

## A SURVEY OF AMERICAN POLITICAL PARTIES IN WORLD PERSPECTIVE

Paper prepared for discussion with staff of the Center for  
the Study of Democratic Institutions, Summer 1977

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"How is your wife?" asks the first vaudeville comic.  
"Compared to what?" puzzles the second.

The same quip might apply to one who innocently inquires about the condition of political parties in the United States. Such a question needs some comparative referents to help determine what is being asked as well as what constitutes an answer. This paper looks at the Republican and Democratic parties in the context of political parties across the world, providing a broad framework for evaluating "how they are" in comparison with parties elsewhere.

The research which underlies this study involves 158 political parties operating from 1950 to 1962 in 53 countries drawn from all the major cultural-geographic areas of the world.<sup>1</sup> The results of that research are being prepared for publication in a variety of forms for different lines of inquiry.<sup>2</sup> One forthcoming publication, American Political Parties in World Perspective, is a book-length comparison of the Democrats and Republicans with all other parties on twelve key concepts in the comparative analysis of political parties. Some major findings of that book are summarized below while avoiding discussion of the complex research methodology involved in the study.<sup>3</sup>

While the purely technical aspects of the research can be omitted due to the survey nature of this paper, some explanation must be given of the analytical purposes to be served through studying American parties in world perspective. This report begins then with some observations on the comparative analysis of political parties. The second section defines the twelve major dimensions of party variation and summarizes the positions of the American parties in the distributions of the world's parties along these dimensions. Although a well-rounded understanding of American parties demands a probing discussion of the parties' placements on each of these key concepts, that is outside the scope of this paper. Instead, the third and final section selects only one dimension, the centralization of power, for closer treatment. It concludes by inquiring whether American government is best served by national political parties which are so extremely decentralized in power that they stand virtually alone among comparable institutions in Western Europe and throughout the world.

### The Comparative Analysis of Political Parties

The method of comparative analysis can be a valuable aid to understanding in many fields of study--plants, literature, food, animals, and especially politics. Comparative analysis is even useful in the study of politics when

we seek only to understand the political system in which we live. Immersed in the details of our situation, we need to rise above its particulars and specifics to discern overall patterns and general trends. In short, we need to achieve some perspective on our subject that is grander than that offered by our own peculiar experiences and perceptions. A comparative analysis of American parties with political parties in other nations offers such a perspective.

Most books on American political parties have not engaged in any type of systematic cross-national comparisons. Indeed, the lack of comparative analysis typifies the study of American politics in general, and this lack has tended to hinder our capacity to understand and perhaps improve our political system. Surely this is true with respect to our political parties, which are rather peculiar creatures in the panoply of parties across the world. Although the Democratic and Republican parties are prominent features of our political landscape and appear to dominate our national politics, that is largely an illusion. In comparison with political parties in other lands, American parties are alarmingly weak in their capacity to structure politics over governmental policy. This is the central conclusion drawn from studying American parties in world-wide perspective, and it is a point that is not likely to be grasped quite so clearly from studying American parties in and of themselves.

This is not to say that there is no point in focusing on the intricacies of party politics in the American case. Works that concentrate on the American situation should be studied to provide the depth of knowledge necessary to support cross-national comparisons. The purpose of comparative analysis is to enhance our texture of understanding by illuminating what is and is not distinctive about party politics in the United States. In an effort to shed light on this matter, the American parties have been compared systematically (1) with the world's parties in general, (2) with certain sub-groups of parties (competitive and non-competitive, Western and non-Western), and (3) with selected parties in particular (the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the British Conservatives, and the British Labour Party). Before discussing this comparison, we need to examine the role of political parties in the political system and the special place of parties in contemporary American politics.

Politics, Government, and Political Parties: Politics has frequently been defined as the process of determining "who gets what, when, why, and how." Politics thus involves contests among people with different values and resources competing over the authoritative formulation of rules for behavior and the allocation of both private and public goods. Politics--these contests among people--occurs within and around a framework of institutions which can be called the political system. All of these institutions structure the role relationships among contestants in the political process. The institutions that constitute the formal "government"--e.g., the legislature, the courts--entrust authority to certain actors (governmental officials) to make decisions affecting outcomes for all contestants. These governmental institutions plus other institutions in the system--e.g., interest groups and perhaps political parties--also impose constraints upon behavior that apply to governmental officials and the other contestants. Thus in this very abstract formulation, politics can be viewed as the struggle among individuals and groups for desired rules and goods, while

government can be viewed as part of the system of institutions which channels these struggles and fixes responsibility for action and decision.

We can make our discussion more concrete by examining the place of political parties within the political system. Political parties have become part of the institutional framework that structures politics in most, but not all, countries across the world. In many of these countries, parties are recognized as part of the formal government, and the trusts of authority they grant and the constraints they impose are regarded by citizens and officials alike as legitimate governmental functions and activities. In other countries, parties stand just outside the government as perhaps "extra-governmental" institutions which play regular and important roles in politics, but the nature and extent of their influence is highly variable. In still other countries, political parties are distinctly "non-governmental" institutions in that the government seeks to suppress their activity or eliminate them altogether. Nevertheless, such parties remain a part of the total political system, as they clearly contribute to structuring the role relationships among contestants in the political process. In all countries with parties, the capacities of parties to influence the outcomes of the political process vary considerably, depending on their characteristics as institutions and organizations.

