars often acquire no special position within the party’s decision-making structures; although nominations generally are made by primary election, in only twenty-six of the fifty states is participation in the primary restricted to those who have previously (in some cases as little as ten days before) affiliated with the party. In many states there is no partisan registration at all, leaving the notion of party membership even more vacuous. Indeed, in a recent court case that indirectly speaks volumes about the parties’ conceptions of themselves, the Supreme Court ruled that the state of Connecticut could not prohibit the Republican Party from allowing voters registered as independents from voting in its primary elections (Tashjian v. Republican Party of Connecticut, 479 US 1024 [1986]).

This ‘empty vessel’ conception of parties is also clear with regard to candidate selection. For all major offices except the presidency, this is virtually always by primary election (again with the right to participate, either as candidate or as voter, beyond the control of the party organizations). Indeed, far from being able to name, or even vet, nominees, in a few cases state law has prohibited the party organizations even from endorsing particular candidates in the primaries. The result, and the intended result, is that basic electoral competition is with few exceptions between two candidates, one called the ‘Democrat’ and the other called the ‘Republican’, but neither chosen by a party with any organizational control over their selection, campaigns, or actions in office. As Ripley observes (1983: 76, emphasis in original), Congressional elections are less
national contests than they 'are local events with national consequences and (sometimes) [ . . . ] influenced by national events. Local candidates by and large are responsible for their own electoral fates. . . .'

The federal conception of parties

Federal involvement in the definition of party revolves around four, not entirely consistent, themes. The first is a clearly non-party conception of politics. For example, the only regulation of political broadcasting is the 'equal access' rule of the Federal Communications Act, which refers only to legally qualified candidates. Similarly, the primary reporting unit for the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) is the candidate committee, and indeed compliance with the law requires that candidates form their own committees rather than relying on pre-existing party organizations; spending by a party on behalf of one of its candidates is not regarded as a 'normal' party activity, but rather as a contribution to the candidate's own campaign.

The second, and somewhat contradictory, theme appears in the composition of the independent regulatory commissions, like the Federal Communications Commission or the Federal Election Commission. Here a bipartisan conception of politics is enshrined in the requirement that no more than half the members of a commission come from the same political party. One result is that the president may have to appoint members to fill positions allocated to the other party. The third theme is the institutionalization of the division of the national parties into separate national committee, House and Senate organizations. Since the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946, the Democratic and Republican parties have received public financial support for their congressional policy committees. This support is not channeled through the party national committees, however, but goes directly to the party organizations in the two chambers of Congress. The fourth, and most important, part of the federal 'official conception' of parties is embodied in FECA. In the course of regulating the activities of candidates for federal office, FECA has a number of provisions which collectively suggest federal, but nonetheless broadly coherent, parties, each headed by its national committee. In addition, FECA reinforces the bias already noted in state laws in favour of the Democratic and Republican parties.

FECA provides public funding for party activities in conjunction with presidential campaigns under three headings. First, each major party is entitled to $2 million plus cost of living adjustments since 1974 for its presidential nominating convention; in 1992, this amounted to about $11 million for each party. Second, presidential candidates who voluntarily accept FECA's general election spending limits ($20 million adjusted for inflation; in 1992, $55 million), receive that amount as a grant from the government. Third, candidates for a party's presidential nomination can receive federal funds to match money raised in private donations. This is available to any candidate, of any party, who meets in each of twenty states the requirement of having raised at least $5000 in donations of less than $250 each. For the first two types of support, however, FECA distinguishes among 'major parties' (those whose presidential candidate received at least 25 per cent of the popular vote in the previous election, that is, the Democrats and Republicans), 'minor parties' (those whose candidate received more than 5 per cent but less than 25 per cent of the popular vote, that is, generally none), and 'new parties' (all others, for example, Libertarians, or in 1992 Ross Perot). Major parties and their candidates receive full and equal funding in advance; minor parties and their candidates receive proportionately reduced funding, also in advance; new party candidates can receive general election funding based on their share of the vote in the current election, if they receive at least 5 per cent of the vote in that election (and thus qualify as minor parties for the next election as well), but this money is paid only after the fact.

The general election subvention is paid to the candidates' own campaign committees, not to their parties, and so while reinforcing the hegemony of the Democratic and Republican labels it does not strengthen the parties as organizations, and indeed is suggestive of a non-party conception of presidential elections even as it entrenches the existing two major parties. Other FECA provisions, however, were explicitly intended to strengthen the parties as organizations, and reflected discontent (at least among professional party politicians) with the success that the Progressive reforms and earlier federal finance legislation had in eviscerating the parties. In addition to providing public funding for presidential campaigns, the law regulates both contributions to political committees and candidates for any federal office as well as expenditures on behalf of such candidates. In doing so, however, the law distinguishes between party committees and other political committees or individuals. With regard to contributions, national and state party committees are allowed to make unlimited contributions to one another, while all other donors are limited in what they can give. Moreover, FECA allows an individual to contribute up to $20,000 per year to a political party, but only $5000 per year to a Political Action Committee (PAC) and $1000 per year to a candidate. Nonetheless, by subjecting each individual's total political contributions to a $25,000 annual limit, the law makes it unlikely that individuals will give anything like the full legal amount to a party, since that would only leave $5000 for all candidates and PACs where individuals might expect their contributions to make a greater difference to the causes they wish to support.

