

PARTY SYSTEMS

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THE concept of party system, while ubiquitous in political science texts, hardly receives systematic treatment, if handbooks by Greenstein and Polsby (1975) and Goodin and Klingemann (1996) are the reference points (cf. Epstein 1975; Pappi 1996). In a similar vein, all editions of the American Political Science Association's *Political Science: The State of the Discipline* (1983, 1993, 2002) discuss parties only within the micro-political context of individual political behavior and preference formation, but have no room for party systems. In the most recent volume, party systems appear only in Fiorina's (2002) article centered exclusively on US parties.

The subject of political party systems may be too complex and heterogeneous to deserve coherent treatment in key political science handbooks. Therefore entire handbooks have been devoted to the study of parties and party systems (cf. Katz and Crotty 2006). Or the proliferation of party system typologies in the 1950s and 1960s may have led to a "confusion and profusion" (Sartori 1976, 119) not even resolved by Sartori's own last-ditch effort. Or comparative politics at least in America has turned its attention so decisively toward comparative political economy, political regime change, and ethnocultural identity politics as to ignore the study of parties and party systems.¹ Nevertheless, party system attributes continue to play a critical role in treatments of political economy and public policy. The substantive alignments of interests and the competitiveness of party systems representing such interests are critical variables in studies of political economy, public policy, and democratic regime survival.

In this article, I first conceptualize party systems separate from parties in analogy to Waltz's (1954, 1979) treatment of international systems separate from states (Section 1). I then identify systemic properties of party systems for the comparative-static analysis

¹ Not by chance, these are the three prominent themes of comparative politics singled out by Laitin 2002 in his overview of the comparative politics subfield.

of competition (Section 2). Subsequently, I probe into the historical-evolutionary competitive dynamic of party systems (Section 3). Here historical-comparative analysis comes into its own beyond the study of formal properties of party systems and competition. My contribution refrains from discussing party systems as independent variables that may account for outputs and outcomes of democratic politics, as this subject is covered in other handbook chapters.

1 THE CONCEPT OF PARTY SYSTEM

Waltz (1954) distinguished three analytical levels or "images" of international politics. The first deals with human behavior, the motivations and actions of individual policy makers and members of societies. The second focuses on processes of group decision making internal to state organizations, as they produce binding collective decisions about foreign policy. The third examines state strategies as a consequence of "systemic" features. The system is conceived as a set of interacting units (Waltz 1979, 40). In a system, the action of *each* participant entity is affected by the actions of *all others*. Systemic theory must hence "show how the systems level, or structure, is distinct from the level of interacting units" (ibid.). In game-theoretic language, systemic features map the structure of the game, as defined by actors' resources, preference schedules, and feasible moves that translate into positive or negative outcomes contingent upon the other players' moves. If preferences are fixed and exogenous, equilibrium states of a system are entirely determined by systemic features concerning the numbers of players, the rules of movement, and resources distributed among the actors. As in economic markets, hegemonic or oligopolistic configurations permit actors to coordinate around different equilibria (relative prices, states of war and peace in the system) than competitive markets with many suppliers and purchasers.

Also party system theory identifies numbers of players, distributions of resources and capabilities among them, and permissible rules of movement to arrive at predictions that hold true regardless of internal idiosyncrasies of the individual elements. Equilibria concern the number of sustainable players, their profile of payoffs, and their relations of alliance and conflict among each other. These then translate into practices of creating and maintaining government executives, extracting and allocating scarce resources to constituencies, and maintaining or abandoning democracy more generally. Even if such systemic propositions are successful, however, they may require qualifications and further specifications based on knowledge about the internal behavior of individual parties, thus setting limits to a purely systemic analysis.

At least tacitly the "three images" of international relations theory have always been a staple also of comparative party system theory, as Sorauf's (1964) distinction between "party in the electorate" (individual behavior and orientations), "party as

organization" (polities as organizations), and "party systems" suggests. Party systems theory is driven by a particular parsimony of focus: Net of idiosyncrasies characterizing individual actors (citizens, politicians) and modes of intra-party decision making, does the structure and dynamics of party systems causally account for identifiable outputs and outcomes of the political process?

Let me begin by outlining first and second image assumptions without which no useful hypotheses about third image (systemic) features and processes can be derived. Just as international systems presuppose historically distinctive first and second image features (cf. Ruggie 1989; Spruyt 1994), also party "systemness" and "systemic processes" take place only when certain lower order conditions are satisfied.

First image assumptions about individual actors (citizens, politicians). Systemic strategic interactions among parties presuppose that at least some citizens compare candidates and parties for electoral office with respect to some of the rewards they offer citizens. If all citizens abstain from voting, vote in a random fashion, or vote based on immutable affective collective group affiliations rather than the comparative alignment of principals' and potential agents' preferences, then there can be no systemic processes. In the sense of Lupia and McCubbins (1998) or Erickson, MacKuen, and Stimson (2002), at least some voters must be "rational information misers" whose strategic choices (voting or non-voting, supporting one candidate/party rather than another) are contingent upon the expected behavior of other voters and of electoral candidates who offer to serve as their agents in legislatures and executives.

In a similar vein, the candidate agents ("politicians") in the electoral polity must strategically act so as to take the preferences and strategic options of at least some principals (voters) and rival candidates into account in their own choice of a course of action. Just as states in international relations theory are postulated to seek survival, politicians seek (re)election to political office—executive office, and as a second best legislative office—as the baseline objective, whatever other goals they may pursue beyond that (personal rents, glory, policy, or targeted benefits for constituencies). Whether and how they pursue these higher-order objectives is endogenous to the competitive situation, characterized by the rules of the game, the stances of their competitors, and the demands of the voters. It is these constraints that prevent politicians in some circumstances from becoming just utterly cynical self-regarding rent maximizers and predators.² In some circumstances, the pursuit of executive office may presuppose that politicians credibly commit to collective goods producing public policies.

Systemic processes in electoral democracies presuppose the *existence of an "electoral market"* in which choices of principals and agents are contingent upon each other. There must be some "elasticities" between supply and demand. Where empirically this condition is not met, systemic party theory is inapplicable. Principals may lack material and cognitive resources to participate in an electoral market, e.g. in extremely poor countries, or they may be so committed to a particular political agent ("party identification") as to pre-empt systemic processes, e.g. in ethnically highly divided polities.

² On systemic conditions for the choice of parties' and politicians' preferences, see Strom 1990.

Second image assumptions about constituent entities of the party system (collective agents). In mass democracies with universal franchise, principals and agents can act effectively in electoral markets only through intermediary vehicles of coordination that help them to overcome collective action problems, to facilitate the flow of information in the market, and to simplify the range of service options based on which principals and politicians may enter direct or indirect contracts with each other. Political parties, the constituent elements of a party system, may provide some or all of such services (Aldrich 1995). Party is here used in a generic sense as a set of politicians pooling resources, not necessarily the label that demarcates parties in a legal-institutional sense. The effective locus of coordination may sometimes be factions within party labels or coalitions combining party labels (Morgenstern 2004). To simplify matters, parties are henceforth the effective collective agents, not necessarily the legal labels.