Political Parties in American Government: Both of the two major American parties are essentially "extra-governmental" institutions and both figure prominently in structuring politics in the United States, but the capacities of the Democratic and Republican party organizations to influence the outcomes of government are very slight. To state the matter simply now, in advance of the more elaborate argument that emerges from the comparative analysis, the two parties function mainly at the electoral stage of the political process and almost not at all at the policy-making stage. They structure the contest for entrance into governmental office but impose few constraints on party members after they have attained that office.

The full study attempts to demonstrate the validity of this thumbnail characterization of American parties and to explain the factors that contribute to its existence. The observations to be made about the impotence of the national party organizations in government policy-making are not original with this study, and similar contentions have been advanced by numerous scholars of American parties. What this study does, however, is to provide some empirical basis for these statements in place of the speculative claims of those who have had to reason from vague impressions rather than concrete evidence. Thanks to the introduction of more accurate information into the evaluation of American parties, we are able to make far more precise statements about the particular character of our parties and to extend our knowledge accordingly. Heretofore, the study of political parties has proceeded without the benefit of any comprehensive, empirical data on substantial numbers of political parties across the world. Like speculating about the outcome of elections in the absence of information about the voters, theorizing about party politics in the absence of data about the parties can go only so far, and it becomes risky at that. Hopefully, this study of American political parties in world-wide perspective will provide a knowledge base that will allow us to rise to a new level of analysis.

A Conceptual Framework for Comparative Analysis: As stated above the study is based upon observations made on more than one hundred and fifty political parties in scores of countries from all cultural geographical areas of the world. The details of the sample--the specific parties and nations covered plus the time period of study--are reported elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> The question that confronts us now is, given the collection of basic information about such a large number of entities called "parties" in countries from Australia to Uganda, what kind of sense can one make from the information? In the language of research, this question translates into, "What 'conceptual framework' guides the study?"

A concept is a mental construct--an idea or thought about some phenomena--that aids in understanding by serving to classify objects or processes in terms of similarities and differences. Thus, one might form the idea of "a body of elected officials empowered to formulate laws for society" and refer to this concept in a shorthand way as a "legislature." In this example, the term "legislature" is simply a brief label for the concept, "a body of elected officials empowered to formulate laws for society." In the social sciences, the distinction between the term and the concept often gets lost, for terms often have denotations and connotations of their own that differ from the definition of the concept to which the term is supposed to apply.

The definitional problem becomes particularly vexing in the study of political parties across nations. There are many social organizations that call themselves "political parties," but we cannot be concerned with studying every organization that applies this term to itself. Nor can we afford to ignore organizations that do not employ this description but otherwise seem to fall within our interest. What we need to do is to construct a concept of a "political party" which serves the purpose of our cross-national analysis. This concept will have to be broad enough to encompass some very diverse organizations in countries outside the Western world but also narrow enough to eliminate those organizations which lack what appears to be essential to our notion of a party.

A conceptual framework for comparative analysis must provide for a clear concept of a political party which can translate into a fairly rigorous definition. It must also provide a series of other concepts which are useful for organizing information about the characteristics of all organizations that meet the definition of party. Taken together, this set of concepts constitutes the "conceptual framework" of the study. The conceptual framework specifies the ideas that are thought to be the keys to the comparative analysis of political parties. As central concepts or key ideas for comparative analysis, they need to be somewhat abstract, above the level of easily observable phenomena. It is this abstract quality of concepts which gives scholars the ability to penetrate beyond what they "see" directly and to derive new meaning from their observations.

The set of concepts which constitutes our conceptual framework for the comparative analysis of political parties involves a considerable amount of abstract or higher-level thinking about parties than is usually employed in studies of the American experience. This is essential in order to relate the American experience to practices in other countries. One's understanding of party politics in the United States should be enhanced through the very act of interpreting the specifics of the American case within the frame-

work of general concepts.

Analytical concepts are creations of imagination, and, as such, they will vary according to the insights, purposes, and knowledge of their creators. The utility of any given conceptual framework, moreover, depends on several factors. Frameworks that embrace large numbers of concepts are likely to have a wider scope of applicability than those which are more parsimonious, involving fewer concepts. The most discriminating criterion for the utility of a conceptual framework is its theoretical capacity--its ability to be used in the formulation of powerful theory which explains and predicts phenomena of interest. In our case, these phenomena consist of the characteristics, activities, and consequences of political parties.

The conceptual framework that guides this study of American parties in worldwide perspective stems from a decade of research on the subject. I have tried to balance the somewhat contradictory requirements of scope in application and parsimony in expression by proposing a basic framework that involves twelve major concepts pertaining to the characteristics of political parties. The ultimate utility of this framework will be judged according to its theoretical capacity, and three other books have been planned to treat party theory in an explicit manner.<sup>5</sup> This study has a different orientation; it is more descriptive than theoretical. Although theoretical statements will be involved in the discussion, the essential focus is on describing the American parties in comparative perspective. The value of the conceptual framework will have to be judged instead according to its capacity to organize one's thinking about American parties and its ability to generate insights into American party politics.

