

Political Parties: Extent and Nature

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Abstract: The political party is a means of connecting the political process with society and it helps to improve the political system. In addition, a central feature of any democracy is political party which serve as a vehicle through which citizens can come together freely to define their political and policy aspirations and campaign for public office. In fact political parties have developed alongside democracy, and it is commonly assumed that democracy cannot survive without them. This article is an overview from the extent and nature of the political party in any society.

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1. Introduction

The idea of party development was born and developed in the early stages of political sociology. Lipset and Rokkan (1967), Lapalombara and Weiner, (1966) and Duverger (1964) were among those who pioneered sociological models of party formation, and they theorized the idea that parties are formed as part of a social and political maturation process which culminated in the mature, democratic party systems we know today. Furthermore, a core feature of any democracy is the political party which serves as a vehicle through which citizens can assemble freely to define their political and policy aspirations, and campaign for public office (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 2001). The existence of at least one party occurs even in dictatorial and, indeed, totalitarian systems (Lapalombara and Wiener, 1966). Besides, if we accept the suggestion by Duverger (1964) and Michels (2001) that political parties are often little more than a small group of oligarchs, we cannot disregard their role as a connector between political systems and the community (Almond & Powell, 1966) and as “instruments of civil society” (Biezen, 2004, p. 18).

Consequently, the present paper focuses on the extent and nature of political party in any society

and attempts to study the important of existence the political party to improve the democracy and political development. This research serves as a guide for government generally to implement plans which lead to the qualitative and quantitative growth of political party and specifically party organizations to be better prepared to meet and overcome obstacles that prohibit them in their development process. The outcome of this article also assist researchers in the field of development studies and lastly, this study can be as a guideline and reference for other researchers who wish to contribute to the effectiveness of political parties in the future.

Our argument is developed in four sections. First, we explain the method that is applied in this study. In our second section, we describe concept of political party. In third section, we study extent and nature of political parties. Last, we state the conclusion the study.

2. Methodology

The data of this study is gathered through secondary data. Secondary data is research based on secondary resources that already exist (Jennings, 2001). Secondary data also refer to previously published information that may conclude information, historical records and government reports (Yin, 2003).

Documentation is relevant to all case studies as it provides evidence of the phenomenon being studied (Yin, 2003). The secondary data method in current research included, journal articles, books and the internet.

3. Concept of Political Party

According to Lawson (1976) “no definition of party is ever entirely satisfactory but perhaps most useful as well as most common are those that focus on the political acts likely to be performed by party” (p. 2). On the other hand, the concept of a political party is multifaceted and can be defined in a number of ways. To start with, a party is a social organization. It means a party serves as a bridge between society and the government/state and represents the masses.

Anthony Downs (1957) points the “political party is a rational actor, which exists in order to fulfil its ideological goals” (p.28). In sum, he states an organization is considered a political party if it seeks to obtain voter support and power in decision-making. Fred Riggs (1968), for example, sees party as “any organization which nominates candidates for election to an elected assembly” (p.51). Joseph Lapalombara and Myron Weiner (1966) also say an organization deserve to be called the party that set up local units, seek electoral support from the general public, play a part in political recruitment, and be “committed to the capture or maintenance of power, either alone or in coalition with others” (p. 29). In addition, Joseph Schlesinger (1968) notes political party is “the political organization which actively and effectively engages in the competition for elective office” (p. 428). Moreover, other political scientists (Duverger, 1972; Epstein, 1980; J. Lapalombara, 1974; Miners, 1991; Sartori, 1976; Schattschneider, 1942) have critically discussed their understanding in the interpretation on political parties. These scholars point out that the electoral characteristic is the defining feature of a political party. Sartori (1976) defines a party as “any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections (free and non-free), candidates for public office” (p. 63). Another author adopts a rather loose definition, and defines a party as “... any group, however loosely organized, seeking to elect governmental office holders under a given label” (Epstein, 1980, p. 9).

Janda (1980) also, supposes parties as “organizations that pursue a goal of placing their avowed representatives in government positions” (p. 5). Moreover, Lapalombara (1974, p. 509) states “a political party is a formal organization whose self-conscious, primary purpose is to place and maintain in public office persons who will control, alone or in coalition, the machinery of government”. On the other hand, Duverger (1972) says “... political parties have as their primary goal the conquest of power” (p. 1). Miners (1991) also, gave a concrete picture of definition for this topic “political parties are normally defined as groups which seek to acquire political power through the capture of political office by winning an election” (p. 196).

Since the focus of this article will be extent and nature of political party, the usage of political parties in this study, therefore, adopts a wider role of parties is to act as a link between the state and society.