Parties may help to overcome collective action problems by reducing voters' costs of information gathering and candidates' costs of information distribution in the run-up to the electoral choice. Parties may also reduce problems of "social choice" that surface in unstable and cycling majority decisions in legislatures and governments by bundling and binding sets of politicians with different individual preference schedules to work together in pursuit of a single collective preference schedule ("party program").³ There may be other vehicles of collective mobilization that contribute to the articulation and aggregation of interests, such as social movements and interest groups. Only in a very few limitational empirical cases, such as Papua New Guinea, does democracy appear to exist without parties in the generic sense of a system of collective agents intermediating in the electoral process. At the other end of the spectrum, where most parties exhibit some durability and capacity to coordinate citizens and politicians time and again, we speak of party system institutionalization (Huntington 1968, ch. 7; Mainwaring and Scully 1995). It is akin to what Sartori (1968, 288-97; 1986, 55-6) has called a "structured" party system and Mair (1997, 213-14) refers to as "systemness" through "closure," namely the identity of interacting corporate units (parties) over some extended time period.

2 VARIETIES OF PARTY SYSTEMS

Party system theory aims at predicting strategies of the competitors and preferably identifying equilibria of such strategies. The critical elements are the number of competitors and the "currency" of competition for voter support, namely the policy issues and issue bundles politicians promise to enact to shore up electoral support. Theories typically assume an indirect exchange between voters and politicians.

³ On the theory of party formation, see especially Aldrich (1995); Cox and McCubbins (1993, chs. 4 and 5); and Snyder and Ting (2002). Whether or not they solve collective action and social choice problems, as Aldrich 1995 postulates, however, is a contingent process (see below).

Citizens surrender their vote at the beginning of the electoral term in exchange for the winning politicians implementing campaign promises during the electoral term. Democratic accountability operates indirectly because of (1) the time elapsed between election and policy delivery; (2) the benefits and costs of policy accruing to all voters, regardless of whether they supported winners; and (3) voters speaking their verdict over the record of governing politicians (and the opposition) retrospectively at the end of the electoral term and taking that evaluation into account in their prospective assessment of politicians' promises for the subsequent electoral term.

The policy-based "responsible partisan" model, however, is only one special case of principal-agent relations within a broader set of mechanisms expressing democratic accountability. Before turning to the key elements of the common models of party competition—numbers of competitors and numbers of dimensions of competition—let us therefore distinguish modes of democratic accountability in terms of different principal-agent exchanges (Section 2.1). Moreover, and related to this point, critics have argued that responsible partisan models home in on a highly constrained view of the currency of competition, namely policy positions rather than a variety of valence goods broadly conceived (Section 2.2). Once the special place of positional issue competition has been characterized, we then can turn to numbers of players and dimensions of policy issues as structural properties of party systems (Sections 2.3 and 2.4). Finally, for all party systems we can distinguish greater or lesser intensity of competition or "competitiveness" (Section 2.5).

2.1 Modes of Democratic Accountability

Why do voters support parties and how can politicians in calculated fashion appeal to voters for support? Party systems theories focus on mechanisms that involve rational deliberation, as opposed to affective psychological attachments, such as party identification, voter identification with the objective traits of candidates (gender, ethnicity), or the personal inspirational ("charismatic") qualities of a candidate. Inasmuch as support based on such criteria treats them as tracers of candidates' cumulative policy records and policy commitments, such as in Fiorina's (1977, 1997) felicitous phrase of party identification as the "running tally" of a party's past record, of course, they are incorporated into theories of party competition.

Among rational modes of accountability, let us distinguish between indirect and direct exchange between voters (as principals) and politicians (as their agents). In the indirect policy exchange, citizens surrender their vote in accordance with the responsible partisan model. The exchange is indirect because it involves an intertemporally long drawn out process between the principal delivering the vote and the agent putting authoritative measures into place that allocate costs of benefits to all members of abstract categories of voters, regardless of whether individual members of each category actually voted for the decision maker or not. Politicians may have only a general sense of where their supporters are located in society.

They are unable to pinpoint, monitor, or sanction their voters. In contrast to this indirect "policy" exchange, in direct, targeted, "clientelistic" exchange, individuals and small groups of voters obtain immediate gratification in exchange for their vote or suffer negative consequences in case of supporting the loser. The currency of exchange here involves gifts or money, public sector jobs, public housing, privileged access to social policy transfers, favorable regulatory rulings, or procurement contracts that allow firms to hire workers who supported the winning party and candidate.⁴ Clientelistic politics comes with direct or indirect social mechanisms permitting politicians to monitor and even sanction the electoral behavior exhibited by small groups.

Numerous theories have tried to account for the relative prominence of clientelistic exchange relations in party competition (cf. Scott 1969; Schmidt et al. 1977; Shelter 1994; Kitschelt 2000a; Piattoni 2001; Keefer 2005; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2006). Increasing affluence and eradication of poverty may make the relative value of clientelistic inducements meaningless for voters and heightens their sensitivity to the opportunity costs of such practices, e.g. in political production of collective goods. Net of development, clientelism hinges upon the economic viability of state-owned, state-subsidized, or state-regulated firms and entire sectors. Economic entities operating under a state-provided "soft budget" umbrella are more amenable to crony appointments and thus clientelism. The presence of mobilized and electorally vocal ethnocultural groups in divided societies furthermore tends to fuel clientelistic practices (cf. Horowitz 1985; Chandra 2004; Wilkinson 2004). Furthermore, all these factors may interact with the competitiveness of a party system (see below). Greater competitiveness may fuel more intensive efforts by politicians to engage in either clientelistic and/or programmatic policy competition.

Whether electoral and executive institutions affect the balance of clientelistic and programmatic competition in party systems, however, is a matter of disagreement. Electoral rules that require candidates to carve out narrowly circumscribed electoral constituencies with whom candidates have direct dealings may induce clientelistic exchange (cf. Katz 1980; Ames 2001). But it is easy to find examples of closed-list multi-member district electoral systems where most parties have practiced clientelism, such as Venezuela (-1999) and Austria, or programmatic parties in open list preference voting systems (cf. Samuels 2004).

2.2 Valence or Positional Competition

Critics of conventional theories of party competition have introduced another useful distinction that can be related to modes of democratic accountability: that between valence and positional issues or party offers (Stokes 1963). Citizens' preference

⁴ Clientelism always involves material incentives to turn out the vote, not just a monetary transfer by a rich citizen to a party in exchange for economic favors. Such material provisions, of course, make it easier for politicians to establish clientelism.

distribution over some salient, prized good is highly skewed so that most citizens want more rather than less of a good (honest politicians, competent management of the economy...). Parties do not take "positional" stances over whether or not to supply some good, but whether they can credibly supply that good better or to a greater extent than their rivals. Each party claims to have "more" attractive candidates and technical advisers, demonstrate "greater" competence in producing collective goods (such as facilitating economic stability and growth, protecting the environment, preventing terrorism), and/or distribute "more copious" targeted benefits to anyone who is asking for them.

Positional competition, by contrast, assumes a broad distribution of voter preferences over the merits of the parties' offers of goods or services. Parties may then promise different things to different voters on the same dimension (see Section 2.3). Positional offers mostly concern policy issues and bundles thereof. But critics of positional theory claim that for voters valence issues trump positional issues most of the time. Retrospective economic voting, for example, has to do with the perceived "competence" of a party's politicians in delivering good economic performance, such as low inflation and high growth. Moreover, non-policy modes of principal-agent relations also operate in the realm of valence competition. In clientelistic politics, parties compete for votes by advertising themselves as suppliers of the most copious, reliable, and expediently delivered targeted benefits. And competition with a candidate's personal charisma may turn on widely desired qualities such as leadership, compassion, or youthful dynamism.