I contend that most of the major dimensions of variation among political parties across nations can be accommodated within a framework of twelve major concepts. These major concepts, moreover, can be separated into eight that pertain to a party's "external relation" with society and four that relate to its manner of "internal organization." These concepts will be presented after formally defining the object of study. A political party is an organization that pursues a goal of placing its avowed representatives in government positions. The term "placing" should be interpreted broadly to mean through the electoral process (when a party competes with one or more others in pursuing its goal) or by a direct administrative action (when a ruling party permits no electoral competition) or by forceful imposition (when a party subverts the system and captures the governmental offices). Some organizations may call themselves "parties" but may not be oriented toward providing governmental leadership, i.e., they do not pursue the goal of placing their avowed representatives in government positions. Therefore, they do not qualify as parties under our definition.

This then is the abstract conceptual definition of a political party employed in this study. This concept of party specifically does not include the requirement of "competition in elections" as a defining characteristic, for that would exclude from study many "parties" in communist states (e.g., the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and would be far too restrictive a conceptualization for our cross-national analysis. After this broad conceptualization was applied to the 53 countries in the sample, 158 qualified for study by meeting certain minimum levels of strength and stability.<sup>6</sup> We now move to the twelve concepts that encompass the major cross-national variations among political parties and our summary comments about the findings of our research.

In reading through these concepts for the comparative analysis of political parties, one may have some expectations about where the Democrats and Republicans measure out on one or more of these dimensions. If so, the findings from our cross-national study provide, in effect, an answer sheet for checking purposes. Because the benchmarks for evaluation in the pages to follow come from scores on these concepts obtained by parties in other countries rather than from some "ideal" standards, the findings in some instances are apt to be surprising. This is especially likely for those whose knowledge about political parties is steeped in the American experience to the exclusion of cross-national referents. Comparative analysis serves to improve understanding, but in the process it often disturbs settled notions and thus perplexes as well as informs. Hopefully, this study of American political parties in worldwide perspective will stimulate more critical intellectual analysis of party politics in the United States. If so, it will have served its purpose.

### A Comparative Evaluation of American Parties

Not surprisingly, there is no single answer to any general question about the state of American parties. Inquiries need to be directed to specific aspects of party performance or structure. This study identifies twelve major concepts bearing on important aspects of a party's external relations with society and its internal organization. Our evaluation of American political parties in world perspective can be ordered and summarized according to these concepts.

**EXTERNAL RELATIONS:** We begin by noting that parties differ considerably in the way that they relate to their political and social environment. The conceptual framework contains eight major concepts pertaining to parties' "external relations," and each of these aims at a fundamental source of differences among political parties across nations.

**Goal orientation:** By definition, "placing their avowed representatives in government positions" is a common goal of political parties, but parties can vary according to the way that they pursue this goal. The concept of goal orientation refers both to the party's strategy and its tactics for achieving this goal.

Approximately two-thirds of the parties in the total sample followed mostly a competitive strategy, seeking to win government office through electoral competition, as opposed to a non-competitive strategy of either restricting competition or subverting the government. The Western parties (i.e., those in Western Europe and the Anglo-American countries) in the study were nearly all competitive. Many of these competitive parties employed a breadth of tactics to implement their strategy, engaging in various educational and social service activities for the benefit of their members. Both American parties were clearly competitive in strategy, but they distinctly limited their tactics to electioneering activities. This earns them description as narrow-oriented competitive parties, engaging in few activities beyond campaign tactics directly associated with a strategy of winning elections.

Governmental status: Some parties tend to dominate the government; others stand largely outside the government. The concept of governmental status refers to the amount of access that the party enjoys to the governmental institutions.

Both American parties rank above the mean of all parties, all competitive parties, and all Western competitive parties on governmental status. This is true for both Republicans and Democrats, as United States' governmental structure (especially the separation of powers) provides multiple points of access for both parties. The direct effect is that both parties tend to enjoy high degrees of governmental status concurrently. One consequence for American politics is that often neither party is entrusted with sole responsibility for governmental performance.

Institutionalization: Parties have varying lifespans, and they also vary in their stability during their lives. The concept of institutionalization gets at this element of permanence and stability.

On our measures, the American parties are the most institutionalized in the world. They have structured the electoral situation in the United States ever since the Civil War at the national, state, and county levels. Despite the parties' recent dips in public esteem, electoral politics in the United States is almost exclusively a story of Democrats and Republicans. However, the importance of the parties as institutions in American political life lies in the claims they have upon voting loyalties rather than their capacities to act as organizational forces in policy making.

Social reflection: Political parties operate within societies that differ greatly in their composition along occupational, ethnic, religious, regional, urban-rural, and educational dimensions. Individual parties may or may not reflect these differences in their own composition. The extent to which they do is expressed in the concept of social reflection.

