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FRANK J. SORAUF

IN

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PARTY POLITICS IN AMERICA

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Preface

For almost 200 years, political parties have been key actors in the American political process. Both in what they are and what they do, they have contributed significantly to the shape of American politics. At the same time, the nature of American politics and the broader sociocultural environment in which it has operated have placed their indelible stamp upon the political parties. As much as they have been able to influence their world, parties have even more been the products of it. The longevity of the American two-party system and the Democratic and Republican parties within it, in a nation that has experienced enormous changes since its founding, are testimony to their remarkable capacity to adapt to the changing conditions around them. The American parties have indeed shown keen instincts for survival.

Recent decades have posed stern tests to the adaptability of the American parties and the American party system. The quintessential party organization, the political machine, has been driven to the verge of extinction. With the rise of television as the political medium of choice by politicians and voters, the domination of nominations by the direct primary, and the increasing individualism of already-weakly-bridled legislators, American politics, in recent times, became more candidate- and less party-centered than ever before—and candidates always have enjoyed more independence of operation here than in other democracies. Moreover, a citizenry that has characteristically looked askance at parties, even as it has depended upon them, has become less party-oriented.

The parties, as they have done time and time again in American history, have risen to these challenges. They have confronted some of them directly. The demands of the new campaigning in a television-centered world, for example, have been met by the parties' enhanced sophistication in modern-day techniques, especially in the national committees and their congressional counterparts. The U.S. Congress seems to have recoiled from the rampant individualism of a few years ago by giving new authority to the instrumentalities of the party. Local party organizations have been boosted by financial support from higher level committees.

The parties have confronted other challenges indirectly, by adapting what they do and ultimately what they are to the new realities. Their organizations have turned into candidate service centers, for instance, assisting candidates rather than controlling them in the electoral process. These organizations too have become more centralized at the national level, overcoming a long tradition of decentralization and localism in party politics. Pushed to the periphery by

PACs and individual donors as dispensers of campaign capital support, they have responded by performing as "match makers" in bringing donors to the candidates. To counter the centrifugal tendencies of individualism, the legislative parties have invigorated their party caucuses rather than extend powers to party oligarchs.

Since the parties have adapted to the new realities, it is difficult to say whether they now are stronger or weaker than before. They have changed, to be sure. But in the time-honored way of American party politics, whether these adaptations have enhanced or enervated the parties resists a straightforward answer in the short run and requires an evaluation of their roles in a broader political context.

The seventh edition of *Party Politics in America* continues the story told in earlier editions of how the American parties have been both influenced by and responsive to their environment—and what this implies for party politics in America. This is necessarily a story of persistence and of change. Persisting for over 150 years has been a competitive system of two largely decentralized parties straining to comfortably combine organizational, voter, and office-holder sectors. Over most of this period, the system has been dominated by the same two parties, and they dominate today more than ever. Yet American party politics always seems to be in a state of flux. Buffeted by the crises of the American polity, pounded by the powerful tides of political reform and electoral realignment, pushed and pulled by the needs and demands of an everchanging American population, it has hardly stood still for very long.

The revised edition of *Party Politics in America* addresses both this persistence and this change, as any comprehensive treatment of the American parties must. Continuity in essential features of the American parties allows the same theoretical framework that has distinguished past editions to shape this one as well. For all that has changed, the parties remain the tripartite combinations of organizations, public officials, and electorates that they always have been in the American context. Much of party politics also continues to involve the sometimes cooperative, sometimes conflictual interaction among these parts, as well as between them and other intermediaries (especially interest groups) in the electoral process. This tripartite structure and the interaction of parts within it remains the central organizing theme of the seventh edition.

To reflect changes in the American parties and the burgeoning research literature on them since 1987, however, this book has been significantly revised from the sixth edition. The chapters covering the party organizations and the parties in the electoral process have been reordered and reorganized. Throughout the volume, certain topics now receive more extensive treatment: for example, divided government, which has become the central political reality of our time; the effects of the mass media; recent changes in the presidential nomination process; the impact of the Reagan and early Bush years; the techniques and realities of the new campaigning; and the recent renaissance in the party organizations. In a multitude of small yet significant changes, moreover, the seventh edition also incorporates the developments, research findings, and altered conceptualizations of party politics that have emerged in the last four years.

The everchanging nature of the parties is matched by a large and rich research literature on them—to which there have been significant additions since 1987. Capturing both is a challenging task, especially in a way that makes the subject matter accessible to undergraduate students yet not oversimplified in the view of a professional audience. Considerable effort was devoted to making this edition more readable than the last by removing outdated material, recasting difficult passages, and adding new material. It is left for readers to judge the success of these efforts.

