

*Understanding Political Parties:  
Back to Basics*

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For American political parties these are the best of times and the worst of times. The major parties dominate elective office to a degree seldom seen in American history. More than ever before, their official organizations are well staffed, they exist at all levels of government, and they operate continuously between elections. By any measure of substantive activity the parties today are at their peak. Moreover, the two parties compete with each other throughout the country more evenly than ever before. In government the two parties have never in this century voted more cohesively.

Yet the dominant view of scholars, journalists, and politicians for the past twenty years has been that the two major American parties are declining. This view derives in part from the increasing willingness of voters to express their disdain for parties and their increasing unwillingness to identify with them. It derives also from the partisan functions that pollsters, PACs, and consultants now perform: taking the electorate's pulse, raising money, and devising electoral strategies. The view is bolstered too by the parties' leaders in Congress, who, despite the increase in cohesive party voting, claim they have lost influence over their members. Similar views have emerged about parties in other developed democracies, though here too the obituaries seem unwarranted.

Whether the parties are declining or prospering depends on one's point of view. I would simply point out that assessments of parties in democracies have frequently been negative and have always been affected by judgments of what parties ought to be. Two ideals dominate the thinking about parties. The two are contradictory though that has not prevented some critics from using both standards. One ideal is the democratic party. Organized partisan efforts to capture elective office in the United States appalled Ostrogorski, the founder of the comparative study of parties, who felt they violated democratic principles. Similarly the seductive effect of elective office upon the German Social Democratic party, as Germany moved toward a parliamentary system, appalled Robert Michels. In response he developed his

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“iron law of oligarchy,” a concept that still haunts studies of party organization, especially those done by advocates of “participatory” parties. American dissatisfaction with parties for their antidemocratic tendencies inspired Andrew Jackson’s charge against “King Caucus” as well as Ross Perot’s and Jerry Brown’s indictment of the major parties as the tools of special interests. The other ideal is the highly disciplined cohesive organization committed to a clearly defined and coherent set of policies. This ideal has long inspired critics of American parties who have found them weak and ineffectual compared to the parties spawned by British parliamentary democracy. It is also the ideal of the critics of French parties who find them lacking the discipline and commitment of their German counterparts. The truth is, disenchantment with parties, especially those who want to govern and are therefore committed above all to the winning of office, is endemic to democracies.

Certainly it is proper to express concern about the role of parties in contemporary democracies. But before we can determine whether they are performing their role properly, whether they need fixing, or even whether they are prospering or declining, we must make sure we understand what they are. We must in other words go back to the basics. Nothing is more basic to the study of parties in democracies than the relationship between parties and elections, though it is often taken for granted or shunted aside as too simplistic to serve as the guiding principle. In this essay therefore I want to demonstrate how and why this basic premise should infuse the study of parties. For this demonstration I shall draw primarily upon the American experience. But it could easily be performed for all democracies.

The virtue of studying parties in the American context is that modern parties first emerged in the United States and thrived in an institutional setting that did little or nothing to nurture them. American institutions if anything were designed to prevent the emergence of parties. Parties however not only appeared; they survived, the object of frequent political reform movements aimed at weakening partisan ties. In effect then American institutions, with some exceptions which I shall discuss later, have provided no support to parties. This allows us to observe without institutional interference the impact of elections upon parties. Given the frequency of the electoral imperative for a myriad of offices, the American experience also provides us with multiple and varied opportunities for observation.

### **The Electoral Imperative, Ambition, and the Emergence of Parties**

I assume that individuals go to the trouble of creating parties because they find them useful in achieving their goals. For reasons I have stated

elsewhere most goals are inadequate to lead individuals to pay the costs of creating and maintaining parties. Of all the goals, only ambition for political office is sufficient to warrant the effort. In democracies, the existence of elective offices for the most important governing positions excites political ambitions. The rules for winning election to office define what ambitious individuals must do. Together offices and rules mandate for the ambitious an organized effort to gain office. The electoral imperative then allows us to refine our understanding of parties by leading us to the ambitious office-seeker. Our ambitious officeseeker is, of course, an abstraction. As human beings officeseekers have a broad range of interests, including an interest in public policy. Nevertheless ambition for office provides the focus for the study of parties because only this drive, however much it may be reinforced by other concerns, leads to the creation and survival of parties.