Both American parties tend to reflect their country's social structures better than the average Western competitive party on five of the six dimensions named above, but the Republicans fall below the Western mean for reflection on ethnicity due to the low percentage of blacks who identify with the party in comparison to the rest of the population. Democratic identifiers are substantially more reflective of the ethnic composition of the population and rate above the Western mean on ethnic reflection. Indeed, the Democrats are more reflective of the U.S. population than the Republicans on all six social dimensions.

Social concentration: In addition to the accuracy with which parties reflect social divisions in society, parties can vary according to the degree that any specific social subgroups dominate the composition of the party, which is the subject of the concept of social concentration.

Both parties show less domination of the party composition by regional and educational subgroupings than the average Western competitive party, but there are some concentrations of social groups within both parties that exceed the average levels of the Western parties. The most striking difference between the American parties and the others is due to the racial structure of American society, which results in both parties being dominated

by whites--with the domination almost complete among Republicans. The Republicans also are more concentrative than other parties on religion (overwhelmingly protestant) and urban-rural lines (notably heavy with supporters living outside the central cities).

Social attraction: Yet a third way of conceptualizing the social bases of a party's support considers the evenness of support that the party draws from the various social subgroups, which is addressed in the concept of social attraction.

The American parties are commonly characterized as being broadly "aggregative" of social groups, and our measure of social attraction bears this out for the most part. Both parties attract support from their country's various subgroupings more evenly than the average Western competitive party on five of the six dimensions. The exception is again the Republicans on ethnicity, as blacks are disproportionately low in their support for the party. And again the Democrats consistently rate higher than the Republicans in their tendency to attract support evenly from the various subgroups.

Autonomy: Parties can operate independently of other institutional sectors of society--like the military, labor unions, business, churches--or they can be structurally linked to these sectors. The absence of such structural links gives the party greater freedom of action, which is dealt with in the concept of autonomy.

In some respects, American parties are highly autonomous in comparison with their competitive counterparts. American parties have no links with foreign organizations; they are not encumbered with inter-party alliances; and they do not depend on other social organizations for their members. On the other hand, the American parties, like most other competitive parties, do look to particular sectors of society for their leaders (mainly business and the legal profession) and--unlike most other competitive parties--rely primarily on one or two sectors of the society for their operating funds. In the case of the Republicans, business and industry furnish the vast bulk of their support. In the case of the Democrats, the major source of support is the same, but labor helps out significantly. In the sense of sources of funds, both American parties are less autonomous than their competitive counterparts, which obtain funds from a wider variety of sources and from membership dues.

Issue orientation: The final concept under the "external relations" heading pertains to the widely different stances that parties take on major political topics, such as those dealing with the role of the government in achieving social objectives and the role of the citizen in affecting the actions of government. The concept of issue orientation addresses these policy differences among parties through the creation of three different "scales" to measure policy positions.

Contrary to some characterizations of American parties, the Democrats and Republicans do differ substantially from each other on issues dealing with the role of the state in economic and social affairs. On the "Positive State" scale, which measures support of government activity, the Republicans'

opposition rated them far to the right of most competitive parties while the Democrats rated near the mean. The American parties evidence about as much difference in philosophy on the Positive State issues as the British parties, only the American parties tend to the center and the right of the continuum while the British parties divide more clearly on the left and righthand sides. On a broader "Marxism" scale, which includes a richer variety of ideological issues, the Democrats and Republicans draw much closer together and move even further to the right of the continuum. On a "Liberalism" scale, embodying the principles of liberty and equality from classical liberalism, both parties ranked below the mean for competitive parties during our time period, the height of the Cold War. Both parties would certainly rank higher on liberalism today.

**INTERNAL ORGANIZATION:** The last four concepts can be thought of as looking inward toward the party rather than outward toward the society, as is the case with the "external relations" concepts. The internal organization concepts find both parties to be quite similar when judged in relationship to the variety of experience across the world.

**Coherence:** Some parties seem to march along in a unified manner toward an agreed-upon set of objectives; others seem to spend more energy in internal disputes than they apply to any external objectives. This source of variation among parties is treated in the concept of coherence.

The American political parties have been beset by regional and ideological divisions which have been reflected in the parties' roll call voting in Congress. Other parties have their factions too, but even in relative terms, both American parties are low in coherence, ranking below the mean of competitive parties as a group and below the Western subset.

**Involvement:** People become involved in party activity to varying degrees and for different reasons. Parties can be classified according to the factors that motivate their activists and the intensity of their participation. This is the purpose of the concept of involvement.

The Democrats and Republicans do not seek to involve citizens in party work apart from election campaigning. In fact, the national parties do not provide at all for mass membership, which is a common feature of other parties in Western countries. It should be no surprise that both parties rank low on involvement of members and militants in comparison with other Western parties or all competitive parties.

**Degree of organization:** Parties display varying amounts of formal structures and organizational apparatus, ranging from those that operate largely out of a strong leader's hat to those that feature a complex mix of conventions, committees, subcommittees, and secretariats. The amount of such structural differentiation that exists within a party is the subject of the concept of degree of organization.