Looking at expenditures, the law distinguishes two categories of expenditure: independent and coordinated, the difference lying in the 'knowledge and consent' of candidates and their organizations. On the premise that a candidate bearing a party label and that party's organization(s) are necessarily in communication with each other, the law assumes that expenditures made by political parties on behalf of candidates cannot be without the candidates' knowledge and consent. Therefore, party expendi-
tures are considered to be 'coordinated' with the individual campaigns, and carry absolute (although reasonably generous) limits in the law. On the other hand, non-party organizations (read: PACs), which do not nominate candidates, are assumed to be able to make 'independent' campaign expenditures for or against a candidate without his/her knowledge and consent. Since 1976, when the Supreme Court ruled limitations on independent expenditures to violate the First Amendment, these expenditures have been unlimited (Buckley v. Valeo).

As originally understood, the language of FECA allows only 'the national committee of a political party and a State committee of a political party, including any subordinate committee of a State committee' (2 USC § 441a) to make coordinated expenditures. In 1982, however, the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC, the congressional campaign committee of the Republicans in the Senate, but, like the other three committees, technically an extra-congressional organization, not simply a committee of the Republican Conference) won the right to spend the amount of money legally allowed for 'coordinated expenditures' by the national and state parties, provided the national committee and state parties agreed to the arrangement. It was a relatively simple matter to get both the national and most of the state committees to enter into these agency agreements; they simply did not have the time, desire or money to pursue congressional coordinated expenditures themselves.

The original law clearly implied the dominance of the national committees. The development of agency agreements, however, reinforced the separation of congressional campaigns both from the national committees and from the state party organizations. Although formally they made the Congressional Campaign Committees (CCCs) agents of the national committees and state parties, in practice they both the principals out of the congressional campaign business altogether. Rather than begging for funds from the national committees and state parties and offering advice on how party funds should be allocated, the CCCs became agents for the raising of money as well as its disbursement, and once they had developed their own fund-raising operations the CCCs directed the disbursement of the funds raised without further reference to their nominal principals.

Finally, FECA is most pro-party in what it fails to limit. Expenditures by state and local parties for voter registration, get-out-the-vote drives and other party-building purposes are exempted from the limits applied to other activities, effectively allowing individuals, PACs and, in some cases, corporations and unions to make unlimited contributions. Moreover, since 1979 the national parties have been able to use this exemption (known as 'soft money') to accept unlimited contributions provided that they are passed through to the states. As a result, in 1988 at least 375 people were able to contribute $100,000 or more to one or the other of the major parties (Magleby and Nelson, 1990: 19).

Despite the complexity of this picture, there is an important element of commonality that runs throughout both the state and the federal concep-

tions of party. That is, American parties are officially conceived as organizations that provide services, both to candidates and to democracy, but not as organizations that themselves run campaigns. They are seen as providing a framework for the choice of candidates (which in some cases they are legally barred from trying to influence); as structuring electoral choice both through the physical organization of the ballot and through campaigns asking for undifferentiated support of the primary winners, whoever they may be; as getting out the vote; as helping candidates raise money; and as acting as a wholesale provider of services for candidates. The actual direction of campaigns, however, is presumed to be the province of the candidates acting as individuals.

The organization of American national parties

Presidential parties

On the surface, the two presidential party organizations are quite similar, and closely follow the 'normal' model of a membership-based party. Formally, the highest governing body of each of the two presidential parties is its quadrennial national convention. The convention chooses the presidential and vice-presidential nominees (and thus the closest approximation in the American system to the party leader), approves the party platform drafted by one of its own committees, and installs the party's national committee to conduct the party's business between conventions. Until 1972, the conventions also had sole power to amend the national party rules; since then, the Democrats have allowed the Democratic National Committee (DNC) to amend the party charter by a two-thirds vote (as opposed to simple majority in the convention). Each of the party national committees in turn elects the party's national chairman, and each also has an executive committee composed of a small number of national committee members, plus representatives of other party-affiliated organizations.

At a deeper level, however, the similarity between American presidential parties and the European membership party model rapidly begins to fade. Most fundamentally, as observed above, there are no party members in any real sense. Although there are a variety of auxillary organizations, many of these are associations of elected officials rather than ordinary citizens (for example, the Democratic Governors Conference) or exist only on paper for the purpose of giving the appearance of ethnic or other representation. Others are 'clubs' of contributors, whose members have no special rights within the party except the right to be solicited for even larger contributions.

