

# Political Parties and the Sociological Imagination: Past, Present, and Future Directions

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## Abstract

The classical sociology of parties was born alongside parties themselves. It explored their dynamic interrelationships with states and society, as well as the tensions inherent in the fact that parties are simultaneously representatives and power seekers. Despite these rich foundations, from the 1960s the sociological approach came to be narrowly identified with a one-dimensional conception of parties, and political sociologists focused their attention elsewhere. This review contributes to efforts that began in the 1990s to reclaim the political party as a full-fledged sociological object. To this end, we track the hourglass-shaped trajectory of the sociology of parties: from broad Marxian and Weberian roots, to narrowing and near-eclipse after the 1960s, to a reemergence that reclaims the breadth of the classical traditions. We conclude by suggesting six lines of inquiry that we believe would be fruitful, emphasizing both classical concerns that deserve more attention and innovative approaches that point in novel directions.

## INTRODUCTION

Long in the making, the rise of party politics was among the most striking phenomena of the past century. Recognizable political parties first emerged during the late-seventeenth century (or earlier<sup>1</sup>) and then proliferated in fits and starts alongside the advance of democratization, industrialization, and liberalism. Institutionalizing in many countries during a “global wave of efforts at building constitutional republics between 1848 and 1918,” stable party systems remained a relative rarity beyond the West into the mid-1900s (Goldstone 2004, p. 334; Dahl 1966). Then, as the twentieth century drew to a close, third-wave democratizations raised the proportion of democratic countries from 30% to 60%, spanning Latin America, East Asia, the Pacific, and the former Soviet bloc, as well as South Asia, central Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa (Huntington 1991, Markoff 1996, Przeworski et al. 2000, Simmons et al. 2006; but see Carothers 2002). Ongoing events since the Arab Spring in 2011 have raised the possibility of parties’ institutionalization in the Middle East and North Africa—that is, areas that have long been exceptions to the spread of representative democracy. At the same time, they have reminded observers of the difficulties of stabilizing party-based democratic competition (Ibrahim 1993, Posusney 2002).

And yet, despite Schattschneider’s oft-quoted observation—now more apt than ever—that democracy is “unthinkable save in terms of parties,” political sociology has long been readily thinkable without parties (Schattschneider 1942, p. 1). For much of the last 50 years, political sociologists largely abandoned the study of parties to political scientists (cf. De Leon et al. 2009, De Leon 2014). The *Annual Review of Political Science*, for instance, has published nearly three times as many articles as the *Annual Review of Sociology* that are explic-

itly concerned with political parties as objects of analysis.

Parties’ low profile in political sociology is all the more surprising given that modern party systems and the sociology of parties were twins at birth. The late-nineteenth-century institutionalization of Western party systems also witnessed the genesis of the social sciences and the classical sociology of parties. Taking a particular interest in emergent socialist and workers’ parties, classical thinkers—Marx and Weber central among them—located parties at the center of political life and social scientific analysis (Marx & Engels 1848 [1978]; Lenin 1902 [1999]; Ward 1908; Michels 1911 [1962]; Weber 1914 [1978], 1919 [1958]; Gramsci 1929–1935 [1971]; on the proliferation of socialist parties from the 1860s, see Eley 2002). The Marxian and Weberian traditions agreed that parties were indigenous to industrialized capitalism and oriented toward state control but, whereas Marxian thinkers situated the party as an ideologically laden nexus of theory and practice and equated party oppositions with class oppositions, Weberians understood parties as both class- and status-based organizations that, regardless of origins or principles, tended to rationalize around the basic goal of power seeking. In either case, classical thinking on the political party offered a broad and multidimensional perspective that attended to its dynamic interrelationships with states and society and to how those interrelationships rendered parties the bearers of more or less representative forms of authority.

By the 1960s, sociology was a leading voice in the social science of parties, but the sociological approach was also coming to be narrowly identified with a one-dimensional understanding of parties as expressions of social groups—a view closely associated with Paul Lazarsfeld, Seymour Martin Lipset, and their colleagues. While this narrow interpretation was never a fair treatment of their nuanced work or its classical bases, and it ignored a range of sociologically informed works on party organization and party systems, the sociological approach gave way to an increasingly dominant

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<sup>1</sup>Following Machiavelli, Weber considered the Italian opposition between the Guelphs and Ghibellines in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to be a party opposition (Machiavelli 1532 [1998], Weber 1919 [1958]).

political science of parties that focused on more individualistic, and eventually rational choice–dominated, modes of analysis. In the 1970s and 1980s, many political sociologists turned their attention away from parties and toward states and social movements, even as students of politics argued—third-wave democratization notwithstanding—that the age of parties was on the wane. The rich traditions of the sociology of parties appeared to be in danger of eclipse.

However, an incipient scholarship emerging since the 1990s has signaled an impulse to renew the sociology of parties, mobilizing a wider field of analytical vision that is reminiscent of classical traditions. While some sociologists and political scientists have revisited the sociological approach, other scholarship has resituated political parties as interconnected with states and society and renewed questions of representation. This emerging scholarship goes beyond the classical sociology of parties in important ways, including incorporating a sensitivity to causal processes as they unfold in time as well as the cultural, performative, and symbolic aspects of party politics. It thus holds significant promise for the party’s overdue resuscitation as a full-fledged sociological object.