The American parties have not been credited with much in the way of party organization, and party scholars often identify them as being weakly organized. But it appears that these scholars are referring more to the location of power within the party instead of the existence of party structure. Conceptualizing degree of organization in terms of the differentia-

tion of party structure, we find that both American parties are about as highly organized as the average competitive party or the average Western party.

Centralization of power: As parties differ in structural differentiation, they also differ in the locus of power within the party. In some, power is diffused throughout the organization; in others, power is concentrated at the national level, perhaps in one person. The concept that assesses this phenomenon is the centralization of power.

American parties are clearly different from other parties in the location of power within the party structure. Decentralization of power within the parties is the standard assessment of American political parties. But the cross-national findings illuminate the extremity of the situation within the United States. The Democrats and Republicans emerge as perhaps the most decentralized parties in existence. American parties are not only decentralized; they are nearly unique in their degree of decentralization.

This summary description of the Democratic and Republican parties encapsulates our findings. In abbreviated form, this is the state of political parties in the United States.

#### Centralization of Power: A Closer Look

The previous section condensed a great deal of information about the world's parties into a few summary comments. These observations may awaken interest in the comparative analysis of American parties, but they are too meager to sustain, much less satisfy, that interest. Although the present format of publication offers no possibility for a thorough review of the findings for any of the twelve key dimensions of variation in the conceptual framework, it is possible to choose one of the dimensions for closer examination. Perhaps the one which carries the most relevant message for the evaluation of contemporary American parties is centralization of power.

This concept is directed at answering these questions: Who controls the party? Is power centralized within the hands of a single party leader, or do various "leaders" direct subdivisions of the party according to their own views and values? Clearly, this dimension of the internal organization of political parties is critical in evaluating a party's role as an organizational force in the political system. Note that centralization of power differs from degree of organization. The most centralized party might claim no structure beyond that of the distinction between the all-powerful leader and his minions. A party with a high degree of organization, on the other hand, might possess multiple and continually warring loci of power. In spite of its high degree of organization, such a party may find its capacity to influence government far less than a centralized party with little formal structure.

Specifically, we define centralization of power as the extent to which the decision-making capacity within the party is concentrated within one superior national body. At the limiting extreme in a centralized party, one individual would possess the power to make all decisions concerning the party. We measured different levels of party position along a centralization continuum by scoring parties on eight separate indicators of central-

ization: (1) nationalization of structure, (2) controlling communications, (3) administering discipline, (4) selecting parliamentary candidates, (5) allocating funds, (6) selecting the national leader, (7) policy formulation, and (8) leadership concentration. A party's ratings on these eight indicators were combined to form a composite scale score, and the scores for all parties on centralization of power were distributed as shown in Figure 1, where positive scores equate with centralization and negative scores show decentralization.

Enter Figure 1

As that graph reveals, non-competitive parties across the world tend to be more centralized than competitive parties. The position of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union illustrates this tendency.<sup>7</sup> But even in comparison with only the competitive parties, the American parties stand in an extreme position on this scale. Whether one wants to make his comparisons with the British parties, the average Western competitive party, the average competitive party regardless of region, the average party regardless of goal orientation, or the Communist Party of the Soviet Union --the outcome is the same: the American parties are far more decentralized.

How does this finding compare with impressionistic judgments of American parties? Our textbooks are virtually unanimous in their assessment of the distribution of power within the Democratic and Republican parties. Power is described as extremely decentralized, and this is often cited as the major characteristic of the two major parties in the United States. More than thirty years ago, Schattschneider wrote:

Decentralization of power is by all odds the most important single characteristic of the American major party; more than anything else this trait distinguishes it from all others. Indeed, once this truth is understood, nearly everything else about American parties is greatly illuminated. (1942: 129)

Approximately fifteen years later, Ranney and Kendall found that their analysis of leadership and discipline among the various levels of American parties warranted "at least one firm conclusion: American national parties are decentralized" (1956: 264, emphasis in original). More recently, Keefe asserted, "There is no lively debate among political scientists concerning the dominant characteristic of American political parties. It is, pure and simple, their decentralization." (1972: 25)

If possible, findings from the cross-national study make the point even stronger. The American parties are very nearly the most decentralized parties in the world. Only three parties in our entire sample obtained lower scores on the centralization of power scale than the Democrats and Republicans. One of these is a now-defunct party in Chad, and the other two are the Blanco and Colorado parties in Uruguay--which scholars often describe not as genuine parties but as coalitions of distinct parties with different names.