In their self-conceptions, the national parties are associations of state parties. Convention delegates are apportioned among the state parties with regard to state population, but also (perhaps reflecting the equation of electoral supporters and members) to previous support for the party's
candiates. The allocation rules have changed frequently, ostensibly to improve the fairness of the process and to improve the competitive quality of the eventual nominee, but more generally to try to cement the position of whatever group is currently on top. One constant, however, is that in neither party does partisan registration, as the closest American equivalent to party membership, have any bearing on state delegation size. Over the period from 1960 through 1990, the Democrats have gradually increased the weight given to states with strong records of support for the presidential ticket while the Republicans have increased the weight given to population (in the guise of number of congressional districts); moreover, while the Democrats have averaged success over the three previous presidential elections, the Republicans have considered only the immediately preceding election cycle and have given (since 1976) bonus delegates to states electing Republican senators, governors and House delegation majorities as well as to states whose electoral votes went to the Republican presidential nominee. Thus, as divided government became more firmly established, each of the parties rewarded those states in which it had done well, but with particular weight given to the arena (presidential or congressional) in which it was doing poorly overall.

At the beginning of the 1960s, the national conventions were in a real sense assemblies of the delegates of state party organizations. Through 1968, thirty-eight states chose all or a substantial part of their national convention delegates in state conventions or state party committees; only fifteen states (plus the District of Columbia) had primary elections in which the names of the presidential candidates themselves appeared on the ballot, and in only six of these was the result binding on the state delegation. Eventually, in 1980, the Democrats permitted a state party to instruct its delegation to vote as a bloc, regardless of the wishes of the minority. The formal structure of the Republican convention has changed far less than the Democratic, in part because the Republicans have maintained the rule that only the National Convention can change the rules for subsequent conventions, but also because their string of presidential victories until 1992 gave them less incentive to reform their rules. In place of the Democratic requirement of gender equality, the Republicans in 1976 adopted equality as a target, supplemented in 1980 by an explicit statement that this target was not to be taken as a quota. Reflecting this difference, the female proportion of Republican delegates has never exceeded 44 per cent, and in 1988 had fallen to 35 per cent. On the other hand, because many of the changes in Democratic Party rules could only be implemented by changing state election laws, they have come to affect the Republican Party as well. Thus, primary elections have become the principal determiner of Republican convention delegates, although in many states the Republicans have retained some form of winner-take-all system, rather than the proportionality required by Democratic Party rules. As a result, in neither party is it any longer possible (as it clearly was in the 1950s and early 1960s) for a candidate to 'skip the primaries' and still be nominated; nor, given the winning of the candidate field through the protracted primary and caucus process, does it appear credible that there will be in the foreseeable future a convention that does other than ratify on the first ballot the pre-ordained choice.

Although the form of the state delegation remains, one effect of these reforms has been to change fundamentally the role of the delegates, from representatives of state parties to representatives of individual candidates and those candidates' own campaign organizations. Often, for example, state election laws now require a prospective convention delegate to have the prior nomination or approval of the candidate(s) he pledges to support. Especially in the Democratic Party, this changed orientation is directly
reflected in the committees of the national convention as well. Each of the national conventions has (with slight variations in nomenclature) three major standing committees: credentials, rules and platform. Until 1972, each state had equal representation (one man and one woman) on each of the Democrats' standing committees. In 1972, ninety-five additional members were allocated in proportion to the size of the states' convention delegations (again equally divided by gender). The crucial change came in 1976, when allocation of committee seats was made proportional to support for presidential candidates, with each candidate permitted to nominate candidates (who need not be delegates to the convention) for the slots allotted to his supporters. Finally, in 1984 a second tier of committee members was added, elected by the Executive Committee of the Democratic National Committee from among 'Party Leaders and Elected Officials'. The Republicans have retained the principle of equal state representation (from 1964, one man and one woman) on standing committees, but the spread of primaries has also made these far more than in the past the direct agents of presidential candidates.

Although the national conventions nominally install their parties' national committees to act for them between conventions, the national committees' structures reflect the formal nature of the parties as federations of state organizations, and their operation reflects the real nature of the parties as essentially empty frameworks within which individual presidential candidates and their supporters contend for position. Each state nominates members in accordance with party rules for ratification by the national convention. For the Republicans, these rules simply specified that state law or custom be observed, and this has meant tremendous stability in the size and composition of their national committee membership. Since 1960, each state or territory has been represented by one man and one woman. In 1960 and 1964, state party chairmen were also granted membership, provided that state demonstrated its Republican voting strength based on one of several measures. Since 1968, state party chairmen have been members automatically. Thus the size of the Republican National Committee membership fluctuated between 148 in 1960 and 165 in 1988. Until 1968, the Democratic National Committee was similarly structured, and party rules similarly deferred to local practice in the selection of national committee members. Since then, however, the DNC has been in a state of flux. From 1960 through 1968, the DNC consisted of one man and one woman from each state and territory. From 1972 on, the committee has been constituted along the same lines as delegates to the national convention. The state party chair and highest ranking opposite sex member of the state party are automatically members, with 150 additional members being apportioned among the states based on the same formula as specified in the call to the convention for delegates. Also beginning in 1972, an increasing number of representatives of party elected officials, and beginning in 1976 an increasing number of representatives of affiliated organizations (Young Democrats, National Federation of Democratic Women) were given seats on the DNC. Finally, allowance was also made for a number of at-large members to provide 'balanced' representation. Altogether, the DNC had grown to 403 members in 1988.