We should, of course, note that, while ambitious officeseekers are the driving force in the development of parties, they do not create and maintain parties because they are committed to the notion of parties. If ambitious officeseekers could win election without creating or seeking the support of a party I see no reason why they would not do so. Why pay the considerable costs involved in creating or sustaining a party? A party requires getting people to work for you, amassing funds, running a campaign, making an organized appeal for votes. Some individuals may develop an attachment to a particular party, but the ideal ambitious officeseeker has only one reason for creating and maintaining a party: it is the most effective way to win office.

We must emphasize, however, that it is the ambitious officeseeker who must create and maintain the party. For whatever the strength of their political sentiments, voters do not create parties. For this important aspect of party development the Perot phenomenon during the 1992 presidential campaign is instructive. As the campaign progressed, it became clear that many voters were dissatisfied with the likely candidates of the two major parties. If parties were indeed the product of grassroots activists we might well have expected widespread voter dissatisfaction to produce a new party. Yet only when a well known billionaire expressed his willingness to run for president and to spend millions of his own dollars to do so, did we see a new organized effort to capture the presidency. When in July Perot suddenly withdrew, that organized effort collapsed, with the notable exception of the state ballot drives he continued to fund. This exception allowed Perot to revive his organized drive for the presidency instantly in October. Restive voters alone could not propel an independent drive for the presidency. They needed a candidate with resources, in this instance his own. The Perot movement then resembled all other nascent organized partisan efforts: it was inspired and dependent for sustenance upon ambition for political office. Unlike more

successful efforts, it was overly dependent upon the ambitions of an idiosyncratic candidate for a single office.

### **Political Parties and the Performance of Tasks**

The basic characteristics of parties then all depend upon what ambitious individuals must do to attain elective office. In other words they depend upon a series of tasks that officeseekers must perform. These tasks are, however, outside their control. Political institutions and electoral rules provide the agenda, as well as the order in which the tasks must be carried out. Officeseekers must perform the same tasks in all democracies, but when and how they perform them can vary from democracy to democracy and even over time. By focusing on these tasks therefore we are better able to understand parties not only at a given place at a given time but in many places at many times.

Focusing on these tasks also insures that we remain focused on individuals, their goals, and what they do to attain them. Among other things this keeps us from reifying parties or assigning goals to a collectivity when only individuals can have goals. This is of major importance because, by remembering that parties are groups of individuals, we keep in mind that they are groups of individuals whose goals can be compatible or in conflict.

The tasks that all officeseekers must perform and the order in which they must perform them are:

1. The declaration of candidacy.
2. The winning of a nomination, or the minimizing of the number of candidates for office.
3. Getting on the ballot.
4. Simple communication: informing supporters of the nomination.
5. Complex communication: persuading voters to vote for the nominee.
6. Maximization of the vote: identifying supporters and insuring they vote for the nominee.
7. Gaining the most advantageous positions in government or governing.
8. Advancement of ambitions: behavior in office that facilitates re-election or attaining higher office.

In all democracies individuals ambitious for office must see to these tasks. In examining each of these tasks for its impact on party organization,

our principal concern is whether the ambitious officeseeker can perform the task in isolation or whether the officeseeker finds it advantageous to perform it in concert with other officeseekers. In the first instance the officeseeker need only rely on a rudimentary organized effort or a nucleus of organization. In the second instance one or more tasks propel the officeseeker toward cooperation with one or more other officeseekers, or toward the formation of a multinuclear organization. Thus by focusing on the eight tasks we are able to analyze party organization in its simple and complex forms and observe how the simple leads to the more complex.

