

PART I

DEFINITION OF PARTY

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WHAT IS A POLITICAL PARTY?

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‘But who do you say that I am?’ – Jesus Christ to his disciples, Matthew 16: 15

Defining political parties is a task that at first glance appears to be relatively simple. In 1984, political scientist Robert Huckshorn provided ‘a pragmatic definition’ of parties in his textbook *Political Parties in America*: ‘[A] political party is an autonomous group of citizens having the purpose of making nominations and contesting elections in hope of gaining control over governmental power through the capture of public offices and the organization of the government’.¹ For Huckshorn, the *raison d’état* for having political parties was simple: they were the means necessary to win elections and provide direction to government.

But is that really so? As students of political parties are well aware, many legitimate political parties exist for reasons that have little to do with winning elections. How else would one explain the proliferation of third parties in recent years? For example, while the Beer-Lovers’ Party in Poland began as a prank, over time it developed a serious platform for which the humorously stated goals of the party – lively political discussion in pubs serving excellent beer – became associated with the values of freedom of association and expression, intellectual tolerance, and a higher standard of living. In 1991, it captured 16 seats in the Sejm, the lower house of the Polish parliament. Thus, while the Beer-Lovers’ Party had

satirical origins, it became a force in Polish politics due to its ideas – not because it was formed with the stated purpose of winning elections. Much the same could be said of the Green Party in the United States. As the party’s website states, Greens are ‘committed to environmentalism, non-violence, social justice, and grassroots organizing’. The Greens are especially supportive of a campaign finance reform law that would renew democracy ‘without the support of corporate donors’.² Like the Beer-Lovers’ Party, the Greens have almost no hope of winning most US elections – including the most important one of all, the presidency. The 2000 Green Party presidential nominee, Ralph Nader, though he cost Democrat Al Gore the presidency in 2000, won a mere 2.7 percent of the popular vote cast.³

Yet political scientists would unanimously classify most third parties (including the Beer-Lovers’ party and the Greens, along with many others) as legitimate parties. But concomitant with such legitimacy come numerous assumptions made by academics as to what political parties *are* and *are not* – and, even more frequently, what they *should be*. If parties are to act as ‘mediating institutions’ between the governors and the governed, then what tasks should they be performing? Should they be election facilitators who provide candidates with ballot access? Or do they exist to promote ideas no matter how controversial? Just as political scientists make assumptions about party behavior,

they also make many presuppositions about *partisan* behavior. For example, do voters behave in an entirely rational manner, thus making parties objects of political utility? Or do voters eschew parties altogether and bring other considerations – if any – into the making of their ballot selections?

Thus, defining what a political party is and what functions it should assume is hardly an objective task. Rather, it is a normative one, and the answers given by political scientists have varied over time. Below are several oft-cited responses to the question ‘What is a political party?’:

- Edmund Burke (1770): ‘[A] party is a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed.’⁴
- Anthony Downs (1957): ‘In the broadest sense, a political party is a coalition of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by legal means. By *coalition*, we mean a group of individuals who have certain ends in common and cooperate with each other to achieve them. By *governing apparatus*, we mean the physical, legal, and institutional equipment which the government uses to carry out its specialized role in the division of labor. By *legal means*, we mean either duly constituted or legitimate influence.’⁵
- V.O. Key, Jr (1964): ‘A political party, at least on the American scene, tends to be a “group” of a peculiar sort. ... Within the body of voters as a whole, groups are formed of persons who regard themselves as party members. ... In another sense the term “party” may refer to the group of more or less professional workers. ... At times party denotes groups within the government. ... Often it refers to an entity which rolls into one the party-in-the-electorate, the professional political group, the party-in-the-legislature, and the party-in-the-government ... In truth, this all-encompassing usage has its legitimate application, for all the types of groups called party interact more or less closely and at times may be as one. Yet both analytically and operationally the term ‘party’ most of the time must refer to several types of group; and it is useful to keep relatively clear the meaning in which the term is used.’⁶
- William Nisbet Chambers (1967): ‘[A] political party in the modern sense may be thought of as a relatively durable social formation which seeks offices or power in government, exhibits a structure or organization which links leaders at the centers of government to a significant popular following in the political arena and its local enclaves, and generates in-group perspectives or at least symbols of identification or loyalty.’⁷
- Leon D. Epstein (1980): ‘[What] is meant by a political party [is] any group, however loosely organized, seeking to elect government officeholders under a given label.’⁸
- Ronald Reagan (1984): ‘A political party isn’t a fraternity. It isn’t something like the old school tie you wear. You band together in a political party because of certain beliefs of what government should be.’⁹
- Joseph Schlesinger (1991): ‘A political party is a group organized to gain control of government in the name of the group by winning election to public office.’¹⁰
- John Aldrich (1995): ‘Political parties can be seen as coalitions of elites to capture and use political office. [But] a political party is more than a coalition. A political party is an institutionalized coalition, one that has adopted rules, norms, and procedures.’¹¹