Nevertheless, there is no one-to-one relationship between modes of democratic accountability and the prevalence of valence or positional offers in party competition. With respect to candidate qualities, while no voter would want incompetent politicians, some citizens may prefer compassion and careful deliberation as a quality of political leadership over decisiveness and expedient action. In a similar vein, descriptive representation of electoral constituencies (by means of the candidate's gender or ethnicity) may be a "positional" strategic move in diverse constituencies where candidates with different ethnocultural markers are competing for political office. Also clientelistic exchange may evolve according to a positional dynamic. There may be electoral situations with highly diversified constituencies that make it attractive for some parties to embrace clientelism and imply that one of its correlates, corruption, should be treated leniently, whereas other parties take the opposite position.

Most importantly, however, one might directly contradict Stokes (1963) and actually assert that most policy issue appeals are at least implicitly positional rather than valence based. Whereas many ultimate objectives in political life may be of the valence type, politics is about the choice of means to obtain those ends, and here one may be firmly in the realm of positional competition because of cognitive and evaluative disagreements. People may have different assessments about the causal efficacy of a policy means to reach an end, given the complexity and uncertainty surrounding causal relations in social life. People may also disagree on the distributive implications that the choice of policy means involves. Politicians may use valence

codes—such as fighting crime, reducing inflation, or creating jobs—to pursue a distributive agenda. For politicians it is part of the art of heresthetics (Riker 1986) to conceal the distributive implications of their own appeal to valence issues, but to highlight those of their opponents' valence issue frames. It is important to realize the limits of valence competition because the *Party Manifestoes Project*, as the most comprehensive and systematic enterprise to register the programmatic appeals of political parties, was at least initially based on the supremacy of a valence-based characterization of party competition (cf. Budge, Robertson, and Hearl 1987; Budge et al. 2001).

Figure 22.1 summarizes the relationship between accountability mechanisms and the prevalence of valence or positional competition. Empirically, I claim the following testable regularities. Political candidate appeals play out in most instances into valence competition and only rarely as positional competition. Clientelistic accountability works mostly as valence competition among parties (who can deliver the most and most reliably? alternatively: Who is the "cleanest" in rejecting clientelistic inducements?). Under certain conditions of economically highly stratified constituencies with great disparities of income, clientelism may become a matter of positional competition, with some parties defending and others attacking it.

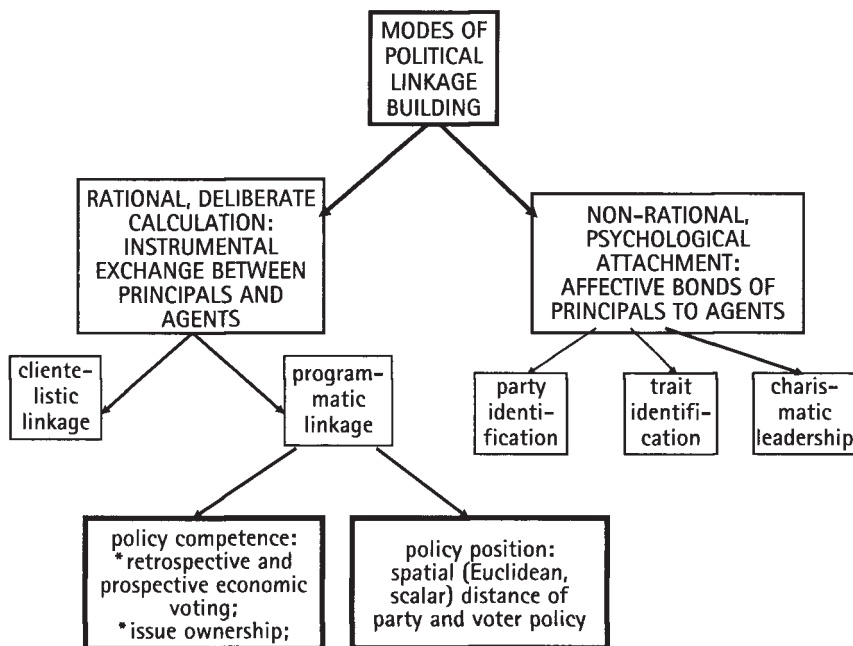


Fig. 22.1 Modes of Political Linkage in Democracies

2.3 Numerical Properties: Fractionalization, Effective Number, and Volatility

From early on, party systems have been divided into two-party and multiparty systems (cf. Duverger 1954; Downs 1957), ultimately giving way to a proliferation of numerical criteria (Mair 1997, 200-6). Most prominent may have been Sartori's (1976) further distinction between moderate and polarized multiparty systems dependent on the presence of "anti-system" spoiler parties. But since the 1970s typologies of party systems have fallen out of favor to the advantage of a variable-based, finer instrument to gauge the size of party systems. It is the measure of party system fractionalization (Rae 1967), or its mathematical inversion proposed by Laakso and Taagepera (1979), the "effective number of parties," whether calculated in terms of voter support for parties (ENVP) or size of parliamentary parties (ENPP). The basic idea here and in further mathematical iterations of the measure (Molinar 1991) is to combine the number and the size distribution of parties in a polity in a single coefficient of fragmentation that sums up the parties in a polity weighted by their size. Fractionalization measures employ partisan labels as their unit of counting. Such measures are meaningful only as long as parties can be treated as unitary collective actors (cf. Morgenstern 2004).

The same qualification applies to a widely used structural parameter of party systems in the temporal dimension, the volatility of party systems. The volatility index summarizes the percentage differences of electoral support obtained by the same parties in two subsequent elections (usually divided by two to give a maximum value of 100) (cf. Pedersen 1983). It is almost self-evident that fractionalization and volatility are closely related. But where several parties are close to each other and operate as one "bloc" in legislatures and elections, a party-based volatility index may seriously overstate volatility by not focusing on the "inter-bloc" volatility of party systems (cf. Bartolini and Mair 1990). The differential conceptualization of volatility may have major consequences, if one employs the concept to gauge the stability and consolidation of party systems over time (e.g. Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Roberts and Wibbels 1999).

2.4 Policy-Based Programmatic Party Systems: Social and Political Divides, Cleavages, Competitive Dimensions

In addition to numbers of players, spatial-positional theories of programmatic party systems consider the number of dimensions on which parties compete, something that empirical comparative analysis often refers to as "cleavages." Because of the variability of language that prevails in this literature, it is important to draw clear terminological distinctions. There are lines of division running through every society generated by social, political, economic, and cultural group interests and sentiments of deprivation. If such divides of traits, affiliations, and opinions are durable we may call them *cleavages* (Rae and Taylor 1970), particularly if they mutually reinforce each

other (Bartolini and Mair 1990). They are separate from mere "divisions" that denote more fleeting group divides typically associated with a single point decision (e.g. to take an example from Europe: driving on the left or the right side of the road). Cleavages tend to have the qualities of social *entrapment and closure*. Individuals face costly barriers to enter and to exit a social or political category and the rewards and deprivations associated with membership. Therefore they tend to organize as that category in order to acquire or defend certain economic, political, or cultural resources, rights, and privileges.

Only few of these divides ever translate into collective action to change the allocation of gratifications, let alone the very specific and challenging form of party politics. A *political partisan divide* appears where parties represent different sides of a social divide. Statistically, such partisan mapping of divides can be detected with techniques of factor and discriminant analysis as well as regression analysis, with party choice as the dependent variable, especially multinomial logistic models. The number of social divides that map onto the party system may be larger than the number of partisan divides, if there are several reinforcing divides captured by the same party alternatives. Thus, if all working-class voters are also secular and all non-working-class voters are religious, there will be no separate religious and class partisan political divides, even if parties map both issues onto the party system. Conversely, where group memberships on social divides cross-cut each other *and* are mapped onto parties, they tend to generate multiple partisan divides.