Any book is the work of many hands beyond those of the author, and this one is no exception. My greatest debt is to Frank Sorauf, who five years ago generously bequeathed to me the textbook that had been so formative of my own understandings of American political parties. I hope that the sixth edition and this new seventh edition, both of which have been my responsibility, have carried on the fine tradition of *Party Politics in America* that he established.

A substantial debt also is owed to my professional colleagues. My home department has given me “in-house” access to specialists on a variety of the topics embraced by the text. Among these collegial advisors, Larry Baum, Greg Caldeira, Aage Clausen, Richard Gunther, John Kessel, Tony Mughan, Kevin O’Brien, Samuel Patterson, Brad Richardson, Randall Ripley, Elliot Slotnick, and Herb Weisberg were especially helpful. The reviewers of my early plan for revision and then of the final manuscript also contributed in significant ways to the seventh edition. These reviewers include David T. Canon, University of Wisconsin; David J. Hadley, Wabash College; Marjorie R. Hershey, Indiana University; Fred Herzon, Temple University; and James Strandberg, University of Wisconsin. Never before have I received such valuable suggestions about my work, and I am grateful to them for the time they devoted to improving the book. And, of course, the community of political parties scholars provided me with much of the raw material for a book. Without their scholarly contributions, there would be precious little to say about the parties.

No book on political parties could be written without the assistance of the people of the parties themselves. Terry Hitchens, Mike McCurry, and Karla Schurr of the Democratic National Committee and Erich Kimbrough and Jim Nathanson of the Republican National Committee were of great help to me in learning about their respective national committees. Officials at the Federal Election Commission were a useful source as well.

I also am indebted to several graduate students at Ohio State University and to the editorial staff at HarperCollins for their help in preparing the book. At Ohio State, Rodney Anderson served ably as my research assistant in tracking down fugitive information and updating figures and tables from the 1988 NES data. Chuck Smith and Barb Newman provided that one last piece of information needed to complete a chapter. Lynn Maurer and Rosie Clawson aided in finalizing the manuscript. At HarperCollins, Catherine Woods and Melonie Parnes shepherded the book through the review and editorial processes, respectively, with skill and efficiency.

Last but hardly least, I am deeply indebted to my family. Tere, Dan, and David patiently endured my regularly late arrivals for dinner and disappearances at night and on weekends into my study with the understanding that this

book in me had to be finished before I could resume a normal life. Finally, I would not be writing on parties but for my parents, my aunts Irene and Lualien, my uncle Randy, and my grandmother Lucille, who instilled in me early in life an abiding interest in party politics and in some cases even provided me with valuable political experience in its practice. In its small way, this book is a tribute to their commitment to a democratic party politics.

Paul Allen Beck

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PART I

PARTIES AND PARTY SYSTEMS

The pervasiveness of politics is a central fact of our times. We have seen in the twentieth century an enormous expansion of governmental activity. The demands of a complex, urban, industrial society, and the dictates of a world beset by international tensions, do not easily permit a return to limited government. For the foreseeable future, a substantial proportion of the important conflicts over the desirable things in American society will be settled within the political system. Indeed, some would argue that intense conflicts can be resolved peacefully only through politics. The really meaningful issues of our time surely will be how influence and power are organized within the political system, who wins the rewards and successes of that political activity, and to whom the people who make the decisions are responsible. The political system still will play a crucial role in deciding, in the candid phrase of Harold Lasswell, "who gets what, when, how."¹

In the United States, these political contests are directed largely at the regular institutions of government. Few political scientists believe that the real and important political decisions are made clandestinely by murky, semivisible elites and merely ratified by the governmental bodies they control.² It may happen, to be sure, that political decisions in a local community are made by a group of influential local citizens rather than by a city council or a mayor or a school board. Nonetheless, one is reasonably safe in looking for the substance of

¹The phrase comes from the title of Harold Lasswell's pioneering book *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936).

²C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), offers the best-known example of such interpretations of American politics. The alternative "pluralist" perspective adopted by most political scientists is well illustrated in Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).