While these definitions vary and many have persisted throughout the ages, they remain controversial. Should parties emphasize their ideological roots, as Burke and Reagan prefer? Or are parties merely tools for gaining access to governmental office, as Epstein, Schlesinger, and Aldrich indicate? Or are they important mediating instruments designed to organize and simplify voter choices in order to influence the actions of government, as Downs, Key, and Chambers imply? Even Downs thought his original definition was misguided, since the governing party did not conform to his idea of ‘a single, rational, decision-making entity controlling government policy’. Thus, Downs redefined parties as follows: ‘A political party is a team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election. By *team*, we mean a coalition whose members agree on all their goals instead of on just part of them.’¹²

Such hedging – along with the widespread lack of consensus within the political science community as to what political parties exactly are or should be – calls to mind the various responses Jesus Christ received when he queried his disciples, asking them ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’. They replied: ‘Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ Jesus persisted, asking his disciples ‘But who do you say that I am?’ One of them, Simon Peter, responded: ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.’¹³ If only, in a more

secular fashion, there could be such a definitive definition as to what parties are and what they ought to do.

Because neither citizens nor scholars have ever satisfactorily answered these normative questions, the attempt to define what a political party is – and what tasks should be entrusted to it – has often produced more confusion than explanation. In the United States, the confusion dates back to the inception of the modern American polity. In *The Federalist*, James Madison likened parties to interest groups which he derisively labeled as ‘factions’. Yet Madison’s discussion of ‘faction’ is rather vague, with a primary emphasis on controlling the ‘mischiefs’ of the propertied interests.¹⁴ One reason for the framers’ lack of intellectual coherence was their distrust of those repositories of political power. To the Federalists, the word ‘power’ had such negative connotations that Alexander Hamilton substituted the word ‘energy’ for it.¹⁵ One Democratic-Republican party opponent spoke out against the Federalist energizers in 1802, saying, ‘I would as soon give my vote to a wolf to be a shepherd, as to a man, who is always contending for the *energy of government*’.¹⁶

Not surprisingly, the framers were reluctant to sharpen their thinking about political parties. Instead, they often made a virtue out of political stalemate, which essentially guaranteed querulous parties arguing over limited objectives. Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in *Democracy in America* that ‘parties are an evil inherent in free governments’.¹⁷ The beneficent effect of parties, said Tocqueville, was that the governmental competition ensured by the US Constitution made them small-minded: ‘They glow with a fractious zeal; their language is violent, but their progress is timid and uncertain. The means they employ are as disreputable as the aim sought.’¹⁸ The result, Tocqueville claimed, was that ‘public opinion is broken up ad infinitum about questions of detail’.¹⁹

With the passage of time, scholars have sought to redefine political parties and distinguish them from ‘factions’ – i.e., interest groups – often assigning more noble tasks to the former than the latter. In 1942, V. O. Key, Jr. suggested that interest groups ‘promote their interests by attempting to influence the government rather than by nominating candidates and seeking the responsibility for the management of government [as political parties do]’.²⁰ Other scholars disagree, noting that in an age of weakened political parties, interest groups frequently influence nominations, are instrumental in electing favorite candidates, and help manage the government by influencing

both the appointment of officials and the actual decision-making process itself.