1. *The declaration of candidacy.* Of all the tasks this would seem to inspire the simple, nuclear organization. Individuals must decide or agree to run for an office. Much depends then on individual initiative. This is true even where others urge candidacy upon an individual. For the decisions about candidacy are highly personal. Most elective offices are sufficiently attractive to draw some candidates; it is news when no one runs for an office. The more attractive the office, the larger the number of individuals who may feel an interest in making a declaration. At the same time, the more attractive the office, the higher the risks and costs of running. This brings about attrition in the number of candidates prepared to declare. Whatever decision is made, the amount of organized effort that goes into the making will rest largely with the candidate.

To find the link between the task of candidacy and the multinuclear party the most obvious technique is to study the backgrounds and careers of candidates for particular offices. Such studies reveal the links between offices, from which we can infer something about cooperation among nuclei. We have enough historical data about political careers in the United States, for example, to realize that a well defined pattern for particular offices emerged in the nine decades following the Civil War. While American institutions do not allow us to define the sources of candidates as sharply as unified parliamentary democracies, we can establish an office hierarchy whose top ranks came mostly from a few manifest positions. The geographical sources of particular offices, as well as the ages of advancement, were also focused. Beginning in the 1960s, however, this pattern began to alter. For example, state legislative office, which had become a dead end increasingly during the first half of the 20th century, became a stepping stone to higher office. This greatly affected what we mean by the multinuclear party. By continuing to study careers systematically we should be able to determine whether patterns for the candidacies of particular offices still exist and to make inferences about the relationships among offices that help determine what the present multinuclear party looks like.

We need however to dig deeper for the links between the declaration of candidacy for multiple offices and the multinuclear party. How the candidacy for one office impinges upon the candidacy for another needs systematic treatment. To accomplish this, we need more detailed systematic analyses of political careers, something between the full scale political biography and the large scale analyses of many individual careers based on biographical directories. Another option is to examine the experiences of select constituencies. I said earlier that most offices attract candidates. But what is the consequence for the multinuclear party if a candidate does not declare for a particular office? It may do no harm. It may allow the multinuclear party to divert resources to another constituency or to keep electoral turnout low so that candidates for other offices may have a better chance of winning. Or it may reflect collusion between multinuclear parties to divide up offices. On the other hand it may indicate real difficulty for the multinuclear party. Do, for example, the number of such constituencies increase, as constituencies grow in size and campaign costs rise?

Far more serious for the multinuclear party is when one of its incumbents declares his candidacy under the sponsorship of another party. Incumbents can afford to change parties only when the shifts in partisan support in the electorate run deeper than the normal swing of votes from election to election. There are of course constraints built into the other tasks that keep incumbent candidates from switching parties. The most important is the task of distributing positions in government. Such shifts then can indicate considerable difficulty for multinuclear organization and are therefore worthy of systematic analysis.

2. *The nomination.* Each candidate prefers to be one of the minimum number required to contest an election under democratic electoral rules. For a single member district, this means being one of two. For a multimember district governed by proportional rules this means being a candidate on one of two or more lists containing no more than the number able to win office. Barring that, the officeseekers' choices are more complex. They prefer to reduce the numbers making similar appeals to reduce the risk of dividing their support. Candidates with a unique appeal face no such risk and have the added advantage of seeing their opponents divide their support. Once candidates have succeeded in minimizing the number of individuals running for a particular office, they must seek an authoritative blessing which discourages others from entering the general election.