From the perspective of office-seeking strategic politicians, what matters for their strategic moves to win elections may be neither social nor even partisan divides, but only the minimal set of *competitive divides or "competitive dimensions"* in a party system. These are only those divides on which voters display some *elasticity of partisan choices*, responding to modifications of the competing parties' appeals and offers. By contrast many political divides are a matter of political identification rather than competition (cf. Sani and Sartori 1983). In this instance, group membership predicts the propensity to favor a party, but there is no open electoral market in which voters would change their partisan choice, were competing parties to modify their appeals on the given political dimension. In case of a competitive dimension, a critical subset of rational voters is responsive to parties' changing electoral appeals. These elasticities are elusive to measure, as they would require a panel data design. A weak tracer of the competitive status of a dimension is the salience of the underlying issues for voters and parties.

Table 22.1 summarizes the terminological conventions introduced in the preceding paragraphs. An example might illustrate the usefulness of the distinctions in anticipation of the stylized historical sketch provided later (Section 2.4). In Belgium, until the 1950s, there were two cross-cutting political partisan divides that were both competitive, a social class-based one pitting the working-class socialists, at one extreme, against the cross-class Christian Democrats in the center and the business-oriented liberals at the other extreme, and a religious divide separating a secular socialist-liberal sector from a Catholic Christian Democratic camp. Over time, the religious divide lost its competitiveness and became a pure partisan

Table 22.1 The organization of issue opinions in democratic party competition

CENTRALITY OF DIVISIONS FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF THE PARTY SYSTEM?	DURABILITY OF ISSUE DIVISIONS?	
	LOW: "DIVIDES"	HIGH: "CLEAVAGES-
LOW: IDEOLOGICAL DIVISIONS AT THE SOCIETAL LEVEL	SOCIAL and "IDEOLOGICAL" DIVIDES	SOCIAL and "IDEOLOGICAL" CLEAVAGES
INTERMEDIATE: PARTISAN DIVISIONS AT THE POLITICAL LEVEL	POLITICAL PARTISAN DIVIDES (transitory)	POLITICAL PARTISAN CLEAVAGES
HIGH: COMPETITIVE DIMENSIONS	COMPETITIVE DIVIDES (transitory)	COMPETITIVE CLEAVAGES

identification divide. As a parallel movement since the 1950s a hitherto politically unmapped, but long-standing ethnocultural divide over language and region began to articulate itself on the plane of party competition, but much more so in Flanders than in Wallonia. By the 1990s, a realigned socioeconomic distributive divide, the ethnolinguistic divide, and a newly arising libertarian-authoritarian divide over political governance all surface in Belgian party competition, particularly in Flanders. At the same time, the old socioeconomic working class versus business divide as well as the religious divide had lost their capacity not only to shape party competition, but even to maintain a partisan identification divide.

Does the number of parties reflect the number of cleavages in a party system (Taagepera and Grofman 1985; Lijphart 1999, 81-3)? While there may be some tendency that a proliferation of societal divides boosts the number of political partisan divides and the latter boosts the number of competitive dimensions, this is far from a foregone conclusion. The relationship between numbers of parties and positional divides in a polity is theoretically problematic and empirically untested because existing research has taken insufficient care in conceptualizing political divides and competitive dimensions.

In many instances, but not in the Belgian example above, political parties reduce the number of active dimensions of electoral competition to one or two only. The literature offers several not necessarily exclusive reasons for a reduction in the dimensionality in party competition. In all instances, the baseline assumption is that parties cannot simply cherry-pick issues and refrain from taking a stance on the full scope of salient issues, except if they are very small niche parties. This is so because party politicians are elected in territorial districts to represent constituencies over an uncertain and unlimited range of issues in legislatures where they have only very limited agenda control, as is evidenced by the necessity to vote on a state budget that covers a bewildering range of issues.

First, where institutional barriers to entry favor a two-party system, politicians in the established parties have powerful incentives to prevent internal party divisions through cross-cutting issues and therefore map positions on new and salient issues on the existing divides (Stimson 2005). Second, general cognitive limits of politicians' and citizens' information processing of political alternatives give a strong advantage to parties that can articulate their positions in a very low-dimensional space of ideological alternatives (cf. Downs 1957; Hinich and Munger 1994; Lupia and McCubbins 1998). Third, the evolution of social structure and the effects of policies, such as the growth of the welfare state, on the distribution of preferences in society might facilitate a bundling of political preferences around a very low-dimensional space (Kitschelt 1994). None of these hypotheses suggests that there is a logically compelling constraint according to which particular issue positions fit together.

2.5 The Competitiveness of Party Systems

Party systems are more "competitive," when (1) there is great uncertainty of electoral outcomes and (2) uncertainty matters, i.e. small variances in parties' electoral support translate into large variance in their legislative representation and/or bargaining power over executive appointments, patronage, or policy. Where competitiveness is intense, politicians make greater efforts to mobilize support and voters pay more attention to politics (campaign contributions, turnout, information processing).

In two-party systems, competitiveness has often been measured as the ex-ante closeness of two candidates in the electoral race, i.e. the expected margin of victory. But this operationalization is not sufficiently general and does not take the "stakes" of the electoral contest into account. Do voters and candidates make a great effort, if the alternatives on offer are essentially the same?

Competitiveness of a party system is intense, if the following five conditions prevail (see Figure 22.2).⁵ (1) For strategic politicians, marginally greater support translates into large increases in bargaining power over legislative majorities (coalitions) and executive office appointments. "Majoritarian" democracy with single-member districts and plurality formula that tend to manufacture single-party unified majority government, at least under parliamentarism, and lack of outside institutional veto points, thus giving high institutional leverage to legislative or executive coalitions, tends to increase the competitiveness of elections (cf. Lijphart 1999; Powell 2000; Tsebelis 2002). (2) Where more than two effective contenders prevail, politicians shore up competitiveness if they configure around **identifiable alternative parties or party blocs** vying for political power.⁶ On the side of voters, preference distribution must make all actors perceive the outcome as both (3) close (low margin of victory between party blocs) and (4) open in the sense that there is

⁵ For a related discussion of electoral competitiveness, also there referred to as "executive responsiveness," see now Franklin (2004, 112-14).

⁶ For a discussion of identifiability and its operationalization see Strom (1990b, 47, 73-5).