4. Extent and Nature of Political Parties

The wide literature on the nature and extent of political parties work done by various scholars such as; Lapalombara and Weiner (1966), Samuel Huntington (1993) Duverger (1964) Almond and Powell (1966), Lucian W. Pye (1966), Beyme (1995), Alan Ware (1996), Eldersveld (1964), Lawson (1976), Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond (2003), Mark Dickerson and Thomas Flanagan (1990), and Hein-Anton van der Heijden (2002). All these scholars agree that political parties are importance and necessary to any political system in the world.

Lapalombara and Weiner (1966) suppose that the political party, as a political institution is presented in all forms of the state and in all manner of political systems and governments even dictatorial and, indeed, he emphasizes that totalitarian systems seem unable to do without at least one party. In other study, Beyme (1995) also demonstrates nature and extent of political parties in liberal democracies and points out to some duties of parties. From point of view, it is articulating and aggregating interests, political communication or the identification of goals; mobilizing and socializing the general public into the political system, elite recruitment and government formation are amongst of parties’ duties.

Furthermore, according to Alan Ware (1996) the essence of a party lies in the coordination of individual resources towards the common goal of

exercising power within the state. Samuel Huntington (1993) also, identifies political parties as a key to political stabilization. He stresses that the party as the only modern source which can become a source of authority. He argues that the party creates the state.

Almond and Powell's (1966) classic book on the *Comparative politics: a developmental approach* furthermore, is a very good example of nature and extent of political parties. According to them the extent of political parties lies in political sociability, recruitment, nominate of efficient members for governmental positions; so they conclude, in this way, political parties become influential in stabilization of political structure and its compatibility with the present social context. The Authors also point out to extent of political parties' function and say political parties play a vital role in political structure of countries, because they categorize the plural and various demands into certain general subjects transferring them to the decision-making centre. Such a function makes political parties a connector between the society and the political system. This facilitates the decision-making duty of government because if policymakers are faced with many conflicting demands, which in turn makes the decision very difficult. However, they emphasize that in the absence of political parties, rulers rely on strange methods such as scattering rumors which naturally cannot reflect the real demands of people.

Lucian W. Pye (1966) in his book *Party Systems and National Development in Asia* also, highlights nature and extent of political parties in this continent. He points to party systems in Asia and says that Asian politics are caught in a deep dilemma: they cannot get along without political parties, or work well with them. Historically, the introduction of political parties has apparently created as many problems as it has solved; and although by now Asians now have considerable experience in the announcement and living outside political parties, Asia has had pathetically little experience with working party systems.

The extent and nature of political party discussed by Bahar (1942) and Nozari (2001)'s work. They deepen our understanding of extent and nature of political parties in Iran. According to them, Iranian people in order to establish and maintain of civil society created first political parties in 1908. These studies show that in Iran after the formation of the parties, there were great attempts to make this western pattern play an important role in the traditional society of Iran, but due to the opposition of traditional

institutions and lack of people's knowledge about its necessity these attempts were not that successful.

According to Eldersveld (1964) the nature of the party structure is governed by three main factors: it is strongly influenced by environmental pressures, socio-economic conditions and political history through the sub-political culture, namely normative and operational codes adhered to in the power process, and by the time factor to the structural characteristics of the party usually evolve gradually overtime with room allowed to change or shift at critical points along the way.

There are some dissertations that also, done in the context of nature and extent of political parties. For example, on thesis of *The Role of Political Parties for Political System Support in Established and New Democracies* Paskeviciute (2005) collects data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) 1996-2000 from eight established democracies. This dissertation develops and tests whether and how political parties influence the opinions of citizens in their political system. This research also examines the role of party identification for the support of citizen of the political system and therefore shows citizens identifying with political parties that take positions about the status quo of a political system. The author also states political parties influence system legitimacy by partisanship that facilitates party persuasion of their supporters, political representation, and party competition for government offices. In sum, according to this thesis parties organize the political world because they are the key actors in the operation of governments and parliaments. In addition, parties build the political sphere for many voters because they provide citizens with useful guidelines for dealing with the complexity of the political environment.

In other academic work that conducted by Lawson (1976, p. 1) the author displays that "parties have not been around very long; they are still not fully accepted everywhere as legitimate agencies of political action." He also suggests that,

Parties are often a nation's most important personnel service. They recruit, process, and send forth a continuous stream of applicants for the top jobs in government. Often, parties themselves accompany victorious candidates into the realm of official decision making; in such cases party headquarters may become the central legislative bodies, and whole party

organizations may become in effect the nation's executive branch, responsible for the faithful execution of policy (p. 2).