The task of nomination then both highlights isolated nuclear efforts and encourages the multinuclear party. On the one hand nomination is a difficult and contentious task that pits ambition against ambition. On the other hand, the very contentiousness of the task impels candidates towards

prior agreements that lay the groundwork for multinuclear parties. Indeed we can write the history of the two major American parties by focusing on the task of nomination. The willingness of incumbents to adopt the direct primary for most offices at the beginning of the 20th century demonstrates how central the task of nomination is to all organized political effort. The primary put the state in charge of performing this contentious task for the existing multinuclear organizations, thereby depriving them of a certain freedom of action. In exchange however they received a clear and guaranteed means of legitimizing their nominations. Surely it was a great boon to existing multinuclear parties to have prescribed regular open meetings for nomination that brought together large numbers of people at the state's expense according to a clear set of rules which included insuring the state's blessing for the chosen nominees. The blessing went to nominees for individual offices. But by placing candidates for several offices in the same primary contest, the state helped underwrite the existing multinuclear party. Certainly the primary contributed to undermining third party efforts as well as independent candidacies. Since most states did not make it difficult to enter the primaries which they ran for the two major parties, serious candidates preferred this route to trying to run as third party or independent candidates in the general election.

The history of the primary for the nomination of presidential candidates further demonstrates its value for the existing multinuclear organizations. Before the 1970s presidential candidates sought the nominations of conventions that were largely private meetings and could not bestow upon their choices the legitimacy secured from nominating procedures run by the state. During this period on several occasions in this century the two major parties failed to produce a binding nomination. The most damaging incident occurred when Teddy Roosevelt walked out of the Republican convention in 1912 and created a new party. In 1948 southern Democrats bolted their party's presidential convention and ran on a Dixiecrat ticket. In this instance the rebels disrupted the regular Democratic party, as all the electoral votes the Dixiecrat ticket received were in states where it appeared on the ballot as the regular Democratic ticket. In these states, Harry Truman, the Democratic convention's choice, either did not appear on the ballot or was forced to appear under another label. In 1960, although John Kennedy was the nominee of the Democratic convention, six of the 11 Democratic electors in Alabama ran as "unpledged" and eventually did not vote for Kennedy.

Since 1972, the increased use of the primary for presidential nominations has made challenges to the legitimacy of the two major parties' choices less likely. In 1992, having lost the primaries, Pat Buchanan and Jerry Brown had no real basis for challenging their parties' nominees in the

general election. As for Ross Perot, his independent candidacy suffered from bypassing the trial runs the primaries provided for the candidates of the two major parties. With the domination of primaries in the presidential nomination, the nominating procedures for all major offices were regularized and the primary became an integral aspect of American party organization.

Much remains to be done, however, on the impact of the primary on party organization, in the United States and elsewhere. In the United States, after all, primaries have come in various forms, each of which have different consequences for parties. With the expansion of the open primary, due to court decisions, the effect of these rules upon the multinuclear party, upon the way candidates for particular offices relate to one another, becomes a fruitful area of study. How does a heated contest for one office, for example, affect the results for other offices? This is of special interest for the presidential primary. The early presidential primaries have been in states with open primaries for the single office. Only as the calendar advances are other offices included. We can certainly hypothesize about the different consequences for the multinuclear party. How, for example, did the heated contests in 1992 for the senate and presidential nominations of both parties in California affect the two major multinuclear parties?

Of great interest also is the attraction the American presidential primary has taken on for French officeholders. Following the adoption of the popularly elected presidency and its significant consequences for French parties, this further experimentation with American institutions lends credence to hypotheses about the dominance of the American party model. The center-right coalition has been especially attracted to the possibilities of a presidential primary. In the last two presidential elections the coalition has felt disfavored because it has been unable to settle on a single candidate for the first of the two rounds of elections held for the presidency. The coalition's leading aspirants for the presidency are therefore seriously considering a variant of the American closed primary, which, though it would be run by the coalition partners themselves, would have the virtue of legitimizing a single candidate and discouraging others from entering the race. This should be a fascinating area of study especially as the failure of these organizations to enlist the state on behalf of the effort could well undermine the project. On the other hand, it could possibly draw the coalition partners into a more cohesive relationship, transforming them into a single multinuclear party.

3. *Getting on the ballot.* Having received some sort of anointment, the nominees must present themselves to the voters. While the procedures by which nominees present themselves to the general electorate may vary, the state has always been involved. Over time involvement has increased. Early on in the United States, the nominees were mostly responsible for gaining



access to the electorate. Given the number of offices elected, many at the same time, nominees were encouraged to form alliances to perform this task. Increasingly around the turn of the century states devised more precise rules for access to the ballot, including petition drives, thereby creating a well defined task for nuclear organizations. This did not, however, rule out the possibility of multinuclear cooperation.