Our review seeks to contribute to the effort by tracking the sociology of parties’ past, present, and possible futures. The discussion is organized into four sections. Because a central aim is to connect the past and present of the sociology of parties, in the next section we consider classical perspectives, dealing with an admittedly narrow selection of thinkers from the Marxian and Weberian traditions. By highlighting classical thinkers’ attentiveness to dynamic society-party-state interrelationships and to important questions of representation, organization, and power seeking, we aim to convey, as concisely as possible, a clear sense of the depth and breadth of classical thinking on parties. We then deal briefly with the subfield’s mid-century high-water mark, the narrowing it entailed, and its subsequent decline. A third section focuses on sociological renewals, discussing a range of scholarship since the 1990s and zeroing in on works in which po-

litical parties are central objects of inquiry, regardless of where they fit into the analysis. We also discuss a recent sociological turn in political science among students of American politics interested in parties. By necessity, in the latter two sections we are (again) selective, largely omitting work that deals with party systems rather than parties themselves, focusing on English-language scholarship, and touching lightly on the voluminous European comparative politics literature. The fourth and final section highlights what we think is new about the resurgent party literature alongside classical themes that deserve more attention, outlining six promising lines of inquiry that a renewed sociology of parties might yet pursue.

## **PARTIES IN THE CLASSICAL IMAGINATION**

Parties figured prominently in early political and sociological thought, especially in the Marxian and Weberian traditions.<sup>2</sup> Notable for their scope, the Marxian and Weberian traditions situated parties as dynamically interconnected with states and society and as forces in their own right, articulating in the process important questions about parties as organizations, power seekers, and representative agents.

One set of basic concerns dealt with parties’ social bases. Differing in their opinions about the kinds of groups parties represent, classical perspectives situated parties as reflections of the multiple social cleavages that characterize modern, industrialized societies. In the Marxian case, the effort to show that “political parties are the more or less adequate political expression of . . . classes and fractions of classes” was central to historical materialist method because party struggles could thus be analyzed as class struggles (Engels 1895 [1978]). As opposed to the

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<sup>2</sup>A fuller discussion of classical thinking on parties might range, roughly, from Machiavelli’s (1532 [1998]) *The Prince* to Gramsci’s (1929–1935 [1971]) *Prison Notebooks*, covering many overlapping strands of philosophical, political, and social scientific thought in between. The following thus represents an extremely selective discussion.

conservative parties of the aristocracy or liberal parties of the industrial bourgeoisie, the socialist mass party (or, often, an idealized communist party) received pride of place in Marxian scholarship as an inherently progressive organization and natural class representative, capable of rendering the industrial proletariat “stronger, firmer, mightier,” and increasingly able to effect change (Marx & Engels 1848 [1978], p. 481).

Weber then modified the Marxian class-centric view of parties with his famous distinction between classes and status groups: Parties could be based in either class or status and are rarely pure reflections of one or the other (Weber 1914 [1958], p. 194). Differing Marxian and Weberian conceptions of parties’ social bases lent themselves to distinctive modes of historical analysis: Whereas the Marxian conception of parties as vectors of class formation, antagonism, and alliance produced important analyses of revolutionary change (Marx 1850 [1978], 1852 [1978]; Engels 1895 [1978]), Weber’s more fluid conception of parties’ social bases lent itself to the analysis of change within parties themselves. Echoing Ostrogorski, for instance, Weber tracked parties’ move from “plutocratic” status bases to more class-based “plebiscitarian” (mass) forms over time (Weber 1919 [1958], pp. 100–101; Ostrogorski 1902 [1981], 1902 [1982]).<sup>3</sup>

Recognition of parties as seekers of power (in the most general sense<sup>4</sup>) fed into another set of historical questions, moving from the issue of parties’ social bases to the question of their relationship to states. Weber, in particular, emphasized state-party ties.<sup>5</sup> Often originating as illegal or extralegal organizations, parties for

Weber were bases of countervailing, nonstate authority that evolved alongside the modern state and accelerated its consolidation; like the modern state, parties’ authority bases were predominantly of a rational-legal sort, but Weber highlighted that, as organizations like any other, they may also be charismatic or traditional. Whatever their authority bases, parties shape state officialdom directly—particularly in parliamentary systems—by fashioning themselves as cabinets-in-waiting. Through nominations and appointments, they also create a stratum of state officials who are evaluated according to political rather than technocratic criteria, whose first loyalties are party loyalties, and who work to extend party control deep into technocratic ranks (Weber 1914 [1978], p. 294; 1919 [1958], pp. 87–95). For better or worse, parties and states are thus dynamically interconnected: Parties shape state composition, diversify forms of authority, and insert partisan interests into the otherwise rational-legal arenas of modern politics.