The real administrative head of the presidential party organization is the National Chairman, who, in particular, hires the staff of the national (committee) party headquarters. Although nominally selected by the national committee, in the president's party the national chairman is effectively a presidential appointee. The basis of this appointive power is not the party rules, but the dominance of the president's supporters within the party as evidenced by his victory at the last national convention and as cemented by the conversion of supporters of his erstwhile opponents within the party. Since the primary purpose of the party as embodied in the national convention and national committee is to choose and support a presidential candidate, it stands to reason that a successful candidate – additionally armed with the president's power of appointment in the governmental sphere – would dominate the national committee organization. The dominance of the defeated presidential candidate, however, disappears with his defeat; hence the chairmanship of the out-party's national committee is more seriously contested, but primarily as a trial of strength among prospective presidential candidates and would-be king-makers.

In practical political terms, the national committees and their chairmen are of some real importance. In the first place, the DNC has the power to change the party's rules, in particular the rules regarding delegate allocation and selection for the next national convention; in doing so, they obviously can advantage some candidates at the expense of others. Secondly, in both parties, the chairman and national committee staff are in regular contact with, and able to provide a variety of resources (especially money and access to money) and services to state parties. In doing this, they can, at least to a limited degree, favour those who are likely to support the 'right' candidate/position at the national level, and more generally can build a base of local information, contacts, and reciprocal favour-doing that can be invaluable in the next campaign for the party's presidential nomination. Thirdly, the national chairman is well positioned to gain access to the media. Particularly when a story calls for presentation of the 'Democratic' and 'Republican' positions, the national chairmen make ideally equivalent spokesmen. Especially here, however, it is also important to underline the limits of the national chairman's power. In neither party can the chairman make binding – or even seriously considered advisory – policy decisions. In the president's party, the national chairman (if he wants to keep his job) can do nothing except serve as a mouthpiece for the White House, although in some cases this may mean doctedly repeating the White House line, in others serving as the ostensible source of 'trial balloons', and in still others serving as one of the many faces a president may want to present to the various elements of a fragile supporting coalition. In the out-party, the chairman has somewhat more
freedom in what he says, but it is a freedom born of marginality and he still can speak for the party only as a well placed insider, not as an authoritative decision-maker.

Congressional parties

In most democratic political systems, the parliamentary party is simply one aspect of the governing face of a national party organization. In the United States, however, the congressional parties are, as already observed, freestanding and independent organizations, in particular performing for their members in their own spheres both of electoral competition and of government the functions performed by the presidential parties for presidential candidates and the president himself. While the congressional parties are represented on the national committees/executive committees of the corresponding presidential parties, this representation, like the committees themselves, is more symbolic than substantive.

Congressional parties also differ from most parliamentary parties in that party discipline is virtually unknown. Relatively few votes divide a majority of one party from a majority of the other, and the average party unity scores (the percentage of the time the member votes with the majority of his/her party) on those votes that do divide the parties generally is barely half way between the theoretical minimum of 0.5 and a perfect 1.0. One reason is that there are virtually no sanctions for breaking party ranks, even when there is an official party (that is, caucus) position—deviants retain their committee and subcommittee chairmanships, office space and staff, as well as their claim on party resources in seeking re-election. As for party leaders denying a rebellious member renomination, that is not within the realm of legal possibility. Indeed, there is not even a particularly strong aspiration toward party unity. Among the four congressional caucuses, the only rules obliging members to support caucus decisions are the House Democrats' rule requiring party unity on the election of Speaker and other officers of the House, and the House Republican rules obliging the ranking Republican member of a committee to 'ensure that each measure on which the Republican Conference has taken a position is managed in accordance with such position' and all members of the Republican leadership 'to support positions adopted by the Conference'.

This is not to say that there are no broad differences between the parties. In Congress, as in the presidential arena, Democrats generally are more ready to use public rather than private means to solve economic problems, while Republicans are more ready to use the power of the state to enforce conformity with social norms; economically, Democrats tend to prefer 'trickle-up' policies (for example, policies like increasing the personal income tax exemption to stimulate demand), while Republicans tend to prefer 'trickle-down' policies (for example, policies like capital gains tax cuts to stimulate investment). There are, however, many apparent excep-


tions in both parties, and in campaigning, as in Congressional policymaking, while the positions taken by party leaders may become identified as the 'party' positions, members are free to depart from them whenever their own perceptions of electoral expedience or desirable policy so dictate. Moreover, the position enunciated by the leaders is likely to be the result of negotiation and brokerage (trying to find a position that most members will accept) rather than centralized decision, and on many important issues there is no party position at all, even in this limited sense.