Much remains to be done on the relationship between access to the ballot and the formation of multinuclear parties. For the United States this is particularly true for the early period and for a comparison of the changes brought about by increased state involvement. For France too there is ample room to compare the relaxed procedures for access to the ballot observed under the Third Republic and the more stringent rules introduced under the Fifth Republic and their comparable effects on party organization. Of course the opportunities for fruitful comparative analysis are numerous.

4. *Simple communication*: the presentation of the nominee to the voters. Having gained access to the ballot the nominees are concerned about the most direct means for communicating with the voters, the ballot itself. Here again the state's involvement increased over time with significant consequences for party organization. Early on in the United States the nominees and their organizations were responsible for the format of the ballot and its distribution. This meant responsibility for providing the voters with such simple but vital information as the nominee's name and a label or cue as to what the nominee stood for. Since several nominees usually ran for different offices at the same time there was an incentive for multinuclear cooperation.

Around the turn of the century however the state took over the responsibility for printing and distributing ballots. Among other things this meant the state determined the information the voters received and the order in which they received it. The state attached labels to nominees and chose whether to group nominees for different offices under the same label, or for each office with different labels. The state also determined the order in which nominees appeared on the ballot. While the state's assumption of this responsibility deprived nominees of important organizational incentives, it did not destroy the links among nuclear organizations. That being said, work remains to be done on the relationship between the format of the ballot and party organization, if only because of the technological revolution that has altered the ballot. In the United States the layout of paper ballots and of voting machines were always designed to play up or down partisan relationships among nominees. With the advent of punch card or computer voting it is worthwhile considering what are the consequences.

In some instances the state does not provide the voter with a partisan cue or label. This is true in the United States for the nonpartisan elections

that are held for judgeships and local offices. In this case it is up to the nominees to decide whether to provide the voters with this simple cue. A fertile field for research in the United States is whether nonpartisan nominees communicate a partisan affiliation to the voters and how they do so. It is my impression that during the very period when parties have supposedly been declining, the partisan affiliations of nonpartisan nominees have become more conspicuous, as in the cases of the nonpartisan legislature of Nebraska and the nonpartisan mayoralities of cities such as Detroit and Los Angeles. I also have the impression that at least in Illinois and Michigan indigenous multinuclear efforts have emerged to work for election to nonpartisan local offices. But all of these developments await scholarly confirmation.

Similar opportunities for fruitful study exist for French parties. While the Fifth Republic, unlike the Third, assumed responsibility for printing and distributing ballots, it left to the nominees the choice of including partisan labels. In the Fifth Republic, as in the Third, while there are numerous elective offices, nominees for different offices never appear on the same ballot. We therefore have another intriguing way to study the relationship between the way nominees perform the task of simple communication and the formation of multinuclear parties.

5. *Complex communication*: persuasion of the voters. Most voters need more than a simple cue or label to support a nominee. Usually nominees must campaign, or try to persuade voters to vote for them. The political institutions of a democracy have much to do with how the task of persuasion is carried out. In a unitary parliamentary system, the incentive is for nominees to carry out the task with a substantial degree of cooperation, though the single member district used for parliamentary elections in France and Great Britain allows for some independent campaigning, just as in American congressional elections. At the same time, in the United States the separation of powers and the federal system allow nominees for different offices more leeway as to how they choose to link their appeals.

In all democracies of course the state assists some nominees more than others in the task of persuasion. In all democracies public officials use the resources of the state to communicate with voters. They also can distribute public benefits to attract the resources needed for electoral campaigns. The advantages of incumbency are difficult to counteract completely. Even state subsidies do not wipe out these disparities. Certainly, since those in office write the rules for the allotment of subsidies, efforts to equalize resources favor nominees of existent multinuclear parties and incumbents in particular.