Marxian thinkers, meanwhile, were especially concerned with party-society ties, emphasizing the processes by which parties both channel interests and act back on society. This does not mean that they were unconcerned with parties’ relationships to the state; Gramsci, for instance, described the party as a state in gestation, summarizing the whole of his political writings as an analysis of “the political party, in its relations with the classes and the State” (Gramsci 1929–1935 [1971], p. 123). An implication is that the careful analysis of party-society ties is a precondition for understanding how the state develops, or might develop. Whereas for Weber modern parties could be understood with reference to two ideal types—the patronage party and the ideological party (Weber 1917 [1978], pp. 1397–98)—parties in the Marxian tradition are always dual entities, at once vehicles for class advancement and semi-autonomous sites of theoretical development. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels famously argued that the communist party was a means of the proletariat’s “political and general education” (Marx & Engels 1848 [1978],

<sup>3</sup>Noting the growing influence of legal and political professionals, Weber arguably saw the modern party as moving toward new status bases in time (Weber 1919 [1958], pp. 94–95).

<sup>4</sup>Party “action is oriented toward the acquisition of social power, that is to say, toward influencing social action no matter what its content may be” (Weber 1911 [1978], p. 938).

<sup>5</sup>These differences in emphasis can be understood as effects of Gramsci’s and Weber’s different historical, political, and geographical positioning, but a full discussion is beyond the scope of this review.

p. 481). For Lenin, the “vanguard party” became a mover of history by marrying political action to the theoretical articulation of workers’ aims, bringing philosophical light to their movements (Lenin 1895 [1972], 1902 [1999]). Gramsci later emphasized that parties need not advance the hegemonic project of the working classes per se, but they are indeed carriers of hegemonic struggles between and within social groups (Anderson 1976b). Social groupness itself is a party effect, however: Politically significant social blocs are constituted by parties, and not vice versa. In Gramsci’s words, “The masses don’t exist politically, if they are not framed in political parties” (Gramsci 1921 [2008]; see also Gramsci 1929–1935 [1971], Paggi 1979, Hawley 1980). For Gramsci, parties dis- and rearticulate social groups partly by producing organic intellectuals who foster class alliances and cultivate the “good sense” of the masses (Gramsci 1929–1935 [1971], pp. 5–23, 30–31, 168, 340; Molyneux 1978 [2008]). Political parties are thus central to the unity of theory and practice that is at the heart of Marxism (Marx 1845 [1978]; see also Anderson 1976a).

Differential emphases on party-society versus party-state ties in the Marxian and Weberian traditions, respectively, ultimately led to different conclusions on important questions of representation and the trajectory of political power struggles. Are parties driven by the priorities of a select few or are they channels for expressing the interests of those they purport to represent? To what extent, and under what conditions, do parties impose an ideology on electoral publics, versus facilitating their self-expression and orienting them toward collectively beneficial ends? Are they a means to revolutionary transformation, or simply a means to state power? In the Weberian tradition, rationalization around power seeking is a basic tendency of the political party: Parties close themselves off and marry themselves to states, tending to become less and less representative of the mass public and part of an essentially conservative bureaucratic apparatus. For thinkers in the Marxian tradition, however, rationalization around power seeking is probable, but not

inevitable; the truly progressive party stays anchored to civil society, constitutes social groups by articulating their shared interests, and then channels and orients those interests in transformative ways.<sup>6</sup>

Weber emphasized that, once in office, the elected representative can “make his own decisions,” being “obligated only to express his own genuine conviction” (Weber 1914 [1978], p. 293). Parliamentary politics are party-led, and citizens are largely “politically passive” consumers of programs and agendas (Weber 1914 [1978], p. 294). On what bases parties led, however, was a different issue: The modern party was increasingly built on legal-rational authority, but parties also made room for claims to authority on the basis of special insight, knowledge, or talent (that is, charisma). Here, still, Weber—and more famously, Robert Michels—held out little hope. Attracted to states as a means of stable financing, legal protections, and administrative resources, the party tends to extract itself from civil society and merge into the state until its “bureaucratic organization...definitively gains the upper hand over its soul” (Michels 1911 [1962], p. 358).<sup>7</sup> Because all parties “live in a house of ‘power,’” there is no exception to this tendency (Weber 1914 [1958], p. 194; 1917 [1978], pp. 1395–99; Michels 1911 [1962]; for a discussion of points of disagreement between Weber and Michels, see Roth 1978, p. xcii). Parties thus introduce a paradox at the heart of democratic societies, tending to lead rather than represent and to bring forth “the rule of professional politicians without a calling, without the inner charismatic qualities that make a leader” (Weber 1919 [1958], pp. 87, 113). For Michels, basic democratic processes—competition, mass appeals, party-state interaction, delegation—all tended to

<sup>6</sup>Needless to say, regressive parties may also be articulators of social groups and agents of hegemonic projects, but exactly whose interests are served is a more open question.