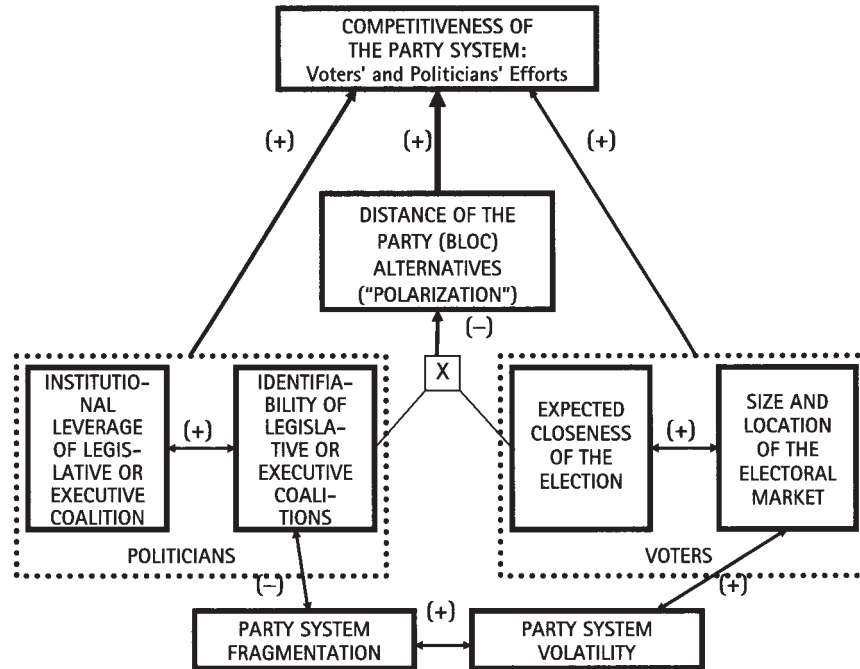


Fig. 22.2 Variables Influencing the Competitiveness of Party Systems

a sizeable electoral market of floating voters situated between the electoral alternatives and responsive to small modulations of candidates' appeals.

Even if these four conditions are met, competitiveness is intense, however, only if also (5) the "stakes" of the competition are high, i.e. the disparity of the cost-benefit allocation by rival camps of politicians is great. Politicians raise or lower the stakes in part as a function of conditions (1) through (4), but as the next section will show, these relations are far from unambiguous. On the face of it, one might expect the median voter theorem to hold: Where two identifiable blocs compete to win majority status that endows great institutional leverage on the winner and there is an electoral market between the competitors in a close race, both camps of politicians actually *reduce* the stakes by offering *similar* cost-benefit allocations in case of victory, and these commitments are most pleasing to the median voter. As we shall see, there are complications that contradict this logic of countervailing forces between strong competitiveness at the level of majority formation and weak competitiveness of majority action ("stakes").

Given the complexity of the conditions that affect the competitiveness of elections both from the perspective of politicians' as well as voters' incentives to make an effort in the electoral contest, simple measures such as party system fragmentation and volatility cannot serve as empirical tracers of competitiveness. Nevertheless, they

have often been employed for such purposes, although they only indirectly affect some of the conditions that determine competitiveness. Moreover, the causal links attributed to such measures are debatable at best. While party system fragmentation has often been considered to boost electoral competitiveness by increasing uncertainty of electoral victory, the opposite may be true because fragmentation tends to reduce the identifiability of governing coalitions. Party system volatility may be a tracer of the size of the electoral market, but not necessarily of its location (between rival camps?). Moreover, following Bartolini and Mair (1990) for the task of predicting politicians' and voters' strategic choices in the party competition, volatility would have to be measured at the level of party blocs rather than individual labels, a practice rarely followed in the literature.

3 COMPARATIVE STATICS: STRATEGIC CHOICE IN PARTY SYSTEMS

Most theories of party system competition work with the assumption that (1) principal-agent relations concern indirect programmatic exchange about (2) positional issues and offers. Strategic choices vary according to the number of competitors and the relevant competitive dimensions of party systems only. The key objective is to find equilibria contingent upon numbers and dimensions of competition such that no strategic actor could alter her choice without lowering her payoff. Because formal research over half a century has found that the identification of equilibria under such conditions is elusive, more recent theorizing has relaxed model assumptions, including those about principal-agent relations and positional issues, to obtain equilibrium predictions. Alternatively, the quest for equilibria has been abandoned altogether and been replaced by agent-based modeling in computer simulations.

3.1 Simple Spatial Theory: The Elusiveness of Equilibria

The most simple case and the starting point of the literature is Downs's (1957) median voter theorem according to which two parties will both choose policy appeals proximate to the position of the median voter. To derive this equilibrium, one must postulate among many other things (1) office-motivated politicians with (2) perfect knowledge of the situation (including voter preferences), (3) not having to fear the entry of additional competitors, (4) relying on the selfless support of political activists whose objectives are perfectly aligned with that of the candidates, (5) competing in a unidimensional space of voter distribution for the support of rational voters who (6) have explicit preference schedules and knowledge of the situation, (7) must not abstain, and (8) cast their vote for the party whose announced position is

closest to their personal ideal point (9) at the very moment of the election. In a similar vein, under highly restrictive conditions of unidimensional competition, some formal theories can show that in systems with four or more candidates rivals disperse over the competitive space and generate an equilibrium distribution.⁷

Relaxing any one or several of the numerous assumptions necessary to derive the median voter theorem, however, reveals its fragility (for an overview: Grofman 2004). This dovetails with the empirical observation that even in unidimensional two-party competition often enough the positions of the competitors diverge rather than converge. Also equilibrium conditions in multiparty and/or multidimensional competition are fragile and elusive. Shepsle (1991) sees no promise to find equilibria when both more than one competitive dimension or more than two candidates are allowed and certain other reasonable assumptions apply. In a survey, one of the most prolific contributors to spatial theorizing of party competition concludes "that simple theoretical generalizations about the structure of competition are unlikely to be forthcoming" (Ordeshook 1997, 266). Theories that try to gain empirical relevance have therefore made additional assumptions or abandoned the search for equilibria. In both instances, the key aspiration is to account for both conditions of party dispersion as well as stability, even if the size of electoral districts (M) and the electoral formula would permit larger party systems with more entry (cf. Cox 1997: $M+i$ as outer bounds of the size of party systems).

3.2 Complex Spatial Theory: Equilibria under Special Conditions

Because of the proliferating literature, I confine myself to listing a few prominent proposals to relax spatial-positional theories of competition. I sidestep valence-based issue theories of competition (Budge and Farlie 1983), as I am convinced that issues are always positional, when choices are properly framed. "Valence" comes into play, however, through non-issue considerations of candidate attractiveness, party identification, including the competence of both to deliver selective benefits or "good" public policy, and here we get to two prominent recent proposals to account for stability and dispersion of party positions in two- and N-party systems.

First, Adams, Merrill, and Grofman (2005) develop a spatial model in which ingredients of (1) voters' non-policy partisan predilections (including identification), (2) discounting of the candidates' credibility or effectiveness in delivering on their promises, and (3) voters' ability to abstain bring about stable equilibria of program-matically dispersed parties in unidimensional or multidimensional spaces. The non-policy partisan preferences are key, while discounting and the option to abstain only amplify their effect on the dispersal of the partisan vote. The logic is clear. If voters identify with a party for non-policy reasons, they support it even if its current issue positions are further removed from the voter's ideal point than those of a

⁷ See especially Enelow and Hinich (1990) and Shepsle (1991).

competitor. While plausible, the trouble with this argument is that "non-policy" factors involve a whole host of variables that must be unpacked and that indirectly often may have a subtle policy base, for example when the influence of people's occupation or party identification may amount to a long-term assessment of a party's policy commitments.

Second, Schofield (2003, 2004) has refined a valence model of competition in which strategic parties disperse over a programmatic issue space so long as their advantage or disadvantage in capturing voters on an additional valence dimension, incorporating their candidates' reputation for competence and leadership, gives them flexibility in their programmatic appeals. While formally elegant, in empirical terms this proposal may generate a post hoc opportunistic account of party system strategic dispersal. Just as in Adams et al.'s (2005) investigation, given the flexibility of the key independent variable, researchers will always be able to locate some sort of valence factor, if dispersal of parties occurs.