THE PARTY CONSENSUS

Even though there exists a rather profound disagreement among political scientists as to *how* political parties ought to operate, there has emerged a passionate consensus behind many of the normative arguments made on their behalf. Beginning with the publication of *The American Commonwealth* in 1888, James Bryce began a tradition that consisted of scholarly investigation and laudatory treatment: ‘Parties are inevitable. No free country has been without them. No-one has shown how representative government could be worked without them. They bring order out of chaos to a multitude of voters’.²¹ Nearly six decades later, E.E. Schattschneider echoed Bryce, writing in his masterful book, *Party Government*, that ‘modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties’.²² Schattschneider’s passion for parties remained undimmed. Shortly before his death, he said: ‘I suppose the most important thing I have done in my field is that I have talked longer and harder and more persistently and enthusiastically about political parties than anyone else alive’.²³ His enthusiasm has been echoed by political scientists in the generations since. For example, Giovanni Sartori claimed parties were ‘the central intermediate structures between society and government’.²⁴ Clinton Rossiter applied the following tautology to the American context: ‘No America without democracy, no democracy without politics, and no politics without parties’.²⁵

Rossiter’s axiom has been applied by other political scientists to their home governments around the globe. For example, in the once communist-controlled ‘Captive Nations’ of eastern Europe, the emergence of party competition (including Poland’s Beer-Lovers’ Party) is used to measure the varying progress of these countries toward democracy. Likewise, in the former Soviet Union, signs of a fledgling party system win accolades from the vast majority of scholars. In the western hemisphere, the march toward democracy in South America is celebrated, as one country after another has discarded dictatorship in favor of democratic party rule. Thus, political scientists measure the march toward democracy in such diverse nations as Iraq, Haiti, Bosnia, and the former Soviet Union in terms of those countries’ capacities to develop strong party organizations that are the foundations for free,

democratic elections. The US-based Committee for Party Renewal summarized the prevailing consensus about the role parties should play – and the discipline's passion for them – in a 1996 *amicus curiae* brief filed with the US Supreme Court:

Political parties play a unique and crucial role in our democratic system of government. Parties enable citizens to participate coherently in a system of government allowing for a substantial number of popularly elected offices. They bring fractured and diverse groups together as a unified force, provide a necessary link between the distinct branches and levels of government, and provide continuity that lasts beyond terms of office. Parties also play an important role in encouraging active participation in politics, holding politicians accountable for their actions, and encouraging debate and discussion of important issues.²⁶

The equating of successful parties to efficiently productive government structures is largely a twentieth-century phenomenon. In 1949, political scientist Hugh McDowall Clokie observed: 'Party government is without doubt the distinctive feature of modern politics. ... [Parties are] fully accepted today as essential organizations for government in the modern state, recognized under varying conditions as entitled to give direction to the course of politics, and endowed either by law or usage with a special status and function in the constitutional system in which they operate.'²⁷ One underlying reason for Clokie's contention that party and government are as one is the increased attention given to defining what a political party is as a matter of state law. For example, Missouri state law defines an 'established political party' as 'a political party which, at either of the last two general elections, polled for its candidate for any statewide office, more than two percent of the entire vote cast for the office'.²⁸ New York's statute is similar: an 'officially recognized party' is one that polled 50,000 or more votes for governor in the previous statewide election.²⁹ In 1986, Leon D. Epstein usefully compared political parties to quasi-governmental agencies that were akin to regulated public utilities, noting that state governments frequently defined political parties and regulated their functions.³⁰

THE VIEW FROM THE TRIPOD

In ancient Greece, when the priestess of Apollo at Delphi made ready to deliver a prophesy,

she positioned herself on a special seat supported by three legs, the tripod. The tripod gave the priestess a clear view of the past, present, and future.³¹ By linking parties so closely with government, political scientists – most prominently, V.O. Key, Jr. – devised the tripod of party-in-the-electorate (PIE), party organizations (PO), and party-in-government (PIG), as a means of teaching what parties were and what they were meant to accomplish.³² The tripod became a convenient teaching tool, as well as a means of assessing party performance. Frank J. Sorauf, whose 1968 textbook has been used to educate three generations of students in American political parties courses, described parties as 'tripartite systems of interactions'.³³ Everett Carl Ladd, Jr. maintained that the PIE-PO-PIG tripod could be used as a means of measuring social change and the institutional party response to it:

1. *Party as Organization*. There is the formal machinery of party ranging from local committees (precinct, ward, or town) up to state central committees, and the people who man and direct there. The party is 'the organization' or 'the machine.'
2. *Party as the Mass of Supporters*. For some, this identification is strong, and they consistently back candidates running under the party label. For others, the attachment is relatively weak and casual. Here, party exists in the eyes of its beholder; it is a bundle of electoral loyalties.
3. *Party as a Body of Notables*. Most political leaders in government and outside it are identified by a party label. *Party* is sometimes used to refer to that collectivity of notables who accept the party label, and party policy then becomes the *prevailing policy tendencies* among this collectivity.³⁴

But while parties have been inextricably linked to government's performance, many reject the PIE-PO-PIG model. Rather than being passionate about parties, ambivalence is often a more common emotion on both the part of the public and elected officials. As George Washington once observed, 'In a Government of a Monarchical cast, Patriotism may look with indulgence, if not with favor, upon the spirit of the party. But in those of popular character, in Governments purely elective, it is a spirit not to be encouraged.'³⁵ Washington's distrust of parties was shared by his peers. Prior to the end of the Revolutionary War, John Adams bemoaned the drift of the country's elites toward party politics: 'There is nothing I dread so much as a division of the Republic

into two great parties, each arranged under its leader and converting measures in opposition to each other.³⁶ His spouse, Abigail Adams, agreed: 'Party spirit is blind, malevolent, uncandid, ungenerous, unjust, and unforgiving.'³⁷ Thomas Jefferson declared in 1789 that if he 'could not go to heaven but with a party', he 'would not go there at all'.³⁸ Alexander Hamilton associated parties with 'ambition, avarice, personal animosity'.³⁹ And James Madison famously wrote that it was necessary to devise a republic that would 'break and control the violence of faction'.⁴⁰

The public disdain for parties continues to persist – especially in the United States. In 1940, Pendleton Herring wrote that American political parties could not adhere to an ideology: 'At best,' Herring wrote, 'all a party can hope to maintain is an attitude, an approach.'⁴¹ But with the passing decades public hostility toward parties has grown, as Americans prefer to eschew them as unreliable advocates and unfaithful governors. In 1982, 40 percent of Massachusetts residents told one pollster: 'Instead of being the servants of the people, elected officials in Massachusetts are really *the enemy of the people*'.⁴² A decade later, when ten registered voters from across the nation were asked what political parties meant to them, two shouted 'Corruption!'. Others used words like 'rich', 'self-serving', 'good-old-boy networks', 'special interests', 'bunch of lost causes', 'lost sheep', 'immorality', 'going whatever way is on top', and 'liars'.⁴³ Campaigning for the presidency in 2000, George W. Bush mentioned the Republican Party just twice in accepting the nomination—once in order to scold his fellow partisans to 'end the politics of fear and save Social Security', and once to tout his bipartisan success: 'I've worked with Republicans and Democrats to get things done.'⁴⁴ Democratic candidate Al Gore never mentioned his party in his acceptance speech.⁴⁵ A poll taken in December 2001 found public skepticism toward the two major parties continued to be high: 56 percent believed the Democrats were 'taking advantage of the current mood to push the interests of their special interests supporters'; 60% thought the Republicans were guilty of doing the same thing.⁴⁶

As they have on so many other occasions, Californians have become trend-setters by taking their scorn for political parties to new heights. In 1998, they were allowed to vote for candidates from different parties in what is called a blanket primary. Party affiliation did not matter, as Democrats, Republicans, and

even independents could support the candidates of their choice whatever their party listing. According to one exit poll, 58% liked this new method of choosing party candidates; only 9% found it confusing.⁴⁷ But the result has been to make party membership so casual that it has virtually no relevance. In 2003, Californians voted to recall an unpopular Democratic governor, Gray Davis. While the recall portion of the ballot required a simple 'yes' or 'no' vote, the second ballot contained a list of 135 possible replacements. Such is the state of California politics when political parties are insufficiently vested with the power to organize voter choices, as the vast majority of academicians would prefer.