Whatever the institutional framework and the amount of state assistance, campaigning requires many contributions, money, polling, issues,

control of the media, the creation of images, all of which have undergone changes of great significance for party organization. Thus aspiring officeholders have always known that those who transmit their messages—town criers, newspapers, and the electronic media—are not neutral. They have their own interests and ambitions. In the United States, therefore, aspirants for higher office early on sponsored newspapers for like minded partisans, Jefferson and Hamilton being two conspicuous examples. In Europe the partisan press was if anything more prevalent. With the development of new modes of communication and the weakening of partisan identification among voters, however, the partisan press in the United States and elsewhere declined, forcing nominees to search for new ways to persuade the electorate. At present nominees are constantly testing the changing technology of persuasion. Indeed, a distinct profession has emerged whose members move freely from campaign to campaign, in the process providing links between the candidates they work for, once provided by a partisan press. At the same time, officeseekers in one industrialized democracy watch closely the techniques and appeals that are successful in another. Global communications have made this possible and in turn made the campaign techniques and appeals used in the industrialized democracies the models for the emergent democracies of Eastern Europe. This homogenization of techniques and appeals, within and among democracies, bears constant monitoring by students of political parties.

6. *Maximization of the vote*: the identification of supporters and assurance of their votes. This task requires first canvassing the electorate for support, then making sure supporters are registered, and finally getting them to the polls. The burden of this task falls most heavily upon the individual nominee or the nuclear organization. The interesting question and one worthy of further investigation is to what extent nuclear organizations find multinuclear efforts at this task beneficial. In the United States this question frequently pertains to voter registration drives. It is therefore less relevant for democracies where, as in France and Great Britain, public officials bear the prime responsibility for getting people on the electoral register. But even in these democracies the question of voter turnout as a multinuclear effort is pertinent. Because the rate of voter turnout is never neutral in its effects on nominees' chances, efforts to improve turnout as a multinuclear enterprise must be politically controversial everywhere and as such an interesting topic for comparative investigation.

7. *Gaining the most advantageous positions in government or governing*. If the task of maximizing the vote rests primarily with the nuclear organization, the task of governing is primarily one for the multinuclear party. This is most obvious in parliamentary systems where multinuclear

cooperation or cooperation among elected officials is required to produce prime ministers and their cabinets. But even in the United States positions of legislative leadership require multinuclear cooperation, as does executive action dependent upon legislative support. Indeed multinuclear parties arose first within legislatures and remain central to their organization and to their relationship with the executive.

The task of governing of course sustains the multinuclear party best when cooperation is constantly essential for the task. In parliamentary systems continuous legislative support is essential to continuous control of the executive. In the United States governing is less dependent upon continuous multinuclear cooperation. In the American Congress leadership positions are chosen early in the session and often by seniority, thereby reducing the need for sustained cooperation. While constitutionally only the Electoral College can anoint the executive, it carries out its mission in a few hours. With the exception of the senate's need to confirm executive appointments, no institutional mandate makes continuous cooperation between the legislature and the executive essential to the task of governing. All the same, of great interest to the students of parties is the extent to which there is more or less continuous multinuclear cooperation between the legislature and the executive in both the American and parliamentary systems.

8. *Advancement of ambitions*: behavior in office that allows for reelection or higher office. The final task for successful officeseekers is to exercise their office so that they will be reelected or promoted to higher office. This task provides the strongest impetus for maintaining the multinuclear party. The desire for reelection forces officeholders to pay attention to their constituents. Ambition for higher office broadens the constituency they must heed. Thus are ambitious officeseekers forced to look beyond the narrow demands of a single election and a single constituency.