<sup>7</sup>Weber placed particular emphasis on the means by which parties are financed as a determinant of the distribution of political power and of party policy (Weber 1914 [1978], p. 286).

render parties vulnerable to the “iron law of oligarchy” (Michels 1911 [1962], pp. 70, 330–37, 365).<sup>8</sup>

Some thinkers in the Marxian tradition, meanwhile, understood the tension between representation and power seeking as potentially dissolvable insofar as political parties facilitate the marriage of theory and practice—an aim that, some argued, could be achieved if parties are democratically organized, facilitate self-criticism, and incorporate critics and if they are deeply embedded in the working classes (Marx & Engels 1848 [1978], Lenin 1902 [1999]; see also Luxemburg 1904–1918 [1961], Lukács 1923 [1971], Gramsci 1929–1935 [1971]).<sup>9</sup> Making a strong distinction between progressive and regressive party forms, Gramsci conceived of the former as “a complex element of society in which a collective will has already been recognized and has to some extent asserted itself in action” (Gramsci 1929–1935 [1971], pp. 123, 129, 155). By wedding representation and ideology, partly via organic intellectuals who helped to build the “intellectual and moral unity” of the classes, the progressive party could serve as a vehicle for counter-hegemonic transformation (Gramsci 1929–1935 [1971], quoted in Anderson 1976b, p. 19; but see Kandil 2011).

## THE MODERN PERIOD: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF PARTIES

During most of the 1960s, the social science of parties remained a deeply sociological enterprise (Duverger 1951 [1954], Sartori 1969). Mayhew (1974, p. 1), for instance, describes legislative work in political science as having

a “dominant sociological tone.” Indeed, sociological intuitions undergirded the ideas of the most accomplished students of American politics in political science. Among them were Key (1942 [1964]), Sorauf (1964), and Eldersveld (1964), who understood parties as broad, “umbrella-like” organizations formed as coalitions “of many and diverse groups” (Aldrich 1995, pp. 7, 8). Parties were widely seen as having come into existence in order to resolve the basic representational dilemma of articulating and aggregating otherwise disparate interests, so that electoral majorities could be welded together and countries could be governed (Aldrich 1995, pp. 9–10). Parties were also understood as multileveled and internally diverse (Eldersveld 1964, cited by Aldrich 1995, p. 10). Key famously distinguished between the “party-in-the-electorate,” “party activists,” a “party-in-the legislature,” and a “party-in-the-government” (Key 1942 [1958], pp. 181–82).<sup>10</sup>

But perhaps the most central figure in postwar research on parties was Seymour Martin Lipset, whose influence spanned both sociology and political science. Lipset drew on several strands of classical thinking to develop a sociological approach to parties and party systems that extended the electoral sociology of Paul Lazarsfeld and his Columbia colleagues (Manza & Brooks 1999, pp. 13–15).<sup>11</sup> In their seminal collaboration, Lipset and Rokkan defined parties as “*alliances in conflicts over policies and value*

<sup>8</sup>Born in Cologne, Michels had been a member of the German Social Democratic Party until 1907, before emigrating to Italy and becoming known as an elite theorist alongside Mosca and Pareto (Hands 1971, p. 157; see also Mosca 1896 [1960], Pareto 1902 [1991], Linz 2006). Ultimately he joined the Italian Fascists.

<sup>9</sup>Questions of party organization, representation, and political action are subjects of intense debate in the Marxian tradition, a full discussion of which is impossible here.

<sup>10</sup>We should also mention that the somewhat older ideas of Schattschneider (1942) about party politics also had a strikingly sociological character. Schattschneider (1942) saw organized interests and pressure groups as a major force in political life, and he saw strong political parties as perhaps the only viable democratic counterweight to their influence.

<sup>11</sup>The sociological approach to parties and party systems, on which this article focuses, should be distinguished from the sociological approach to voting behavior. They are analytically related, and their intellectual fortunes are somewhat intertwined, but the former sees the party as the main object of analysis, whereas the latter sees the individual as the main object of analysis. For a review of postwar research on voting behavior, including the Columbia School’s electoral sociology and the Michigan School’s social-psychological approach, which eventually gave rise to behavioralism in American politics research, see Manza & Brooks (1999, pp. 13–14) and De Leon (2014).



*commitments within the larger body politic*" (Lipset & Rokkan 1967, p. 5). A key source of conflict was class cleavage, which Lipset understood primarily in terms of income and occupational hierarchy. He argued that political parties—particularly in European countries, but also in the American two-party context—tended to be "based on either the lower classes or the middle and upper classes" and, as such, represented a "democratic translation of class struggle" (Lipset 1960 [1981], pp. 230, 303–331, 460). Despite the centrality of Marxian insights in Lipset's work,<sup>12</sup> an emphasis on nonclass cleavages also lent it a decidedly Weberian tone: Party struggle was class struggle, but nonclass social cleavages such as religious belief, ethnic identity, and regional ties were also expressed in party conflict. In fact, according to Lipset & Rokkan, whether a European party system came to feature a strong working-class movement depended on how a sequence of successive conflicts—first between the center and periphery, then state and church, and finally land and industry—was resolved by the time universal manhood suffrage was introduced (Lipset & Rokkan 1967, pp. 38, 48). This process of cleavage-based party development finally ended in the early twentieth century, when there was a "freezing of the major party alternatives" (Lipset & Rokkan 1967, p. 50).