These comparative analysis confirm that American parties not only rank low in centralization of power but are virtually unique in their decentral-

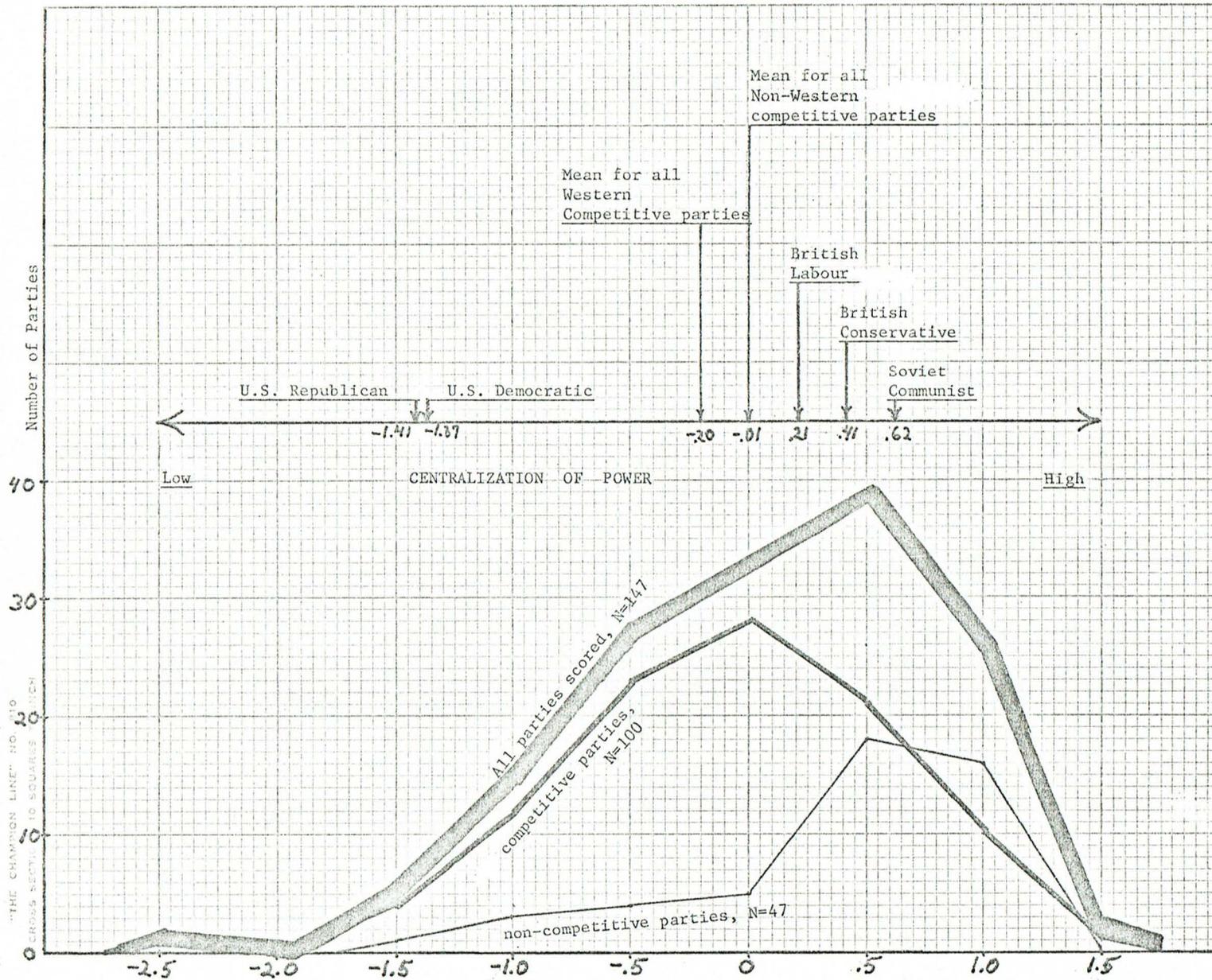


Figure 1

ization. This observation may be incredible to those familiar with reformers' recent efforts to "open up" the party. We need to look more closely than usual at parties' scores on the components of our scale to see how they earned such decentralized ratings.

On "nationalization of structure"--both parties display something less than a hierarchy of command, for state party organizations have often flaunted national-level decisions--including platform enactments and even choice of the presidential candidate. In preference to "hierarchy," Eldersveld employs the term "stratarchy" for the distribution of power in American parties:

The general characteristics of stratarchy are the proliferation of the ruling group and the diffusion of power prerogatives and power exercise. Rather than centralized "unity of command," or a general dilution of power throughout the structure, "strata commands" exist which operate with a varying, but considerable degree of, independence. (1964: 9)

On "selecting the national leader" (defined in our study as the party's presidential candidate)--both parties' use of the convention method represents one of the more decentralized options, as most parties across the world employ more centralized procedures-- such as selection by the national committee. The increased use of primaries to nominate convention delegates --a consequence of the recent reform movement--serves to decentralize power even further. In past conventions, party leaders in command of state blocs could introduce some centralization of power through a bargaining process. Although bargaining will likely be necessary at future conventions (because no one is apt to win enough delegates to insure victory beforehand), established party leaders will not play the same facilitative role. As for the possible impact of national primaries for nominating the parties' candidates, Crotty states it clearly: "While well-intentioned, the national primary concept represents a radical alternative that could well destroy what is left of the party system." (1977: 229)

On "selecting parliamentary (congressional) candidates"--no other parties in the sample use the direct primary method of nominating party candidates, a method which effectively removes the national party organization from the process. In most parties, the national committee has some role of approval or outright selection. As Sindler says, "The decentralization and localism of American national parties are nowhere better illustrated than in nominations to national legislative offices." (1966: 83)

On "allocating funds"--the Republicans' procedures are somewhat more centralized than the Democrats, but in both parties the role of the national committee is definitely limited. Ad hoc campaign committees were common during the 1950s and proliferated in the 1960s, raising and spending most of the funds in presidential campaigns. (The new public financing of campaigns has eliminated the proliferation of ad hoc campaign committees, but the national committees still remain far in the background.)