While the leaders of the presidential party (that is, the presidential candidates) are chosen by the parties' primary voters or state and local caucus participants, the leaders of the congressional parties are chosen by the caucuses themselves. That is to say that although they have constituents in their own districts or states and must win re-election there like any other member of Congress, their only 'constituents' as leaders are the other sitting Senators or Representatives. In this the congressional parties are like many other parliamentary parties. Where they differ is that the leaders chosen by the congressional parties do not in any substantial sense become the leaders of the party outside Congress. Even if party label and image are significant electorally, no congressional candidate is likely to believe that the identity of the party's leader in Congress will make a difference to his/her own fate at the polls. Congressional party leadership and congressional elections are generally independent of one another—except that the 'pork barrel' opportunities, and the required moderation and compromise, of leadership positions can respectably be electoral assets or liabilities for the leaders themselves in their own districts. The closest to an exception is the slight tendency to consider overall party success in deciding whether to retain the chairman of one of the Congressional Campaign Committees. This choice, however, is made after the new Congress has been elected, and hence only those members who were themselves (re)elected, regardless of how disastrous the overall result may have been, can vote.

Each of the caucuses chooses candidates for Speaker (House) and President pro tempore (Senate) and elects the party floor leaders, whips, chairmen of the caucuses (not the same person as the Speaker/majority/minority leader except for the Senate Democrats) and of the various caucus committees. In the Democratic caucuses, these caucus committee chairmanships are all held by the Speaker (except the chairmanship of the House Democratic caucus) or floor leader, while in the Republican caucuses, they are spread among different individuals, perhaps because as the majority party the Democrats have all the standing committees and subcommittee chairmanships to divide among themselves (making party offices appear relatively unimportant) while for the Republicans chairmanships of the various caucus committees are the best offices available. Additionally, the caucuses may meet during the Congress to adopt party policy positions, which, however, are not binding on anyone.

The most important policy-relevant decision of the caucuses is the
assignment of their members to the standing committees of the full chamber, at the beginning of each Congress. For the Democrats, committee assignments are controlled by the two Steering Committees, which are chaired by the Speaker in the House and the Majority Leader in the Senate. The Republicans have a separate Committee on Committees, but basically follow the same procedure, the most significant element of which is that it only applies to new members and senior members seeking new committee assignments. Returning members have a presumptive right to reappointment to the committees on which they served in the previous Congress unless 'bumped' by a reduction in the party's share of the committee seats. Because the committee assignments are based on party, those who are neither Democrats nor Republicans get what is left over at the end – a powerful incentive even for those few candidates elected as independents or on minor party tickets to join either the Democratic or Republican caucus. While this makes party affiliation crucial to the organization and operation of Congress, however, it does not make the party organizations themselves powerful. First, the party caucuses exercise the greatest discretion with freshman members, who have no record of party loyalty for which they can be rewarded or punished. Second, the caucuses are constrained by a variety of norms, for example requiring geographic balance among committee members, that limit their discretion even in the assignment of freshmen. More important, however, is the simple fact that within the congressional parties unity is less important to leaders and followers alike than is the maintenance or achievement of a nominal partisan majority; thus members generally are assigned to the committees that will allow them to be seen attending to their own constituents' needs and interests, even if this is detrimental to overall party cohesion.

Since the mid-1970s, the Democratic (majority) caucus has also designated the chairmen of the standing committees. (The minority Republican House caucus began this practice for the ranking minority member in 1971.)6 Previously, committee assignments and chairmanships were awarded strictly on the basis of seniority. In fact, seniority still is rarely violated, and so only in extreme cases. Anomalously, since 1973 Democratic subcommittee chairmen have been designated by the relevant Democratic committee caucuses, rather than by the committee chairmen, although again generally following a seniority rule. While this marginally increased the power of the caucus, its real effect was to decrease the individual power of committee chairmen, making the process more egalitarian rather than more partisan. Virtually all members of the majority party in the Senate and about half the members in the House chair one or more subcommittees. Especially given this diffusion of chairmanships, caucus members do not want to be bound by party discipline, and thus do not try to impose it on others.

What most underlines the status of the congressional parties as more than simply two additional faces of a single national party in government, is that each has its own, independent, agency for conducting and coordinating campaigns (that is, for performing the extra-parliamentary functions of a political party) separately from, and sometimes in opposition to, the national committee of nominally the same party. These are the four Congressional Campaign Committees (CCCs): the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC: House Democrats); the NRCC (National Republican Congressional Committee: House Republicans); the DSCC (Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee: Senate Democrats); and the NRSC (National Republican Senatorial Committee: Senate Republicans). The CCCs originated in the 1860s to help congressmen campaign independently from the president, and they continue to reflect the electoral separation of the legislative and executive branches today. Originally, they organized speaking tours in support of congressional candidates and sponsored the preparation of issue books laying out and defending policy positions. Later they also 'laundered' contributions from potentially sensitive donors, often accepting contributions in cash, and then passing it on as a cheque drawn on a party bank account. The finance reforms of the 1970s led to significant changes in the CCCs, however. Many of their traditional functions (speaker's bureau and issue books) had already been marginalized. Now their main residual function, the 'laundering' of contributions, became illegal. Moreover, the CCCs became responsible for their own overheads, and they no longer could have subsidized office space in the Capitol, or employees who were paid by the Sergeant-at-Arms or from left-over slots on congressmen's clerk-hire allowances.7