Third, starting with May (1973) and Robertson (1976) through Aldrich (1983) and Schlesinger (1984) to McGann (2002) and Miller and Schofield (2003), theorists have introduced preference heterogeneity among the principals who select a party's electoral candidates and office holders. If such candidates rely not only on voters, but also on party "activists" who contribute labor and capital to mobilize voters without being candidates themselves, then the aspirations and preferences of the latter may matter for the strategic appeals of the former. To preserve the electoral credibility of their party, leaders may need to give activists some voice in the strategic decision-making process, thus demonstrating that unity around a set of objectives is more than tactical lip service of a few leaders, but a broadly shared commitment (Caillaud and Tirole 2002). But party activists tend to be ideologists who join a party to express programmatic preferences rather than to win elections (cf. Panebianco 1988). To secure indispensable activist input, candidates may be compelled to adopt issue positions distinctly removed from their optimal voter issue appeal. Whether or not activists hold such radicalizing positions, however, may depend on the format of the party system and on societal preference mobilization around a class of issues (cf. Kitschelt 1989). In multiparty systems where dissatisfied activists can join competing party labels it is less likely that activists express systematically different views than instrumental for the pursuit of votes and office.

Fourth, a long line of modeling has postulated that electoral candidates are not just office, but also policy seeking, and therefore diverge from their spatially optimal vote-getting programmatic appeal. The most encompassing and complex elaboration of that perspective can be found in Roemer (2001) who shows that even in the two-party case the presence of policy-motivated candidates, faced with uncertainty over voters' preferences in a two-dimensional policy space and the task to build a winning coalition among three different intra-party factions around a winning joint electoral strategy, will yield equilibrium positions that clearly set the competitors apart from each other.

Fifth, voters may be strategic and not vote based on the proximity between their own policy ideal points and that of individual parties, but that of likely future

partisan coalitions (Kedar 2005). In that case more extreme parties may gain larger shares of votes and yield a more polarized spectrum of alternatives. Voters support more radical parties than is warranted by their own policy ideal points in the expectation that these have to bargain policy compromises with moderate collaborators that ultimately bring the center of policy gravity of a coalition government close to the voters' sincere ideal points. A further modification of this point may be a model of lexical voting (Kitschelt and Rehm 2005). If parties, constrained by their past record of action, do not substantially diverge from each other on a highly salient policy dimension so that voters are basically indifferent between the partisan alternatives, in a manner of "lexical" ordering in their choice among parties voters may focus on a second, third, or n-th dimension of competition just as long as partisan alternatives on that dimension are stark and salient for the voters.

Sixth, voters may not act on a simple spatial rationale in which they gauge the Euclidean distance, weighted by salience, between their own ideal policy schedules and those of the partisan competitors, but support parties in a "directional" fashion based on whether they take a pronounced position on the "correct" side of a political issue, thus giving parties an incentive to disperse their issue positions (cf. Rabinowitz and McDonald 1989). A huge theoretical and empirical literature surrounds this proposal that ultimately appears to conclude that both spatial and directional elements enter voters' calculation, but that empirically the directional component only adds a vanishingly small modification to the basic spatial set-up of voting behavior (cf. Merrill and Grofman 1999).

3.3 Agent-Based Modeling of Party Competition

As a backlash against formal theory, but also voicing unease with purely historical narratives of party competition, a new computational approach of agent-based modeling of political behavior has tried to gain theoretical insights in the comparative statics and dynamics of party systems (cf. Kollman, Miller, and Page 1992, 1998). Critical assumptions are here that voters and politicians have very limited knowledge-processing capacity and therefore act on simple rules rather than on a survey of everyone's preferences and strategic options. Because voters vote spatially, but process little information, parties can only slowly move in the issue space without wrecking their reputation. Following Laver (2005), parties act on simple rules of thumb, such as that of "hunter" who repeats appeals that have increased electoral support recently and modifies them, if elections were lost, or that of "predator" who always moves toward the electorally strongest party. In a two-dimensional space with randomly distributed voters, such conduct may yield a gradual gravitation of the partisan actors to the center region of the space, but with no party moving directly dead center and continuous oscillation of positions that prevents stable equilibria.

The advantage, but also downside, of agent-based computational models is that an infinite number of modifications and complications can be introduced without knowing the epistemological advantage of each move in the enterprise. Do we

achieve a theoretical explanation of observable behavior if the simulation results of a certain model specification coincide with empirical patterns? What if many different specifications reproduce the same empirical patterns? What this suggests is that agent-based modeling must be combined with empirical research that lends robustness to the behavioral assumptions employed in the computer simulations. In this sense, Laver's model could be enriched by a simple calculus of voters' abstention or participation in elections, contingent upon the observed parties in the vicinity of voters.

3.4 Entry of New Parties

Formal spatial theories have scored only very limited success in accounting for party entry (for a critique, see Laver and Schilperoord 2005, 8-9). More promising may be a recent non-spatial game-theoretical model with incomplete information where a potential entrant interacts with an established party, although it makes questionable assumptions about the distribution of incumbent and challenger (private) knowledge in the game and generates rather mixed empirical results (Hug 2001).

The informal, empirical literature has implicitly been driven by a behaviorally constrained quasi-spatial framework of competition in which the entry and exit of parties is seen as a result of an interplay between demand and supply (cf. Hauss and Rayside 1978; Harmel and Robertson 1984; Kitschelt 1988, 1995a). Induced by socio-logical and political-economic developments, new political demands become salient that established political parties are not willing to service. This intransigence may result from an interaction of (1) the reputation of an established party that can be changed only slowly at considerable electoral cost combined with (2) the electoral tradeoffs involved in modified programmatic appeals. While a new issue appeal may attract new electoral constituencies only gradually, established voters may be alienated quickly, plunging an established party into an electoral crisis. Barriers of entry to new challengers, as erected by electoral systems, mass media access, or party finance, may make it more or less comfortable for existing parties to ignore new political demands. Computational models can capture both the strategic immobility of established parties as well as the barriers to entry encountered by new parties (cf. Laver and Schilperoord 2005).

While much of the informal and computational literature on party entry implicitly subscribes to a spatial model of party competition, though with relaxed rationality endowments for voters and politicians, critics have modified this perspective through salience models. Meguid (2005) argues that new niche parties may arise if a party antagonistic to its claims nevertheless raises the salience of the issue by engaging in an adversarial strategy in the hope to hurt an existing competitor who prefers to dismiss the issue because it might internally divide and make it lose some of its current party constituencies, if the issue were to become salient. Meguid tries to endogenize the dimensions of party competition itself. In a more radical fashion this was anticipated by Riker's (1982, 213-32) theory that a permanent loser party on an

existing dimension of party competition may try to create a new competitive dimension in the party system that internally divides the hegemonic party and creates an opening for a new party or an old loser to displace it electorally. Riker's historical reference point is the rise of the Republicans with the slavery issue. The example also shows, however, the limits of a voluntarist theory in which strategic politicians can "manufacture" salient issue dimensions. As Weingast's (1998) alternative account of the slavery issue in party competition suggests, politicians may create new parties and alignments only when political-economic conditions enable them to count on an exogenous process in which sufficiently large constituencies develop new political claims that are not mapped onto the existing party system.