PARTY PARADIGMS

One reason why academics believe that political parties are essential to governing is the rather 'perverse and unorthodox' belief, as political scientist V.O. Key, Jr. expressed it in 1966, that 'voters are not fools'.⁴⁸ This rather novel idea has guided two especially important party paradigms that emerged in the twentieth century: *the rational-efficient model* and *the responsible parties model*.

The rational-efficient model

First advocated by Anthony Downs, the rational-efficient model emphasizes the parties' electoral activities at the expense of virtually all other party functions. As Downs stated in his 1957 book, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*:

Our model is based on the assumption that every government seeks to maximize political support. We further assume that the government exists in a democratic society where periodic elections are held, that its primary goal is reelection, and that election is the goal of those parties out of power. At each election, the party which receives the most votes (though not necessarily a majority) controls the entire government until the next election, with no intermediate votes either by the people as a whole or by a parliament. The governing party thus has unlimited freedom of action, within the bounds of the constitution.⁴⁹

Thus, the rational-choice model envisions the winning of elections not as a welcome outcome but as the only outcome worth having. As a victorious Richard Nixon told cheering supporters upon finally winning the presidency in 1968: 'Winning's a lot more fun.'⁵⁰ From the

rational-efficient perspective, parties exist to win elections and all party-related projects are designed to make that happen. Incentives to participate in the process come from the patronage jobs that are to be had once victory is ensured.

From the voters' perspective, the party-in-the-electorate behaves rationally – i.e., using the information provided by the party candidates to make rational selections that will benefit them personally. This view of the electorate's voting considerations is far from universal. Some believe that parties are the emotional ties that bind – thus, while voters may rationalize their selections to pollsters there is an emotive quality to their vote. As with sports, it is hard to know with certainty why fans root for particular teams. Others see the electorate as lacking any rationality whatsoever. Walter Lippmann, for one, wrote in 1925 that there was hardly any intelligence behind the balloting:

We call an election an expression of the popular will. But is it? We go into a polling booth and mark a cross on a piece of paper for one of two, or perhaps three or four names. Have we expressed our thoughts on the public policy of the United States? Presumably we have a number of thoughts on this and that with many buts and ifs and ors. Surely the cross on a piece of paper does not express them.⁵¹

The organizational structure of rational-efficient parties consists of a cadre of political entrepreneurs. There is a large degree of centralization and no formal party membership. The organizational style is professional where workers, leaders, and candidates are often recruited from outside the organization or are self-recruited. Efficiency is stressed above all else. There is little, if any, organizational continuity after the election.

In the rational-efficient model, elected officials are allowed to do as they wish once elected, as long as their activities help to win the next election. As political parties wane in influence, Downs's rational-choice model has become the one most often used by political scientists to explain voter behavior. According to the Social Sciences Citation Index, since the 1980s citations from Downs's *Economic Theory of Democracy* have steadily risen.⁵² In a 1965 foreword to the paperback edition of *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Stanley Kelley wrote that years from now he would 'be surprised if Downs's work is not recognized as the starting point of a highly important development in the study of politics'.⁵³

The responsible parties model

While the framers of the US Constitution viewed political parties with a jaundiced eye, by the 1830s those in government came to see the utility of having effective parties. Martin Van Buren, for one, believed parties rendered an important public service when they were organized around issues of principle:

Doubtless excesses frequently attend [parties] and produce many evils, but not so many as are prevented by the maintenance of their organization and vigilance. The disposition to abuse power, so deeply planted in the human heart, can by no other means be more effectually checked; and it has always therefore struck me as more honorable and manly and more in harmony with the character of our people and of our institutions to deal with the subject of political parties in a sincerer and wiser spirit – to recognize their necessity, to prove and to elevate the principles and objects to our own [party] and to support it faithfully.⁵⁴

Van Buren's notion of a principle-based party system formed the genesis for the 'responsible party' school that became popular in the mid-twentieth century. The idea for the responsible parties model formed the basis for a report issued by the American Political Science Association's Committee on Political Parties in 1950: 'An effective party system requires, first, that the parties are able to bring forth programs to which they commit themselves and, second, that the parties possess sufficient internal cohesion to carry out these programs.'⁵⁵ Achieving party unity around a coherent set of ideas matters because (1) it gives voters a clear choice in election campaigns; (2) it gives the winning political party a mandate for governing; and (3) it ensures the party as the likely instrument whereby voters can make a legal revolution.