As it became clear that the national committees were not prepared to devote 'adequate' resources to congressional candidates, or to allow the advice of the CCCs to direct the allocation of those resources, one result was the agency agreements discussed earlier. Another was for the CCCs dramatically to strengthen their own fund-raising capacity. With autonomous fund-raising came renewed independence from the national committees. The initial breakthrough came in 1978 with a direct mail campaign instigated by NRCC chairman Guy Vander Jagt. This was so successful (in terms both of money raised and Republican electoral success) that the NRCC was able to aid the debt-ridden NRSC, whose new chairman, Robert Packwood, got on the direct mail bandwagon. The initial Democratic response, based on their continued control of Congress, was, on the one hand, to continue fund-raising as usual (that is, through an annual dinner) and, on the other hand, to attempt to legislate away the CCCs' right to raise money at all. When the legislative attempt failed, and a subsequent attempt to prevent agency agreements by lawsuit also failed, the Democrats emulated the Republicans in soliciting direct mail and PAC contributions.

Structurally, each of the CCCs in the House has at least one member from each state in which the party has representation, although the party leaders may appoint additional members. The chairman and vice-chairman
are selected from among the committee members by a formal vote of the entire party caucus; for the House Democrats, this election is simply the pro forma ratification of the Speaker's choice; the other three caucuses may have serious contests for these positions.

In Herrnson's (1988: 48) view, the CCCs are important because they 'provide their candidates with both direct and brokered services and thereby function as the most important aggregators, distributors, and directors of campaign services and resources in congressional elections'. Two important points must be emphasized, however. First, although the dollar totals provided by the parties to their candidates appear impressive on their own, they are only about 10 per cent of the total spent by candidates. The other services provided by the CCCs may also be less significant than they appear. Indicatively, even former NRSC chairman John Heinz 'preferred to use costly outside consultants rather than free “in-house” advisers in his re-election campaigns. “He never used the services of the NRSC when he ran”' (Luntz, 1988: 140, quoting Republican media consultant John Deardourff). Second, the primary criteria influencing the distribution of CCC resources are incumbency and 'winnability'; notable by its absence is any consideration of party loyalty, either in congressional behaviour or in campaign platform. Moreover, the 1990 NRCC experiment with channelling resources to targeted open seats (and thus away from incumbents) has been interpreted as one of the stimuli to a challenge to Guy Vander Jagt's re-election as chairman. Although the challenge was unsuccessful, the experience is likely to result in even greater concentration on incumbents in the future. Again, those who are re-elected without CCC help are unlikely to be grateful (an incentive to give to incumbents, who are likely to win), while those who are defeated (most challengers) cannot vote for caucus leadership positions. All of the CCCs offer advice about the selection of issues and issue positions. What is most striking about this advice, however, is that it is tailored to the candidate's own position. While pre-packaged issue papers are made available to candidates who request them, a candidate who opposes the party's position will be given help in advancing his own, contrary, position - although, more often, a candidate who does not accept the position identified with the party will simply seek advice elsewhere.

By most standards, it is hard to call congressional parties 'parties' rather than 'cliques'. In one arena, party discipline is absolute: the organization of the chambers, and therefore the selection of committee and subcommittee chairs. But, unlike policy, these are basically individual, rather than collective, rewards, and so cooperation among co-partisans in competition with the other party is easy. The organizing function itself is performed at the beginning of each Congress, and is in effect over by the next day; only its consequences for the subsequent operation of Congress and for its ultimate policy decisions, profound though they may be, but also indirect and in some respects even unintended, linger on.

Party Organization as an Empty Vessel

Party staff

The two key features of American party bureaucracies are transience and personal ties. There is virtually no permanent staff. Although vast numbers of people are employed in American 'party' politics (for example, the budgets for administrative and legislative assistance of the eight senators representing the four smallest states total to more than the staff budget of the entire British Labour party), most are not employees of any of the party organizations per se, but rather are employed by individual representatives or working as independent contractors, and even those individuals who are nominally employed by the parties more often in reality work for individual leaders. American parties, at least as represented by the staffs of their national committees and congressional caucuses and CCCs, are less permanent organizations than they are blank organization charts or, even better, empty suites of offices waiting to be filled from a pool of political professionals who float between various party structures, the personal staff of individual politicians and independent consultancy, but who have no fixed attachment to the party as a permanent organization. And reflecting the division of American parties among presidential, senatorial and House organizations, these suites of offices are physically separated - on separate floors in the case of the DNC, DCCC and DSCC, and in the case of the RNC and NRCC, but with a completely separate building in the case of the NRSC.