4 HISTORICAL DYNAMICS OF PARTY SYSTEMS

Students of the historical dynamics of party systems, the trailblazer of which was Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) article about the emergence and persistence of political cleavages in Western Europe, implicitly build on and apply many elements explicitly modeled in spatial theories of party competition and in models of party entry and exit. Thus there is no contradiction between the formal or informal general analytical literature on party competition, on one side, and the comparative-historical analysis of party system evolution. As socioeconomic, political, and cultural conditions create new divides of interests and values in society, different issue bundles will be mapped onto the arena of party competition, contingent upon the institutional constraints and strategic opportunities politicians see in the game of jockeying for votes, political office, and control of public policy. Ideally, the general analytical and the historical-comparative literatures on party systems complement and cross-fertilize each other. Whereas the former is mostly a comparative-static analysis of strategic moves when the political preferences of voters and party politicians are given, but the number of partisan players is either exogenous or endogenous, the latter fills this ahistorical framework with flesh and blood by identifying the sociological, political-economic, and cultural developments that shape preferences as well as the institutional and strategic conditions that influence the set of political strategies seen as feasible by the political actors.

4.1 Classical Analysis of Party System Formation in Western Europe

Lipset and Rokkan (1967) analyze the development of European party systems from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century against the backdrop of the twin

challenges of the national and industrial revolutions that began to take place since the seventeenth century. But in no way is their analysis one of sociological determinism (Sartori 1968). First of all, the historical conditions that shaped the mobilization of societal divisions were shot through with political action. The development of parties and party systems takes place against the backdrop of strategic political choices and interactions among conflicting elites in the process of building territorial states, subduing religious associations under state authority, coping with the reticence of agrarian elites against relinquishing political control, and including the growing working-class movements in institutionalized politics. Second, they emphasize the complex and varied political process of electoral enfranchisement and institution building both as consequence and as cause of party system formation. Agrarian and religious divides therefore do not naturally flow from sociological conditions, but result from a complex strategic interaction among political elites.

The finest examples of post-Lipset-Rokkan comparative historical analysis capturing the interrelations of demand and supply conditions in the formation and realignment of European party systems are probably the works of Luebbert (1991), Kalyvas (1996), and Bartolini (2000). Luebbert emphasizes the different strategic conflict between socialist, liberal, and conservative parties in the mobilization of agrarian constituencies to account for different pathways of party systems in the inter-war period. Kalyvas (1996) highlights the strategic calculations of the Catholic Church and of Catholic lay politicians involved in the formation of confessional parties since the late nineteenth century. And Bartolini (2000) develops an all-inclusive landscape of demand and supply conditions that have shaped the mobilization of the class cleavage in European politics as the last and therefore residual line of conflict strategic politicians had to wedge into already party systems already constituted along other divides.

These books render a more subtle and empirically plausible picture of party formation than two analytically leaner, but historically far less insightful perspectives. Przeworski and Sprague's (1986) intentionally voluntarist account of partisan class politics emphasizes strategic politicians and their capacity to shape the terms of working-class formation, although the empirical analysis is compelled to concede the powerful role of pre-existing cross-nationally varying cultural diversity, corporatist interest intermediation, and socioeconomic development of blue-collar electoral constituencies. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Rogowski (1989) offers an economically determinist account of political coalitions and partisan cleavages in Europe and around the world based on relative scarcities of domestic land, labor, and capital in world markets and resulting group interests over trade openness or protectionism under conditions of an expanding or a contracting world economy. While yielding important novel insights, the analysis overstates the importance of external economic exposure for the formation of political divides and competitive dimensions, probably because it lacks an analysis of the conditions under which collective mobilization of economic interests and their translation into party competition takes place.

4.2 The Transformation of Party Politics in Post-Industrial Democracies

Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) famous dictum about the "freezing" of European party systems in the 1920s was hugely overrated in the literature. What started out as a simple observational suggestion in the conclusion to a lengthy comparative-historical analysis of European political cleavage formation was subsequently blown up into a fundamental theoretical and empirical claim about the nature of mature, institutionalized party systems. The empirical observation of relative party system stability in Europe over some period of time, however, did not compel Lipset and Rokkan to deny that such systems may get caught up in a profound process of systemic dealignment and realignment (cf. Mair 1997, 4). At least three different themes in the comparative literature about the transformation of party systems in affluent post-industrial democracies deserve highlighting.

First, inspired by Lipset and Rokkan's work, many scholars have probed into continuity or decline of existing European political cleavage structures. Studies of aggregate party system volatility usually found only moderate increases (cf. Maguire 1983; Shamir 1984; Bartolini and Mair 1990). But individual-level voting analysis shows a strong, though cross-nationally variable decline in conventional class voting (cf. Franklin, Mackie, and Valen 1992). On the one hand, this gave rise to a perspective that postulates a "dealignment" of voters from parties (Dalton, Flanagan, and Beck 1984; Dalton 2004). Post-industrialization has made especially educated citizens distrustful of parties and prepared to engage in a variety of forms of political interest mobilization that sidestep the electoral process. That trend is associated with declining voter turnout, disjointed single-issue voting, and vanishing partisan identification, resulting in a detachment of economic and social structures of conflict from partisan-level divides.

As a second theme contradicting the dealignment perspective, other scholars have emphasized the emergence of new partisan divides and competitive dimensions with post-industrial economic structure. Realignment of political-economic interests with the implosion of the manual working class, the differentiation of educational-professional skills, and the rise of a vast non-profit sector of social services, often configured around the welfare state, create new opportunities for political parties to realign political divides and competitive dimensions (cf. Brooks, Nieuwbeerta, and Manza 2006; Evans 1999; Knutsen 2006; Manza and Brooks 1999). Again, partisan divides and competitive dimensions are no direct reflection of underlying social change, but result from the strategic positioning of parties and their ability to craft electoral coalitions (cf. Kitschelt 1994; Kitschelt and Rehm 2005). These party system changes may not so much signal a demise of economic-distributive politics, as diagnosed in the postmaterialism literature (Inglehart 1990, 1997), as a novel fusion of economic interest alignments and demands about political and cultural governance.

The combination of economic and non-economic interests by entrepreneurial politicians faced with cross-nationally varying strategic configurations among existing parties is also at the heart of a burgeoning literature on new party formation and

success in post-industrial democracies. While this literature initially focused on a libertarian left (cf. Kitschelt 1988, 1989b; Redding and Viterna 1999), much more attention has recently been devoted to the rise of extreme rightist parties in many European polities and Anglo-Saxon settler democracies. While there is widespread agreement on the socioeconomic transformations that bring about electoral constituencies available for such parties (primarily manual laborers at different skill levels and traditional small business owners, such as farmers, craftsmen and shopkeepers, men with low skills more generally) and pit them against other groups impervious to rightist political appeals (primarily highly trained professionals, particularly women and especially in the social service sector), it is more contentious how political opportunity structures have affected the nature of the radical right's appeals and its electoral success (cf. Kitschelt 19950; Lubbers, Gilsberts, and Scheepers 2002; Norris 2005). Central controversies concern the extent to which the radical right incorporates liberal market economics into its menu of political appeals (cf. Cole 2005; Ivarsflaten 2005; Kitschelt 1995a; Schain, Zolbergi and Hossau 2002), the causal efficacy of electoral laws in promoting or preventing the rise of new radical rightist parties (Carter 2005; Golder 2003; Jackman and Volpert 1996; Norris 2005; Veugelers and Magnan 2005) and the role the convergence and similarity among conventional left and right parties in their policies and governing practices has played for the success of new rightist parties (Carter 2005; Ignazi 2003; Kitschelt 1995a; Meguid 2005; Norris 2005; van der Brug, Fennema, and Tillie 2005; Veugelers and Magnan 2005).