While the responsible parties model gives priority to the enunciation of the majority party's platform, it also envisions a vibrant role for the opposition: 'The fundamental requirement of accountability is a two-party system in which the opposition party acts as the critic of the party in power, developing, defining and presenting the policy alternatives which are necessary for a true choice in reaching public decisions.'⁵⁶ No wonder that the Committee on Political Parties began its work on the following premise: 'Throughout this report political parties are treated as indispensable instruments of government.'⁵⁷

The committee's passion for parties became endemic throughout the academy. Fifty years

after its publication, *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System* remains required reading. Evron Kirkpatrick praised the report as 'a landmark in the history of political science as policy science'.⁵⁸ Theodore J. Lowi ranked the report as 'second only to the 1937 President's Committee on Administrative Management as a contribution by academics to public discourse on the fundamentals of American democracy'.⁵⁹ William Crotty claimed that publication of *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System* 'may have been the most significant influence on the debate over the operation of political parties that occurred between the Progressive period and the party reform movement of the 1970s'.⁶⁰

Yet the responsible party argument is not without its critics. The most prominent of these, ironically, was Evron M. Kirkpatrick, a member of the Committee on Political Parties.⁶¹ In 1970, Kirkpatrick renounced the report as 'irrelevant and disturbing', explaining it was 'disturbing to any political scientist who believes that the discipline can provide knowledge applicable to the solution of human problems and the achievement of human goals'.⁶² Others saw a tension in the report between those who advocated intra-party debate and those who preferred inter-party conflict. Austin Ranney wondered if it is 'possible for twenty-seven million Democrats to "participate" in the close supervision of their government any more than it is for one-hundred-fifty-million Americans to do so'.⁶³ Clearly, the Committee envisioned an enlightened issue activism, with the rank-and-file guiding the party's direction and emboldening it with purpose. But the Committee also envisioned a party council – an elitist, national body that suggested party responsibility was something that flowed from the top down. Murray S. Stedman, Jr. and Herbert Sonthoff thought the party council was another illustration of the 'increasingly administrative or even quasi-military approach to the study of political problems'.⁶⁴ Julius Turner worried that such placement of power in the hands of party elites would result in control by unrepresentative factions.⁶⁵

The responsible party advocates' contention that political parties are vital to successful governing appears to be so self-evident that it is often forgotten that it was a contentious subject in the early years of political science. At the turn of the twentieth century, some scholars wondered whether any polity could (or should) be characterized by a commitment to *collective* (meaning party) responsibility or to *individual* responsibility. M.I. Ostrogorski criticized

the discipline's infatuation with collective responsibility: 'This theory appeared alluring enough to be adopted by some writers of prominence, and expanded in certain cases, with brilliancy of literary style. It has, however, one defect: it is not borne out by the facts.'⁶⁶ William Graham Sumner agreed. A believer in individual responsibility, Sumner wrote in 1914: 'I cannot trust a party; I can trust a man. I cannot hold a party responsible; I can hold a man responsible. I cannot get an expression of opinion which is single and simple from a party; I can get that only from a man.'⁶⁷ Herbert Croly maintained that party government was undesirable because it 'interfered with genuine popular government both by a mischievous, artificial and irresponsible [i.e. parochial and localistic] method of representation, and by an enfeeblement of the administration in the interest of partisan subsistence'.⁶⁸

Others disagreed. In 1900, Frank A. Goodnow made the case for collective party responsibility: 'The individual candidate must be sunk to a large extent in the party. Individual responsibility must give place to party responsibility.'⁶⁹ Perhaps no scholar better demonstrates the movement of the political science community toward party responsibility (and the inherent conflicts contained therein) than Woodrow Wilson. At first, Wilson maintained that party responsibility was more fiction than fact. Addressing the Virginia Bar Association in 1897, he declared:

I, for my part, when I vote at a critical election, should like to be able to vote for a definite line of policy with regard to the great questions of the day – not for platforms, which Heaven knows, mean little enough – but for *men* known and tried in public service; with records open to be scrutinized with reference to these very matters; and pledged to do this or that particular thing; to take a definite course of action. As it is, I vote for nobody I can depend upon to do anything – no, not if I were to vote for myself.⁷⁰

Later, Wilson saw collective responsibility as not only desirable but also necessary. In a 1908 book, *Constitutional Government in the United States*, Wilson wrote: 'There is a sense in which our parties may be said to have been our real body politic. Not the authority of Congress, not the leadership of the President, but the discipline and zest of parties has held us together, has made it possible for us to form and to carry out national programs.' He added: 'We must think less of checks and balances and more of coordinated power, less of separation of functions and more of the synthesis of action.'⁷¹

There is a creative tension in Wilson's scholarship. He believes that collective responsibility is essential, but couples it with a plea for individual responsibility by emphasizing the president's role as party leader. In an article about Grover Cleveland's cabinet, Wilson observes: 'What we need is harmonious, consistent, responsible party government, instead of a wide dispersion of function and responsibility; and we can get it only by connecting the President as closely as may be with his party in Congress.'⁷² In subsequent editions of *Congressional Government*, Wilson goes further in placing the president at the apex of responsible party government:

If there be one principle clearer than another, it is this: that in any business, whether of government or of mere merchandising, *somebody must be trusted*, in order that when things go wrong it may be quite plain who should be punished ... *Power and strict accountability for its use* are the essential constituents of good government. A sense of highest responsibility, a dignifying and elevating sense of being trusted, together with a consciousness of being in an official station so conspicuous that no faithful discharge of duty can go unacknowledged and unrewarded, and no breach of trust undiscovered and unpunished – these are the influences, the only influences, which foster practical, energetic, and trustworthy statesmanship.⁷³

Wilson's predilection for individual (read presidential) responsibility was not universally accepted by subsequent generations of political scientists. As the Committee on Political Parties warned in its 1950 report: 'When the president's program actually is the sole program, either his party becomes a flock of sheep or the party falls apart.'⁷⁴ In 1955, former Committee on Political Parties member V.O. Key, Jr. introduced the concept of 'critical elections', with political parties acting as catalysts in electoral realignments.⁷⁵

By 1950, collective party responsibility had become political science's First Commandment and digressions from it were often considered heretical. One reason for the espousal of collective party responsibility was the desire of many political scientists to limit conflict. In *The Semi-Sovereign People*, E.E. Schattschneider wrote: 'The best point at which to manage conflict is before it starts.'⁷⁶ His argument reflected one made by social scientist Lewis Coser. In Coser's *The Functions of Social Conflict*, Schattschneider heavily underlined this passage: 'One unites in order to fight, and one fights under the mutually recognized control of

norms and rules.'⁷⁷ Parties, therefore, became a sort of 'thought police' in the establishment and maintenance of order.

THE DECLINE OF MEDIATING INSTITUTIONS

In the Information Age, many scholars argue that political parties 'aren't what they used to be'. Voters may not pay as much attention to party labels as before, though some believe that increased ideological polarization and greater organizational skills are helping to bring parties back to life.⁷⁸ There exists a lively academic debate between those who say parties are in an irreversible decline and those who see a party revival.⁷⁹ Many of the arguments center around the ideas presented in this chapter – i.e., what are the normative functions that should properly be ascribed to political parties? The differing answers only add more intensity to the passions on both sides.