Ambitions link officeseekers in countless ways. Even task 1, the declaration of candidacy, depends upon the ambitions of numerous officeseekers. Up and down the office hierarchy the advancement of one person opens the way for others below. Ambitious officeseekers are prepared to cooperate in order to strengthen their performance of task 2, the achievement of an authoritative nomination. Similarly to advance their ambitions officeseekers are prepared to cooperate in performing tasks 4, 5, and 6, in seeking to maximize the voters' support through the use of the same label and the same or shared campaign techniques. Finally, legislators ambitious for leadership positions and the executive eager for success know very well that their fates are linked. While conflicting ambitions provide the basis for factionalism within the multinuclear party they also contribute to its existence. The

multinuclear party is best placed to settle such conflicts. At the same time conflict allows the party to adapt to needed change.

### Some Propositions about Parties

In any democracy candidates for elective office must perform the eight tasks I have laid out. When and how these tasks must be performed, however, differs from democracy to democracy and within a democracy over time. By focusing on these tasks, then, we can formulate propositions about parties that are of general utility and at the same time allow us to capture significant differences between and within democracies.

A. *Party organization arises because individuals ambitious for elective office must have the eight tasks performed.* Once formed, parties may, of course, engage in activities which have no direct impact on these tasks. Thus parties can provide social and economic benefits to individuals that are not directly associated with running for office. While the provision of such benefits may contribute to the performance of the basic tasks it cannot replace them as the impetus for party organization.

B. *The more obvious and easy the task, the more likely the organized effort.* All ambitious officeseekers know that they must declare their candidacy, win the nomination, and appear on the ballot in the general election. Thus in the United States candidates find it easiest to organize the petition drives required by the state for primaries and general elections.

C. *Organized effort for the obvious tasks facilitates organized effort for the more difficult tasks.* Thus once candidates organize petition drives for the nomination or access to the ballot in the general election, they can utilize the circulators of petitions for the task of complex communication, for the circulation of campaign literature, and the signers of petitions as potential financial contributors to the campaign.

D. *Some tasks, more than others, foster organized cooperation among ambitious officeseekers.* Nomination, governing, and the advancement of ambitions provide the strongest impulse for cooperation. Of course to the extent that the state performs the task of nomination as it does with the American primary it lessens the need for organized effort. At the same time by giving prominence over time to the same partisan label for candidates for different offices it underwrites partisan links. As I have already pointed out governing requires organized cooperative effort though it may or may not be continuous. Of all the tasks, the advancement of ambitions is the cement that in all democracies holds multinuclear parties together over time.

E. *Certainty about when and how the tasks must be performed minimizes the need for organized effort.* Certainty about when the tasks need to

be performed allows officeseekers to stagger their organizational efforts. When as in the United States the timing of elections is set, the terms of office fixed, and the length of legislative sessions generally known, officeseekers can be more relaxed about their organizational efforts.

Certainty about how a task should be performed also allows for greater flexibility. This is especially true of the level of competition the officeseeker faces. For the level of organized activity is a response to the amount of effort required to succeed at each task. If the ambitious officeseeker faces little or no competition for the nomination or the general election, little organizational effort will go into the tasks of nomination, simple and complex communication, or maximization of the vote. At the same time, since competition varies among constituencies and changes for the same constituency over time, the amount of organizational activity needed is never guaranteed. Of course the level of competition itself is very much the product of how well officeholders have organized to perform the tasks of governing and advancing their ambitions.

*F. Uncertainty about when and how tasks must be performed increases the need for organized effort.* Uncertainty about the timing of elections, the length of office terms, and the length of legislative sessions prompts a continuous organized cooperative effort. This is true in parliamentary systems where dissolution of the legislature can produce an election at any time, as well as in a presidential system such as the French where the death or retirement of a president provokes a new election. Uncertainty about the timing of policy making impels officeholders everywhere, including the United States, to maintain a concerted and continuous organized effort to perform the task of governing as well as the advancement of their future careers.

Uncertainty about how a task should be performed also requires organizational vigilance. Thus the greater the degree of competition for the nomination and the general election the greater the need to organize to obtain the nomination, to engage in complex communication and maximization of the vote. The greater the advantage also of cooperative organized effort. Of course uncertainty that promotes more than one organized effort for the nomination can hamper the performance of subsequent tasks. Much depends on whether the ultimate nominee retains the perception of a possible winner.