Despite its influence and prominence, the full breadth and richness of Lipset's analytical vision gradually receded, though his basic intuitions remained somewhat influential in comparative politics. This change of fortune is partly attributable to the larger demise of the Parsonsian paradigm, which formed a key part of his analysis (Lipset & Rokkan 1967, pp. 6–26).<sup>13</sup> But other aspects of his analysis

also faded from view, ranging from his stress on timing and sequencing to his emphasis on the importance of the "instrumental and representative" functions of parties, which can "force the spokesmen for many contrasting interests and outlooks to strike bargains, to stagger demands, and to aggregate pressures (Lipset & Rokkan 1967, pp. 5, 93; Boix 2007, p. 505, has made a similar observation). In many quarters of sociology and political science, what remained of the sociological approach to parties was the notion that parties were the political creatures of social groups.<sup>14</sup>

Even this eventually gave way in the study of American politics to a relatively asociological paradigm built principally on the work of economist Anthony Downs (1957) (see Aldrich 1995, pp. 12–13). In the Downsian paradigm, parties were understood not as instruments of group struggle but as a "team of politicians whose paramount goal is to win elective office" (Bawn et al. 2012, p. 571). As Downs wrote, parties "do not seek to gain office in order to carry out certain preconceived policies or to serve any particular interest groups; rather they formulate policies and serve interest groups in order to gain office" (Downs 1957, p. 137). Central to this view of parties was the rational, self-interested behavior of election-minded politicians, especially legislators (see Mayhew 1974; Cox & McCubbins 1993, 2005). There were important alternatives to this approach, including a literature on party systems and electoral realignments (Key 1955, Burnham 1970, Sundquist 1973; for an important critique, see Mayhew 2002) and Ferguson's

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& Friedland (1974) and De Leon et al. (2009) for a critique. See also De Leon (2014).

<sup>12</sup>Lipset eschewed the eschatological vision of the Marxian tradition but nevertheless described his political sociology as an "apolitical Marxist analysis," absent "Marx's conclusion that socialism is an inevitable or preferable successor to capitalism" (Lipset 1960 [1981], p. 459).

<sup>13</sup>For instance, Lipset & Rokkan placed cleavages in a two-dimensional political space using Parson's AGIL paradigm (Lipset & Rokkan 1967, pp. 95, 101, 112–14). See Mair (1997 [2004]) for a useful discussion of Lipset & Rokkan; see Alford

<sup>14</sup>Worth mentioning here is the sidelining of a largely European, interdisciplinary scholarship that considered the strengths and weaknesses of single-party, two-party, and multi-party alternatives, the forces that tend to produce them, and the effects of the mass party form (Duverger 1951 [1954]; Almond 1956; Blondel 1968; Lijphart 1969; Rokkan 1970; Sartori 1968, 1976; see Mair 1990, 1997 [2004] for a discussion). Maurice Duverger, the French sociologist who articulated "Duverger's law" (that majoritarian voting will tend to produce a two-party system), is a foundational figure here.

“investment theory of party competition,” which conceptualized parties as “*blocs of major investors who coalesce to advance candidates representing their interests*” (Ferguson 1995, p. 27; see also Ferguson 1983, Ferguson & Rogers 1986). Yet major tenets of the Downsian paradigm became highly influential in the literature on parties, epitomized by Aldrich’s “rational choice” argument that electorally ambitious legislators create parties to solve a range of collective action and social choice problems (Aldrich 1995, pp. 29–50).<sup>15</sup>

In the meantime, the sociology of parties itself experienced a marked decline in the 1970s and 1980s, apparently a combined effect of epistemological doubt and a turn to nonparty political phenomena—especially states, state building, and social movements (e.g., Piven & Cloward 1977, Skocpol 1979, McAdam 1982, Evans et al. 1985, Tilly 1985; but see Knoke 1972, 1973 for exceptions). The turn away from the sociology of parties was accompanied by an apparent decline of parties themselves. Dahl, for instance, noted the expansion of nonmajoritarian policy making, attributing it to growing executive powers and the eclipse of elected bodies by employer, union, and interest group bargaining (Dahl 1966, p. 396; LaPalombara & Weiner 1966; Epstein 1967; DiSalvo 2012). Echoing Michelsian-Weberian predictions, Kirchheimer identified the rise of the “catch-all party,” characterized by a prioritization of general electoral appeal over “the intellectual and moral *encadrement* of the masses” (Kirchheimer 1966, pp. 184, 190). Others argued that the class basis of older electoral coalitions was beginning to decay and the “traditional social group bases of political behavior and party coalitions” were

“breaking down,” displaced by postmaterialist values, nonclass party appeals, and new voting (and nonvoting) tendencies (Manza & Brooks 1999, p. 2; see also Inglehart 1977, Przeworski 1980, Przeworski & Sprague 1986, Rose & McAllister 1986, Franklin et al. 1992, Dalton & Wattenberg 2000). Its central object called into question, the sociology of parties appeared to be nearing a total eclipse.

## RENEWALS

The period since the 1990s brought signs of the return of a full-fledged sociology of parties. Sociologists and political scientists produced new analyses that cast parties as causal forces in historical change, as effects of other processes, and as important in themselves. In the process, they have resuscitated the breadth of the classical sociology of parties and updated it theoretically and methodologically.