In short, Lawson (1976) assumes that the domain of parties can be equal to the domain of politics itself, and all the functions that political systems can be made complete by the party. Furthermore, nature and extent of political parties is related to classifying of party organizations. For example, Duverger's (1964) classic book on *Political parties* is one the important research that have done already in classifying type of political parties. According to him the party system has shown in three main types: the single party, two-party system and a multi party structure.

He explains that "single party system has usually been regarded as a new political structure that developed in the twentieth century, exemplified by the former regimes in Germany, Italy and the Soviet government" (p. 225). According to him the party in a single party system aims to create new elites while creating and fashioning political leaders capable of governing with tight control since the masses themselves do not have the potential for governing themselves. The main difficulty inherent in such a system is the fact that the country's leaders are isolated from the masses.

Duverger also highlights that the two-party is closely associated with the Anglo-Saxon world, although it is neither universal among such countries nor exclusive to them. Two-party systems have existed also in Turkey and some Latin American countries, and gradual evolution towards such a system is becoming apparent in parts of continental Europe. According to him, the two-party system is not monolithic in itself, a fact clearly illustrated in a comparison between British and American models. In Britain, the party structure is highly centralized, particularly in the Labour party. In the United State on the other hand, there is the little organization beyond that of the state, and the power of national leaders and committees is strictly regulated and controlled (Duverger, 1964). Duverger (1964) shows that the type of the multi-party system is a bit difficult to establish, then he points out to the multi-party system in France and Belgium and says that; "the tripartite systems of France or Belgium, for example, show no common features, and there is little similarity between the quadric-partite systems of Scandinavia and Switzerland" (p. 229).

Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond's (2003) study on *Species of Political Parties: A New Typology*, likewise, is an effort to set many of the commonly used conceptions of parties into a coherent framework, and to define new party types whenever the existing models are incapable of capturing important aspects of contemporary parties. They suggest that although for nearly a century, political scientists (e.g. Duverger, 1964; Kirchheimer, 1966; Neumann, 1956) have developed typologies and models of political parties in an effort to capture the essential features of the partisan organizations that were the objects of their analysis for decades but the existing models of political parties are not adequately to capture the full range of variation in party types found in the world today.

Indeed, the researchers classified 15 types of party on the basis of three criteria: (1) the nature of the party's organization (thick/thin, elite-based or mass-based, etc.); (2) the programmatic orientation of the party (ideological, particularistic-clientele-oriented, etc.); and (3) tolerant and pluralistic (or democratic) versus proto-hegemonic (or anti-system). Nevertheless, this typology lacks parsimony; they believe that it captures more accurately the diversity of the parties as they exist in the contemporary democratic world. These can be seen in the figure below, which shows these party types in a two-dimensional array with "organizationally thin" parties towards the left and "organizationally thick" parties towards the right side of the diagram, and with party types that emerged in earlier historical periods towards the top of the diagram, and more recent entrants on the scene appearing towards the bottom.

Mark Dickerson and Thomas Flanagan (1990) also offer classifications for political parties. They separate political parties into five distinct categories: pragmatic, ideological, interest, personal and movement parties. Similarly, H. V. Wiseman (1966) reveals differences among political parties in terms of the style of their performance. He describes parties according to three typologies: a) secular or pragmatic bargaining parties; b) absolute value-oriented ideological parties; and c) traditional parties.

4.1 If extent of parties is limited in the world?

Nevertheless above literatures confirm the scope of functions of political parties in earlier decades but some studies show that extent of parties is limited in the world today. For example, Joseph Lapalombara (2007, p. 149) stresses that "the political party is everywhere in decline. Party identification is weakened. Party legitimacy is problematical. The professionals

have replaced old-line party leaders, and the once-critical party activists or cadres have largely disappeared”.

The study of Hein-Anton van der Heijden (2002) shows that political parties in many countries around the world have lost many of their original functions (articulation of demand, political socialization, etc.) and are now part of the state and increasingly are aimed at efficient and effective management, rather than to transform society. According to him from the late 1960s forward, many countries in the world experienced the emergence of so-called new social movements like; women’s movement, peace movement, and environmental movement as the emergence of power rivals such as NGOs, mass media and even European Union and Trans European Networks. Therefore, these new players have taken over some functions originally belonging to political parties.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this overview was to study the extent and nature of political parties. It appears from this overview that political systems cannot be understood without understanding the political parties. In fact, it can be said that all of these researches attempted to demonstrate the nature and extent of political parties to bring the necessity and importance of parties to stability of political regimes in all forms of the state and in all manner of political systems and governments, even dictatorial.

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