But the twenty-first-century phenomenon that will cause political parties to either adapt or wither away is the decline of mediating institutions. Robert Putnam believes we are in an era where citizens are more likely than ever before to be 'bowling alone'.⁸⁰ In Putnam's view, social capital is slowly eroding as more citizens than ever before refuse to join either bowling leagues or other civic-minded institutions – including political parties. The Internet is contributing to this development, as citizens sit alone at a computer without the social and community interactions so favored by the political parties of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thus, the 'quality' of political participation is quite different and less interactive. Citizens may be able, for example, to select a party's nominees by voting on their computer without any guidance from the party organizations. At once, the Internet has leveled the playing field, as information becomes available to party producers and consumers alike. In short, political parties no longer provide a filter for information. Instead, they are just one provider – among many – of several different types of information that are available on the World Wide Web. As political parties adapt to these new conditions, new definitions of parties – replete with new normative assumptions about their functions – are likely to shape the ongoing debate about political parties in the twenty-first century.

NOTES

1. Robert Huckshorn, *Political Parties in America* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1984), p. 10.
2. See Green Party of the United States website, <http://www.gp.org> (accessed October 13, 2003).
3. In Florida, Nader received more than 97,000 votes, the vast majority of which would have either supported Al Gore or stayed home. If Gore had won Florida, he would have received at least 292 electoral votes, 22 more than the 270 majority required to win in the Electoral College.
4. *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770), in Paul Langford, ed., *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 317.
5. Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957), pp. 24–5.
6. V.O. Key, Jr., *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups* (New York: Crowell, 1964), pp. 163–5. First edition published in 1942.
7. William Nisbet Chambers, 'Party Development and the American Mainstream', in Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham (eds), *The American Party Systems* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 5.
8. Leon D. Epstein, *Political Parties in Western Democracies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1980), p. 9.
9. Hugh Sidey, 'A Conversation with Reagan', *Time*, September 3, 1984.
10. Joseph A. Schlesinger, *Political Parties and the Winning of Office* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).
11. John H. Aldrich, *Why Parties?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 19.
12. Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, p. 25.
13. Matthew 16: 13–16.
14. James Madison, *Federalist #10*, Clinton Rossiter ed., (New York: New American Library, 1961)
15. In *The Federalist*, Hamilton wrote: 'Energy in the executive is the leading character in the definition of good government.' See Alexander Hamilton, 'Federalist #70', in Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter, (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 423.
16. Quoted in Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s–1840s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 8.
17. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J. P. Mayer (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), p. 174.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 176. Tocqueville added that the demise of great parties in the United States had resulted in a 'great gain in happiness, but not in morality' (p. 176).
20. Key, *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups*, p. 18.
21. Quoted in Leon D. Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), p. 18.
22. E.E. Schattschneider, *Party Government in the United States* (New York: Rinehart, 1942), p. 1.
23. Quoted in Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold*, p. 32.
24. Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party System: A Framework for Analysis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. ix.
25. Clinton Rossiter, *Parties and Politics in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1960), p. 1.
26. Amicus curiae brief filed by the Committee for Party Renewal in *Colorado Republican Federal Campaign Committee v. Federal Election Commission* (February 1996), p. 3.
27. Hugh McDowall Clokie, 'The modern party state', in Norman L. Zucker (ed.), *The American Party Process: Readings and Comments* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1968), pp. 5, 7.
28. Cited in Frank J. Sorauf and Paul Allen Beck, *Party Politics in America* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1988), p. 9.
29. See Howard A. Scarrow, *Parties, Elections, and Representation in the State of New York* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), p. 2.
30. Leon D. Epstein, *Political Parties in the American Mold*, pp. 155–199. During the 1980s, the Committee for Party Renewal, a multi-partisan group of US political scientists sought to 'deregulate' political parties by challenging the state laws in the courts. Most notably, the committee succeeded in the landmark US Supreme Court decision *Eu v. San Francisco Democratic Central Committee*, 489 US 214 (1989).
31. See Everett Carlil Ladd with Charles D. Hadley, *Transformations of the American Party System* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), p. 1.
32. See Key, *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups*, p. 164. The person who invented the PIE–PO–PIG analogy was Ralph M. Goldman. See Ralph M. Goldman, 'Party chairmen and party factions, 1789–1900'. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1951, ch. 17. Paul S. Herrnson subsequently introduced a fourth component, the party-in-the-campaign. See Paul S. Herrnson, *Party Campaigning in the 1980s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).
33. See Frank J. Sorauf, *Party Politics in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1972 edition), p. 9.