Looking first at the staff of the national committees, what the winner of an American presidential election gets from the party is not the use of a pre-existing staff, but the use of the party headquarters building to house his own staff, as well as access to the party's bank accounts to pay them. The people working at RNC headquarters in 1991 and 1992, for example, did not describe themselves as the staff of the Republican National Committee, but rather as the staff of George Bush's National Committee. On the Democratic side, on the other hand, the DNC was staffed by people who had little previous connection with Bill Clinton, and Clinton's campaign was conducted essentially without reference to the national party organization. Even for such non-sensitive questions as the candidate's schedule, one had to contact his own headquarters in Arkansas, and the DNC chairman, Ron Brown, was reduced to doing 'colour commentary' after one of the candidate debates on public television. By 1996, however, one can predict that the DNC will have become Bill Clinton's organization, and will be populated by many of the people who in 1992 were working in Little Rock.

The staff of the congressional parties is more fragmented than that of the national committees. The vast majority are staff aides to individual members of congress. Reflecting the absence of a strong hierarchy of congressional leadership, some staffers work for the party (majority or minority) leaders, some for the parties (caucuses) per se (which is to say for their chairmen, who, except in the case of the Senate Democrats, are not
the majority or minority leaders), and still others for the CCCs (again effectively for their chairmen). Just as the election of a new president results in virtually complete turnover of the national committee staff (as does the election of a new national chairman after a presidential defeat), these congressional aides all expect to be replaced whenever the relevant leadership position changes hands.

Complementing the relatively limited job possibilities and the insecurity that this implies, the United States has a large and expanding market for ex-party bureaucrats as independent consultants, lobbyists and news media commentators. Indeed, far from being a career, working within one of the three organizations of each of the parties is more generally an apprenticeship, during which the experience and contacts required for a subsequent independent career are acquired. Generally speaking, therefore, the functions normally performed by long-term officials employed by a party organization in other systems are performed in the United States by independent contractors in the short-term employ of individual candidates. This is probably the one area in which the partisan nature of American politics is often understated, however. While these independent consultants have no formal ties to party organizations, they are not for the most part people with no independent convictions available for hire by the highest bidder. Rather, there are Democratic pollsters and Republican pollsters, Democratic media consultants and Republican media consultants, and they advertise themselves as such, for example, in the campaign-professional trade press. But, like the congressional parties, these party ties are often more nominal than substantive, and refer more to vague tendencies than to concrete ideologies or fixed policy positions.

Why does the two-party system persist?

Given the weakness of the two American parties just described, one might well wonder why they persist at all. In part the answer has already been given. The two parties enjoy a panoply of important advantages, and benefit from a variety of institutional barriers to the entry of any new parties. Officials elected on the slates of the two parties are, of course, the ones who gave themselves these advantages. In doing so, however, they could justify what were essentially self-serving actions with reference to a strong cultural understanding of democracy as being best served by a choice between exactly two alternatives.

The nature of media coverage of campaigns also contributes to the two-party monopoly of public office. Since no free time is provided to candidates, candidates must rely on the editorial decisions of journalists to gain exposure beyond that which they can afford to buy. Although broadcasters do not restrict coverage to the candidates of the major parties on those grounds, they do tend to limit coverage to candidates that they regard as 'viable', which is usually the same thing. In 1992, for example, four candidates for president – Bill Clinton (Democrat), George Bush (Republican), Ross Perot (Independent) and Andre Marrou (Libertarian) – appeared on the ballot in all fifty states. Only the first three received serious news coverage, however, the first two as the major party candidates, and Perot largely because his wealth allowed him direct access to both the media and the public.

The impact of these factors is reinforced by the absence of any significant countervailing pressures. It is almost always easier for an insurgent to secure a place on the primary ballot of one of the major parties than to get on the general election ballot as an independent or new party candidate, and to win both the primary and then the general election as a major party candidate than to win the general election as a minor party candidate. Yet to pursue the major party route to office requires no sacrifice of independence. Thus, American general elections remain primarily a series of simultaneous contests between pairs of party-labelled, but not party-bound, candidates.

Ironically, however, while the two parties have built themselves virtually impenetrable barriers against challenge by new parties, they are both terribly vulnerable to being taken over from within. At the presidential level, this can be illustrated by considering the success of 'outsider' Jimmy Carter in winning the Democratic nomination in 1976, the reaction of conservative Republicans to Ronald Reagan's failure to obtain the party's nomination in the same year, or the strategy of Jackson Democrats in the 1980s. For other offices, the legally imposed openness of the parties can leave their leaders unable to prevent the party's label from being appropriated by candidates they view as loathsome, as is demonstrated by the 1990 senatorial and 1991 gubernatorial campaigns of former Nazi and Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard, David Duke, under the Republican banner in Louisiana (and his subsequent entry into several 1992 Republican presidential primaries).