A further interesting question of realignment concerns the way divisions over European integration have inserted themselves into national party systems (cf. Gabel 1998; Hix 1999; Marks and Wilson 2000; Marks, Wilson, and Ray 2002; Marks and Steenbergen 2004). In many countries, it is unlikely that European integration becomes a competitive dimension in the sense specified above (cf. Mair 2000). Beyond that, contextual conditions related to the perceived and anticipated consequences of EU integration for national political economies may bring about a rather diverse insertion of the EU issue into domestic politics (cf. Bringar, Jolly, and Kitschelt 2004; Ray 2004; Scheve 2000).

A third and final theme concerns the extent to which citizen-politician relations in contemporary post-industrial polities can still be conceived within a principal-agent framework. Some have argued that the transition to capital-intensive campaign strategies with an overwhelming role for the mass media and increasingly funded by public party finance has created unaccountable "party cartels" impervious to voter demands (Blyth and Katz 2005; Katz and Mair 1995, reprinted in Mair 1997), while others have invoked the power of competition and voter exit to contradict that thesis (Kitschelt 2000b). In other words, does the undeniable tendency of voters to express greater dissatisfaction with parties than in previous decades indicate that there is a crisis of political representation precipitated by unaccountable elites, or are these misgivings by-products of weaker economic performance and structural economic change that opens opportunities for partisan realignment?

4.3 Party Systems in New Democracies of the Developing World

Whereas comparative literature on Western OECD politics worries about the erosion of relations of democratic accountability, students of democracy in developing countries are preoccupied with the reverse question of whether accountability relations and "institutionalized" party systems will ever emerge in the first place. Particularly students of Latin American and post-communist politics have been impressed by the high volatility of many parties and party systems signaling difficulty in establishing lasting relations between voters and political agents (cf. Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Mair 1997, ch. 8; Roberts and Wibbels 1999; Rose and Munro 2003). In countries where party systems have developed some staying power, it is not programmatic politics based on indirect exchange, but clientelistic principal-agent relations that appear to dominate the scene and adapt to new constituencies and political challenges, whether in South and South-East Asia (cf. Kohli 1990; Chandra 2004; Chhibber 1998; Krishna 2002; Sachsenroder 1998; Wilkinson 2006), in Latin America (Fox 1994; Gibson 1997; Levitsky 2003) or post-communist Eastern Europe (Hale 2006; Kitschelt et al. 1999). The persistence or demise of clientelistic conditions does not simply depend on economic poverty and unequal asset distribution in a polity, but also on the strategic incentives generated within the arena of party competition to switch to a different accountability relationship (cf. Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2006). Also weak performance of public sector enterprises or of publicly regulated companies that are often shot through with clientelistic exchange relations may affect how democratic political accountability relations evolve.

Upon closer inspection, within each region of the developing world the current state of party system consolidation and the practices of principal-agent relations varies widely. Both in post-communist Europe as well as in Latin America a number of party systems have quite clearly structured programmatic political cleavages and rather stable competitive partisan divides, particularly if we follow Bartolini and Mair's (1990) focus not on the volatility of individual parties, but on party blocs with roughly similar appeals within a cleavage system. A growing literature has examined the extent and the nature of political cleavages and competitive party divides in the post-communist region (cf. Bielasiak 2002; de Waele 2004; Evans and Whitefield 1993, 2000; Kitschelt 1992, 1995b; Lewis 2000; Pridham and Lewis 1996; Tavits 2005; Whitefield 2002). Particular attention has been devoted to the insertion of the former communist ruling parties into democratic partisan politics (cf. Bozoki and Ishiyama 2002; Grzymala-Busse 2002). Controversies surround both the descriptive characterization of the political divides and competitive dimensions as well as the explanation for more or less programmatic structuring. Is it a consequence of political experiences of the past ("legacies") in each country, of democratic institutions (such as electoral systems and relations between the executive and the legislature), or of the momentous political-economic reforms that generate new divides between interests?

Comparative scholarship on Latin America has asked closely parallel questions. Some authors have ventured to identify the historical origins, profile, and durability of political cleavages in at least some party systems (Dix 1989; Collier and Collier 1991; Coppedge 1998). Others have focused on general patterns of stability and change in Latin American party systems in order to explore the causes of democratic party system institutionalization (cf. Dix 1992; Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Geddes 2003). In Latin America, just as in Eastern Europe, those party systems appear more consolidated and structured around mechanisms of programmatic accountability in which there had been other episodes of democratic competition before the current spell of democratic competition beginning in the 1980s. Such episodes of broad political mobilization enabled people to gain political experience and sometimes even to "lock in" certain political economic achievements, such as the beginnings of a welfare state, that provided a focal point to crystallize electorates around programmatic alternatives, particularly in an era of economic reform and market liberalization.

There is a curious asymmetry, however, when comparing Eastern Europe and Latin America. In Latin America party system consolidation and programmatic structuring tend to have undergone the greatest erosion in the 1990s and since 2000 precisely in countries with historically more established party systems. This erosion is greatest in Venezuela, followed by Argentina, but also present to a lesser extent even in Costa Rica, Uruguay, Mexico, and Chile. At the same time, Latin American countries with always inchoate party systems show few signs of changing that state of affairs. In Eastern Europe, by contrast, the polities with the most promising historical priors for party system institutionalization around programmatic accountability are also those that have achieved the comparatively greatest institutionalization. But even many less hospitable places have shown signs of moving toward patterns of programmatic accountability.

In Eastern Europe and also in South and South-East Asia sustained economic growth for at least the past decade and often longer has most certainly benefited the gradual establishment of robust structures of representation. In Latin America, by contrast, the demise of import-substituting industrialization strategies in the 1980s and the inability of political elites to embrace a definite new strategy of political-economic development, as evidenced by anemic growth and repeated monetary stabilization crises, may have contributed not only to the region's continuing economic hardship, but also the fragility of its democratic party systems.

5 CONCLUSION

My review of the party system literature has been highly selective, driven by my personal research interests in the area and an effort to stress certain agenda points for future research. Thus I believe more emphasis has to be placed on the comparative

study of the varieties of mechanisms that may govern the relationship between principals and agents in democratic party systems. I also believe that in the study of the "dimensionality" of party competition, more attention needs to be paid to the distinction between social, political, and competitive partisan divides. Third, and intimately linked to the previous point, the competitiveness of party systems deserves better conceptualization and more intensive study than in the past. Conversely, I submit that too much significance has been attached to certain relatively easily measured macro-level properties of party systems, such as party system fragmentation, polarization, and volatility, none of which are good measures of party system competitiveness.

My treatment of party systems has ignored, however, any discussion of the concept as independent variable. After all, we might develop concepts and theorems of party systems not for their own sake, but as fruitful tools to study the consequences of party competition for a variety of political and economic processes. Among them I would count the formation of legislative and executive majorities, the resulting process of policy formation and implementation, and ultimately the consequences of party system dynamics for the stability and survival of the political regime form itself. Since these topics are treated elsewhere in this volume, I could do without a detailed discussion in this entry on party systems. At the same time, a more sophisticated conceptualization of party systems, particularly of mechanisms of democratic accountability and partisan competitiveness, may perform wonders in improving the causal efficacy of explanations that employ party system attributes to predict political economic developments and political regime trajectories.

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