### The Return of the Sociological Approach?

An early marker of the return of the sociology of parties was work by Hout, Manza, and Brooks that systematically revisited the sociological approach to political behavior (Hout et al. 1995, Manza et al. 1995, Manza & Brooks 1999). Analyzing data from the National Election Survey on such individual-level variables as vote choice, voter turnout, and party identification, they reasserted the significance of class and other social cleavages as a basis of partisan politics, and they updated understandings of how group-based partisan alignments had changed over time. Around the same time, Schwartz (1990, 1994) called for a view of the political party as “a network of relations,” in a new sociological push for thinking about parties in more flexible ways. These works signaled that it was high time for a revitalized sociology of parties.

A sociological turn of sorts also occurred in the last decade or so among students of American politics in political science, partly in response to findings that are difficult to reconcile with the discipline’s standard view of parties

<sup>15</sup> Notably, Aldrich (1995, p. 21) does not argue that politicians are single-minded in their motivation to obtain or retain office. Moreover, there is a significant strand of the so-called “rational choice” literature built on the notion that politicians are motivated not by electoral goals but by policy goals (e.g., Krehbiel 1993, 1998). For a helpful review of the literature and a careful elaboration of a model that takes the idea of multiple (and sometimes conflicting) motivations seriously, see Smith (2007).



(see Ansolabehere et al. 2001, Canes-Wrone et al. 2002, Maskett 2009, Carson et al. 2010, cited in Bawn et al. 2012). At the forefront is the work of the so-called UCLA school, led by John R. Zaller and collaborators (Cohen 2005, Bawn & Noel 2007, Cohen et al. 2008, Karol 2009, Maskett 2009, Bawn et al. 2012, Baylor 2012). In a recent paper, Zaller and colleagues clearly lay out the basic elements of the new approach (Bawn et al. 2012), building on *The Party Decides* (Cohen et al. 2008). The core idea, strongly resonant with the sociological approach, is that parties do not emerge because of the rational, self-interested behavior of teams of politicians seeking to win elections, but rather because organized groups of “policy demanders” seek special benefits by nominating and electing candidates amenable to their policy preferences (Bawn et al. 2012, pp. 574–75). Pointing to cases such as the Southern planters and Northern mercantilists of the Federalist Party during the late-eighteenth century and the collection of civil rights organizations, labor unions, and religious and civic groups that formed the backbone of liberalism within the Democratic Party starting in the 1940s, researchers in the mold of the “UCLA school” see interest-based groups as the “first movers” of the political process, and their motivations and actions are understood as setting partisan politics in motion and pushing partisan politics along (Bawn et al. 2012, pp. 579, 581).

The explanatory value of the group-based approach is apparent in recent work on partisan change. Except in the case of “groupless” issues, Karol (2009, p. 9) finds that shifts in the policy positions of the two major parties can “usually be attributed to shifts in preferences among groups already in their coalition or party elites’ attempts to attract a new group to their side.” Interest-based groups play a key role in this process of “coalition management” by initiating or accelerating partisan change as well as inducing or constraining the repositioning of politicians (Karol 2009). Schickler and colleagues (2010, p. 682) find parallel evidence that the “Democratic Party’s core coalition partners were instrumental in transforming the party

to embrace civil rights” (see also Feinstein & Schickler 2008). The national party changed in response not to strategic choices of party leaders (e.g., Carmines & Stimson 1989), but to the demands of groups like the Urban League, Congress of Industrial Organizations, American Jewish Congress, and Americans for Democratic Action (Schickler et al. 2010, p. 686).

The approach is also gaining traction in research on representational inequality. In a statistical analysis of a unique data set on policy responsiveness, Gilens (2012, p. 163) finds that parties act more like the agents of “policy demanders” than instruments of office seekers, “responding to the preferences of the public . . . when necessary but pursuing their own policy agendas when they can.” He argues that policy is broadly representative of public preferences only when there is a change in partisan regime or when there is a presidential election coming up. Otherwise, policy is largely driven by “[a]ctivist groups, major donors, and interest organizers.” Thus, most of the time, “upwardly distributive policies” are put into place when Republicans dominate, while “policies that redistribute resources to the less advantaged” are established “when Democrats control Congress and the White House” (Gilens 2012, p. 191).

This partisan pattern points to a second sense in which research on parties by students of American politics is taking a sociological turn. A growing number of studies now support the conclusion that the two parties are tied to different social classes—with important consequences for representation, policy making, and economic inequality. Bartels (2008, pp. 29–63) shows that the real income of the middle class and the working poor has increased much more quickly under Democratic presidents. His analysis of policy making across a number of issues indicates that the roll call votes of US senators is strongly predicted by the opinion of affluent constituents and the party of the legislator (important early studies of inequality in political representation include Gilens 2005 and Jacobs & Page 2005). More striking still, Republicans appear far less responsive to their

low- and middle-income constituents and far more responsive to the opinion of their affluent constituents than do Democrats, who appear equally responsive to middle- and upper-income constituents (Bartels 2008, pp. 252–82).