On "policy formulation"--the American parties play a constrained role. The typical pattern across the world involves the national committee in policy making in an exclusive or major way. The Democrats experimented with a national-level policy council during our time period, (and are cur-

rently experimenting with the mid-term convention idea) but both parties have favored the more decentralized option of formulating policy every four years in conventions whose main purpose is to nominate presidential candidates.

On "controlling communications"--neither party has any mass media of any consequence under its control. There are no widely read party newspapers, published by the national committee, as in some countries.

On "administering discipline"--neither national party organization made any attempts to discipline party members in government positions or local party organizations during our time period. Afterwards, however, the Democrats did unseat delegates from Mississippi and Georgia at the 1968 convention for discrimination against blacks in the delegate selection process, and the National Democratic Committee proposed sweeping guidelines for the selection of delegates to the 1972 convention, which saw challenged delegations (most notably from Illinois) unseated for non-compliance.

On "leadership concentration"--it cannot be said that any individual has the right to speak for the party and to commit the party to binding courses of action through the power invested in his office. This is obvious for the party which does not control the presidency, but it is also true for the party which does. Presidential policies are not party policies, and in any year, there are a number of elected party leaders in congress who can claim status as party spokesmen. The sound of the American party resembles the Tower of Babel more than the voice from the pulpit.

The role of the parties' national committees deserves special attention in a study of power within the parties. The national committees have not played the part in American party politics that they typically do across the world. Crotty comments:

The national committees--in organization, operation, or conception--in no sense represent national headquarters for nationwide parties; a point that continually mystifies foreign visitors more familiar with the national level organizations of the European democratic parties. (1971: 1)

The position of national party chairmen is also of lesser importance than the party chairmanship in most other parties. The national chairman is usually designated by the successful party nominee after the nominating conventions. He typically has no extensive power base of his own and serves at the pleasure of the president (when his party's candidate wins the election), or at the pleasure of opposing forces within the party (when his party loses). In either case, Cotter notes, "a national chairman must regard himself as expendable" (1969: 22). The position of national chairman has never served as a stepping stone to the presidency or vice-presidency. (William E. Miller was selected as Senator Goldwater's vice-presidential running mate in 1964--an exceptional move in American politics.) In short, the national chairman rarely finds himself in the seat of power.

Politics without Power is the descriptive title of the book by Cotter and Hennessy about the national party committees (1964). Bone, another student of the national committees, concludes that "the national committee is very rarely an important center of power in terms of drafting the party's

legislative program and exercising authority over its candidates and public officeholders" (1971: 187). What then, do they do? Bone contends that such committees primarily provide service:

This involves the responsibility for conducting research, obtaining publicity to keep the party before the public, assisting in speech writing, supplying speakers and materials to both party and non-party groups, and in general serving as the secretariat for the party. (1971: 189)

Clearly, the American national committees serve their parties; they do not lead them.

### Summary and Conclusions

American parties have been characterized as extremely decentralized. Our analysis of the centralization of power within political parties across the world strongly supports this characterization. Not only are they on the decentralized side of the scale, but the Democrats and Republicans are among the most decentralized parties in the world. Local parties determine nominations for congressional offices quite independently of any national direction, much less control. The party's nomination for the presidency is decided in convention, and the national committee's role in this process (in the absence of an incumbent president seeking re-nomination) is cautious neutrality. Funds are collected and expended for election campaigns largely outside of any national committee supervision. Party policy, once enunciated in the convention platforms, is left to find its own champions, for the party has no machinery to enforce its promotion. In sum, the American national parties--as organizations--exercise almost no powers to induce behavior on behalf of party goals.

This lack of power in American national parties must be viewed in the context of the parties' position on coherence. If the parties were highly coherent, so that members and activists agreed on policy, strategy, and leadership, there would be little need for centralization of power within the party. Agreeing among themselves on such matters of import, party leaders and workers would advance the party interest simply by being left alone to do their good works. But the American parties are lacking in coherence as well as power, and a doctrine of laissez faire in party matters provides free expression to divergent tendencies within the parties and makes orphans of party goals.

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union also rated below average on coherence. But the CPSU possesses enough organizational power to command behavior on behalf of its objectives. In the case of the CPSU, it becomes meaningful to talk about party action in pursuit of party policy. Such talks is far less appropriate to the United States, where parties have neither coherence nor power.