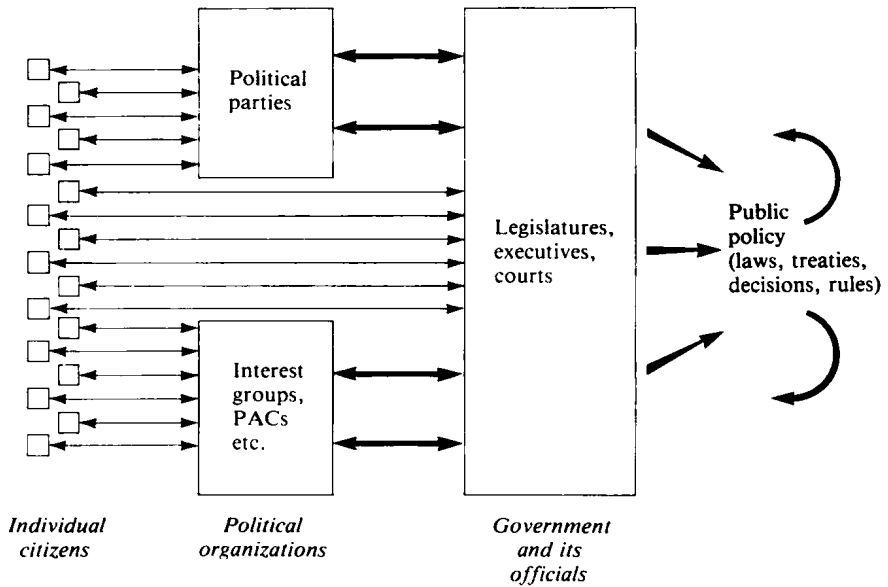


Figure I.1 Political organizations as organizing intermediaries in the political system.

American politics in the legislatures, executives, and courts of the nation, the fifty states, and localities. Considerable activity is directed, therefore, to influence either the making of decisions within these governmental bodies or the selecting of the men and women who will make them.

This struggle for influence is not unorganized, however confusing it may seem to be. Large political organizations attempt to mobilize influence on behalf of aggregates of individuals. In democracies the political party is unquestionably the most important and pervasive of these political organizations. It is not, however, the only one. Interest groups, such as the American Farm Bureau Federation and the AFL-CIO, also mobilize influence. So do smaller factions and cliques, charismatic individuals, and nonparty political organizations such as Americans for Democratic Action and the American Conservative Union. And so in the United States do the political action committees (PACs) that pay a substantial part of the costs of campaigning. Even ostensibly nonpolitical organizations—e.g., churches, civic clubs, ethnic group associations—may from time to time play important roles in the political process.

All these political organizations work as *intermediaries* between the millions of political individuals and the distant policymakers in government (Figure I.1). They build influence into large aggregates in order to have a greater effect on the selection of policymakers and the policies they will make. At the same time, they codify and simplify information about government and politics as it moves back to the individual. In a very real sense, therefore, these political organizers are the informal agents by which individuals are linked to government

in the complex democracies of our time. They are both the builders and the agents of majorities.

In any political system, the political intermediary organizations develop an informal division of labor. Political parties concentrate on contesting elections as a way of aggregating influence. Others, especially interest groups, pursue the avenues of direct influence on legislators or administrators in articulating the demands of narrower groups. Still others seek mainly to propagate ideologies or build support on specific issues of foreign or domestic policy. Indeed, the nature of the division of labor among the various political intermediaries says a great deal about any political system and about the general processes of mobilizing influence within it. The division also speaks meaningfully about the political parties. It is a commonplace, for example, that among the parties of the democracies, the American political parties are occupied to an unusual extent with the single activity of contesting elections. The parties of Western Europe, on the other hand, have been more committed to spreading ideologies and disciplining legislators as well. And those of developing countries sometimes play important roles in transmitting political values and information to a citizenry that lacks other avenues of political socialization and communication.

The division of labor among political organizations is, however, neither clear nor permanent. There is always an overlapping—and hence a competition—among political organizations over the performance of their activities. That competition is most obvious when it takes place within the party system, the competition of one party against another. It also takes place between parties and other political intermediaries—for example, in the competition of parties and powerful interest groups for the attention and support of legislators or for the right to name a candidate in a primary election. Furthermore, the extent to which any one kind of political organization controls or participates in any one kind of organizing activity may change radically over time. Certainly, no one would argue that the American political parties today control as much of the business of campaigning as they did a century ago.

All of this competing for a role in American politics implies another kind of competition. The political organizations compete among themselves for political resources: money, skills, expertise, the efforts of men and women. All of these resources are necessary for the fueling of organizational activity, but none of them is in particularly abundant supply in the American society. Then, with those resources at hand, they compete for the support of individual citizens—that is, they seek their support for the goals and leadership of the organization. In sum, the parties and other political organizations compete for scarce resources with which to mobilize the political influence necessary to capture the scarce rewards the political system allocates. They compete first for the capacity to organize influence and then for the influence itself.

Despite these excursions beyond the subject of political parties, however, this is a book about political parties. The broader survey of politics and political organizations merely has been background for two themes that will recur throughout the remainder of the book. The first is that the political party is not