If it is true that Republicans are most responsive to the opinions of affluent constituents (Bartels 2008, pp. 252–82), and if it is also true that affluent Americans tend to oppose a “higher minimum wage, more generous unemployment benefits, stricter corporate regulation...and a more progressive personal tax regime” to a greater degree than less affluent Americans (Gilens 2012, p. 117), then it is not much of a mystery why the adoption of “upwardly redistributive policies” (Gilens 2012, p. 191) and thus stronger income growth among the affluent than the less affluent (Bartels 2008, pp. 33, 56) tends to occur under Republican control of government. Republicans listen most closely to their affluent constituents, whose upwardly redistributive preferences they follow when in office (and whose preferences they perhaps share). At the same time, there should be little mystery why affluent voters today tend to identify as Republicans and vote for Republican candidates (McCarty et al. 2006, pp. 74, 84–85, 96). The affluent do better under the GOP than the alternative. Neither conclusion would have seemed out of place among scholars working in certain mid-century traditions of research on parties. Notwithstanding the suggestive finding from Verba et al. (1995) on the role of campaign contributions, perhaps the only enduring mystery is why Republicans would listen to the affluent more closely than they listen to other Americans and more closely than Democrats listen to the affluent (Bartels 2008, pp. 270, 280).

There is also growing evidence that the parties are tied differently to politically active groups. Drawing on Ferguson (1983), Ferguson & Rogers (1986), and Vogel (1989), Hacker & Pierson (2010) argue that today’s massive degree of economic inequality is due largely to the remobilization of organized business in the 1970s. Yet business would eventually establish

different financial connections with Democrats than it did with Republicans. “Financing the GOP was an investment,” write Hacker & Pierson (2010, p. 179), helping the party shape a policy agenda and elect the right candidates. It was a “form of insurance” in the case of Democrats, where it went to remove potential obstacles and encourage defection from the party line (Hacker & Pierson 2010, p. 180). Money to Republicans often went to the party, whereas for Democrats it went to individual candidates (Hacker & Pierson 2010, p. 180). The result was the radicalization and revitalization of the GOP, a weakening of Democratic solidarity and resolve, and a host of policy changes that have fueled the rise of economic inequality. In arguing that “[p]owerful groups” are behind the partisan politics of the “winner-take-all economy”—and here they have in mind “business coalitions, Wall Street lobbyists, medical industry players”—Hacker & Pierson (2010, p. 291) are harkening back to earlier, more sociologically minded traditions of thought about parties, traditions that call to mind Key and Lipset rather than Downs. Unsurprisingly, some political scientists have called for a reengagement with sociologically inflected theories of political economy (e.g., Jacobs & Soss 2010).

Engaging with these emergent political science literatures, sociologists have also taken on questions of inequality and representation in American politics. Juxtaposing the pluralist notion of American society as one of “multiple and overlapping lines of disagreement” with polarization in the form of interest alignment (constraint), Baldassarri & Gelman (2008) analyzed patterns in the evolution of opinion correlations within years, in various issue domains, using the National Elections Studies (1972–2004). They argue that party polarization is driving the ideological sorting of individuals in the United States, rather than the other way around. Pointing out that groups that exhibit the most constraint are the wealthiest 33% of Americans and (especially Republican) activists, they argue that activists and parties are locked in a self-reinforcing cycle of polarization, even

as the wealthiest class—which “knows what it wants, and is likely, now more than in the past, to affect the political process”—exerts undue influence, marginalizing poorer groups and the nonactivist public (Baldassarri & Gelman 2008, pp. 409, 442; see also Baldassarri & Bearman 2007, Baldassarri 2011).

Other sociologists have considered the partisan effects of representational exclusion by looking to a specific American population: disenfranchised felons. Uggen & Manza (2002) argue that the exponential increase in American incarceration rates in the late twentieth century (see also Sutton 2004, Pager 2007, Western 2007)—viewed by Wacquant (2008, 2012) as an integral feature of the neoliberal era—and the distinctly American practice of felon disenfranchisement have tilted electoral outcomes in a pro-Republican direction. Estimating the likely voting patterns of disenfranchised felons, they argue that, without felon disenfranchisement, Democrats would have controlled the Senate since 1986; they also present evidence that, if year 2000 levels of incarceration had obtained in the 1960s and 1970s, neither Kennedy nor Carter would have won the presidency (but see Burch 2012).

## Remarrying Parties to States and Society

Sociologists of social movements, meanwhile, have refocused attention on society-party ties by rethinking a tendency in social movement scholarship to frame movements and parties as mutually exclusive modes of political action (e.g., Gamson 1975 [1990], Tilly 1978, Jenkins & Klandermans 1995). This effort has involved (re)imagining parties, movements, and states as dynamically interconnected, examining how movements and parties may become more or less permanently joined, and considering parties as channels through which social movements affect policies and states (Goldstone 2003b; McAdam et al. 2001, 2008; Amenta et al. 2010). Goldstone (2004, pp. 336–37) in particular argues that this is a necessary move, given that recent waves of democratization

have shown that “social movement activity is . . . a complementary mode of political action” to party-based activity. Parties should thus be understood as essential elements of the “relational fields” that condition movements’ “emergence, growth, actions,” and successes or failures (Goldstone 2004, pp. 336–37; see also Van Dyke 2003).