Uncertainty about how one task is performed affects all others and therefore the character of the multinuclear party. Uncertainty always arises when major changes are introduced for any one task. This has been true of the direct primary for the task of nomination in the United States. By altering the task of nomination the primary forced officeseekers to recast all

their organizational tasks. A competitive trial run for the nomination altered the ways in which complex communication and vote maximization had to be performed. Similarly the uncertainty introduced into the task of complex communication by technological changes in transportation and, above all, in methods of communication has affected all other tasks. Such changes have caused an almost constant reassessment of organizational needs on the part of those seeking office. To a large extent they have also provided impetus for the pooling of organizational resources.

Students of political parties therefore should examine carefully all suggestions for changes in the ways the eight tasks must be performed. In the United States we face a number of such suggestions: direct election of Presidents, public financing of congressional campaigns, and term limits. We can speculate that eliminating the Electoral College would reduce the need for presidential candidates to develop strong ties with candidates for other offices throughout the country to perform the tasks of complex communication and vote maximization. It also would eliminate the need to find faithful Electors in each state to perform the brief but critical task assuring control of office (task 7). The performance of these tasks would also certainly be altered by the proposal for public financing of congressional campaigns, as would the tasks of governing and advancing political ambitions. Whether it would ease organized cooperative efforts would depend on how it was done.

The possible impact of term limits for legislators presents one of the most intriguing areas for study, affecting as it does the advancement of political ambitions. Given the importance of ambition for the multinuclear party students of parties should be especially alert to any changes that affect aspirations for office. Opening up legislative posts more frequently and forcing legislators to search for new positions in government or with interest groups are bound to affect the multinuclear party. How this acceleration of activity by ambitious candidates would affect multinuclear cooperation is not entirely clear. Officeholders who cannot be reelected nor seek higher office can become detached not only from the electorate, present and future, but also from their partisan colleagues.

Perhaps the most interesting question about the movement for term limits is whether it has been impelled by an increase in thwarted political ambitions. A continuous change affecting the way those seeking legislative office must perform the eight tasks has largely gone unnoticed: the distance between voters and state and federal legislators has been growing steadily in the United States. This has occurred ever since the U.S. House of Representatives chose to fix its size permanently in 1910, and more recently as states have reduced or stabilized their legislatures' size and in some cases

extended their terms, despite the growth in population. Measured by size of constituency, the electoral distance for the average United States Representative is greater today than in any other democracy except India. U.S. Representatives, for example, have almost six times the number of constituents as the average French deputy and six and half times the number of a British MP. In 1910, when the current size of the House was fixed at 435, twelve states had fewer people than the average district does today. Between 1950 and 1990, New York State lost twelve representatives while gaining three million people. The same growth in electoral distance has occurred for state legislatures. Today California's population is roughly equal to that of the entire country before the Civil War, while the two houses of its legislature combined are but half the size of the pre-Civil War U.S. House of Representatives. If we assume that the proportion of any population willing to seek elective office is stable then the decline in relative outlets for political ambitions means a proportionate increase in discontent among the politically active of the population. Thwarted ambitions are of course an inevitable consequence of competitive elections. Stable democracies depend on defusing them in an orderly fashion; parties have been the principal mechanism for bringing this about. Among the principal challenges facing American parties, then, may well be the reduction of elective office opportunities while the population expands. Along with term limits this alters and complicates the task I have singled out as providing the cement of multinuclear parties, the advancement of ambitions.

These eight tasks provide a simple framework for examining party development. The propositions represent what appear to me to be the basic ways in which these tasks affect party organization. For it appears that not only have parties arisen because of the need to perform these tasks. To the extent that parties change, adapt and survive, it is because they come upon new ways to execute them. The extent also to which parties are isolated nuclear efforts or clearly defined multinuclear organizations depends ultimately on the ways in which officeseekers must perform these eight tasks.