Questions for the future

Whether or not the old saw that American parties are like two bottles on a shelf, one labelled 'whisky' and the other labelled 'milk', but both empty, accurately describes the policies of the Democrats and the Republicans, it surely fits their organizations. Moreover, the two bottles, although each quite complicated and variegated, are remarkably similar to one another. In one important respect, however, the two party bottles have become more different, at least in the period from 1968 to 1992. Although political scientists kept looking for a realignment of party identification that never came, there nonetheless developed an expectation born of experience that the Republicans would control the White House and the Democrats would control Congress. This expectation arguably had important consequences for the parties and their leaders.
For the Democrats, permanent Republican control of the White House meant that the congressional leaders became accustomed to an adversarial rather than a collaborative relationship with the president and, moreover, to a relationship in which their majority forced the president to treat them with considerable respect and deference. The idea that the national chairman might be a first rank party leader never being seriously entertained, they also became used to being the highest authorities in the party, with no expectation that they ought to support 'the leader of their party'. Therefore the first question to be asked now is whether the Democrats in Congress will be prepared to accept the less prominent role of supporters of a Democratic president or whether, alternatively, they have become so accustomed to the independence and power of their majority-in-opposition status that they treat a Democratic president in much the same way they treated Republicans. The latter case, which was foreshadowed by relations between Jimmy Carter and the Democratic Congresses he faced, would clearly further the six-party model. (At the same time, one lesson that might be drawn from the Carter years is that the price of failure to hang together is twelve years of Republican presidencies, and this might deter repetition of the experience.)

The behaviour of 'ordinary' members of the Democratic caucuses was also affected. Although other factors also contributed to the trend, the absence of a Democratic presidential programme to support contributed to the fragmentation of congressional authority (for example, the proliferation of subcommittees and the devolution of power to their chairmen). Divided control contributed to the opportunities for individual deals as the Republican White House tried to build support that of mathematical necessity had to cut across party lines and thus for the tendency of members of Congress to emphasize constituency service and the delivery of particular economic benefits (that is, the kind of 'quid' the White House could offer in exchange for the 'quo' of roll-call support) both in Congress and in their campaigns. To the extent that this continues under a Democratic administration, it would favour the no-party, or empty framework, model.

Under a Democratic administration, the Republicans have been freed from any expectation of supporting a president who was forced to compromise with the Democrats and are more able to unify as a principled opposition. Moreover, since there continues to be no appreciable chance of Republican majorities in Congress, national power for Republicans, as individuals as well as collectively, requires that they recapture the White House. This, in turn, should encourage even members of Congress to address the national, presidential, constituency (at least more than the Democrats, who are more prone to address their individual, local, constituencies). If they do this, it would further the two-party model. Alternatively, however, denied the possibility of influence through the White House (in exchange for loyalty) or the patronage resources of the executive branch, Republicans in Congress could see that their permanent minority status means they will be completely marginalized unless they come to individual arrangements on individual issues. In this case, the result would further the no-party model. This alternative is the more consistent with previous experience. But as with the Carter experience, there is an evident downside. One clear consequence of the accommodating attitude of Republicans who had come to terms with their permanent minority status was the 'Reagan revolution' at the primary ballot boxes that displaced many of them.

Underlying, and reflected in, these observations is perhaps the most important consequence of persistent divided government. It meant that partisan conflict between Democrats and Republicans came to coincide with rather than cross-cut institutional conflict between the legislative and executive branches. This is significant in the context of party organization because emphasis on, or dominance of, the presidential wing of a party is more consistent with the two-party model while emphasis on, or dominance of, the legislative wings of a party is more consistent with the six-party and, indeed, the no-party models. The implication of this, that the Republicans should have become more party-like and the Democrats less so over the twenty-four years from 1968 to 1992, is true in general terms. The question is whether this tendency will continue, especially if 1992 marks the return of extended Democratic dominance rather than simply another four-year hiatus.

Notes

1 This chapter is concerned with state parties only to the extent that they are constitutive parts of the national parties. Thus, the hundred-party model is only of indirect concern. The central focus is on the distinction among the two-party, six-party, and no-party conceptions as relevant in national (presidential and congressional) politics.

2 The degree to which the congressional parties in general, and the congressional campaign committees in particular, perform these functions actually is quite limited (Katz and Kolodny, 1992). The point is that the national committees are no more effective in performing these functions, either at the congressional or presidential levels, because American political campaigns are overwhelmingly candidate- rather than party-oriented.

3 Although state law continues to control the selection of national convention delegates, the courts have ruled that the national parties may impose rules to which state selection processes must conform, and that the national conventions may refuse to seat delegations selected otherwise.

4 In addition, presidential preference primaries were optional in Alabama and Arkansas. In the latter case, the outcome would be binding on the delegation.

5 The Republicans have, and the Democrats until 1972 had, a standing committee on permanent organization as well.

6 The ranking minority member is the senior member of the committee from the minority party. In general, this person has control over the part of the committee staff assigned to the minority (as the committee chairman has control over the rest of the staff).

7 It is for this reason that the CCCs technically are not committees of the caucuses.

8 In the context of American television coverage of the debates, for Ron Brown to have appeared on public television indicates that none of the 'real' networks, including CNN, thought he was important enough to interview.
References