Reference to the CPSU is made deliberately, for it represents in the eyes of many Americans the ugliness of party power. Power implies coercion, and coercion is not a popular term in the rhetoric of participatory democracy, so prominent in political discourse of contemporary American society. The watchword among party reformers is "intra-party democracy," and decen-

tralization of power is seen by many as an aspect of this ideal state. Unpopular or not, power relationships are an inevitable part of life, utopian attempts to eliminate them notwithstanding. Unquestioning opposition to centralization of power within parties on ideological grounds can blind one to contradictions within his system of values and actions. Alternative models of the distribution of power within American parties need to be evaluated for their consequences rather than their symbolism.

There are those who would have the American parties work to direct and channel social change. This position is often identified with the "programmatic" function of political parties, which American parties have not fulfilled very well. Evidence exists that, at least within the Democratic Party, those who favor a programmatic party also insist on intra-party democracy (Soule and Clarke, 1970: 888). To the extent that the commitment to intra-party democracy also implies opposition to centralization of power, our cross-national analysis suggests that those who advocate these joint values are running against the tide of the data. Adopting the Positive State Scale (which indicates favorable attitudes toward government activity) as roughly reflective of a programmatic orientation, one finds a correlation of about .30 between centralization of power and programmatic orientation. Across the world, the tendency is for parties who favor a positive role for the state to be more centralized than those who do not. This relationship is far from perfect, and the Positive State Scale is only an imperfect measure of programmatic parties. But the correlational evidence gives one pause to think about the mechanisms whereby programmatic parties can implement their programs. If parties as organizations are to accomplish their objectives, they need some capacity for inducing behavior toward their ends. If fortune smiles upon the party, it might possess sufficient coherence to elicit cohesiveness without asking for it. But if party members entertain different opinions about what the party ought do, then the organization will need to utilize some power to produce cohesiveness. A dilemma appears to confront those who favor programmatic parties but also abhor party power, a dilemma which is spotlighted through the comparative analysis of political parties.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>The research was begun in 1967 at Northwestern University under the auspices of the International Comparative Political Parties Project. The main financial support for the project came from the National Science Foundation under grants GS-1418, GS-2523, and GS-27081. Research funds were also provided by Northwestern's Research Committee and its Council for Intersocietal Studies, by the Foreign Policy Research Institute of Philadelphia, and by the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research in Washington, D.C. The principal investigator of the ICPP Project is Kenneth Janda.

<sup>2</sup>The basic data collected on all the parties will be published in Kenneth Janda, Comparative Political Parties: A Cross-National Survey (New York: The Free Press, forthcoming). The Free Press has also contracted to publish a series of other volumes analyzing the data from the project. One will examine the interrelationships among party characteristics, another will assess the effect of system variables upon party characteristics, and a third will investigate the effect of party characteristics upon the performance of political systems.

<sup>3</sup>See Kenneth Janda, "A Microfilm and Computer System for Analyzing Comparative Politics Literature," in George Gerbner et al. (es.); The Analysis of Communication Content (New York: John Wiley, 1969), 407-435; Kenneth Janda, "Data Quality Control and Library Research on Political Parties," in Raoul Naroll and Ronald Cohen (eds.), A Handbook of Method in Cultural Anthropology (Garden City, New York: Natural History Press, 1970), 962-973; and Kenneth Janda, "A Worldwide Study of Political Parties," in Benjamin Mittman and Lorraine Borman (eds.), Personalized Data Base Systems (New York: John Wiley, 1975), 129-137.

<sup>4</sup>Five countries were drawn at random from each of ten cultural-geographical areas. This random sample of fifty countries was later augmented by the addition of Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States--none of which chanced to in the original sample. See Kenneth Janda, "The Status of the International Comparative Political Parties Project," International Studies Newsletter (Winter, 1973), 49-52.

<sup>5</sup>One will focus on political parties as organizations, interrelating the characteristics of political parties within the context of organizational theory. Another will treat parties as dependent variables, whose nature and viability are affected by the political and social system. The last will regard parties as independent variables, affecting the style and substance of politics and public policy within nations.

<sup>6</sup>For legal parties, our criteria for inclusion requires (a) holding at least five percent of the seats in the legislature (b) following two elections during our time period. For illegal parties, our criteria are less automatic, but we look for the party receiving support (a) from at least ten percent of the population (b) over a five year period.

<sup>7</sup>In general, leftist parties tend to be more highly centralized than non-leftist parties, but there are some striking exceptions. Some extreme rightist parties are among the most centralized parties in the world. A

Footnotes

case in point was the Dominican Party of the Dominican Republic, which had a centralization score of 1.07. This party was the creature of General Rafael Trujillo, who ruled from 1930 until his assassination in 1961. There were several such instruments of one-man rule in our study. They usually had little in the way of party structure (and thus ranked low on degree of organization) and instead concentrated power in the hands of one individual or his deputies. Leftist parties, on the other hand, were much more likely to be highly organized, with power inhering in the occupants of positions within the party structure and not in the persons themselves. Thus, there appears to be a limiting factor on the centralization of power within leftist parties. Although they tend to rate above the mean on centralization of power, they do not hold the very top positions on the scale, which are occupied by one-man parties in authoritarian regimes.

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