Social movement scholars note that the shaping or reshaping of parties is among “[t]he main potential political consequences of movements at the structural level,” marking the achievement of lasting influence and the possibility of collective benefits (Amenta et al. 2010, pp. 289, 292). Examples include, for instance, “the historical development of mid-nineteenth-century French republicanism from a movement into a party” (Aminzade 1993, p. 19), recent events in non-Western countries where “citizenship rights and political party systems are developing out of social movements” (Goldstone 2003a, p. 3), and the rise of conservative, populist, and radical right parties in Canada and Western Europe (Betz & Immerfall 1998, Schwartz 2000, Rydgren 2007). The significance of movement-party ties in terms of collective benefits is perhaps most obvious in the case of left party formation out of workers’ organizations, which fundamentally shaped Western political landscapes in the twentieth century (Sassoon 1996, Eley 2002).<sup>16</sup> For this reason, parties actually remained a going concern in welfare states literatures even as social scientists otherwise lost interest: Adherents of the power-resources perspective present strong evidence that left parties—being linked up with organized labor and structurally disadvantaged groups—tend to push policy in a more progressive, redistributive, and universalistic direction, albeit with important national and historical variations (Stephens 1979; Korpi 1978, 2003, 2006; Korpi & Shalev 1980; Huber

<sup>16</sup>The literature on labor, left parties, and social democracy is vast and overlaps with Marxist theoretical scholarship—an expression, arguably, of the particular concern with parties as a nexus of theory and practice in the Marxian tradition.

et al. 1993; Hicks 1999; Huber & Stephens 2001; Korpi & Palme 2003; Bradley et al. 2003; Brady 2003; cf. Boix 1997). Others contend that the absence of successful labor-to-party formation in the United States, meanwhile, is key to understanding the American welfare state and US political development more generally (Voss 1993, Lipset & Marks 2001, Archer 2008; cf. Sombart 1906 [1976]). By extension, the late-twentieth-century weakening of union-party ties is broadly understood as a historical divorce of left parties from their movement foundations (Ebbinghaus 1995, 2003; Howell 2001; Voss 2010; cf. Kitschelt 1993).

Others are now looking beyond the labor movement to consider the nature and consequences of movement-party ties. Based on an analysis of the US antiwar movement using survey and ethnographic evidence, Heaney & Rojas (2007) argue that membership overlap between movements and parties can effectively create a “party-in-the-street”: a “network of activists and organizations that simultaneously maintain loyalty to and involvement with a major political party and a social movement” (p. 453; see also Heaney & Rojas 2015). While the movement-party relationship may come and go as movements mobilize around particular issues or elections, movements may also power electoral realignments or invent new modes of contention for parties to appropriate. Schwartz (2006) focuses on small parties in the United States and Canada as “party movements,” which have characteristics of both movements and parties, and manage to remain surprisingly resilient in the face of organizational obstacles. At the extreme, McAdam & Tarrow (2010) have argued that movement-party-state interpenetration may be so thorough as to effectively constitute a “movement state”—that is, states that are interpenetrated with movements via parties.

Among the most important party-related outcomes, of course, is the stabilization of party systems (cf. Goldstone 2011). As in the present-day Middle East, newly formed party systems invariably confront a host of issues that threaten to undo them, ranging from disputes over fiscal

and legal authority and foreign policy to military power and external conflict (Goldstone 2011, pp. 14, 16). McLean (2011, p. 90), in contrast, considers the question of stabilization in the case of eighteenth-century Poland, asking how “chaotic, factionalized, pathologically patrimonial politics” transitioned into “a politically stable outcome based not on tyranny, but on the operation of parties.” Taking aim at rational choice models, he argues that transitions from factions to party systems cannot be modeled according to the “rational choices” of interest-seeking elites because interests are products of social organization and the roles therein (McLean 2011, p. 91). Instead, he argues, the analytical focus should center on how the configuration of social networks produces social roles, and thus political identities. McLean (2011, p. 91) contends that, in Poland, a “rewiring of highly politicized elite marriage networks . . . clarified the loyalties of key participants” and made the constitutional agreement of 1791 possible, cementing the Polish party system.

Other analyses recall the Weberian theme of party formation and state building as parallel processes, with emphasis on sequencing and path dependence. A classic work here is Skowronek’s (1982) study of American state building between 1877 and 1920, when the American state was transformed from a “state of courts and parties,” unable to meet the widening social and economic demands of the age to an administrative state of national scope and capabilities (pp. 39–40). Among other things, Skowronek identified an important difference in state-party dynamics in Europe versus the United States. At the same time that European parties were challenging the political hegemony of national states, American “government officials” were challenging the hegemony of political parties (Skowronek 1982, pp. 12, 41). More recently, Slez & Martin (2007) analyze the origins of the American party system in the first place, using multidimensional scaling techniques to show how the alliances that would come to characterize the first American party system emerged through the timing and

sequencing of votes at that seminal state-building event, the Constitutional Convention of 1787. As in McLean's analysis, interests are emergent, not given: Delegations interpreted their interests in a path-dependent manner depending on "how previous questions were decided," such that alignments emerged as a result of the "interdependent moves of different players" over time (Slez & Martin 2007, p. 43).

Another example of time-sensitive analysis dealing with parties and state building is Riley & Desai's (2007) macrosociological analysis of "passive revolutions," in which they track political processes from movements, to parties, to states in Italy and India. They note that a "weak old regime" and a "period of working class and peasant insurgency" in both countries prompted elites to support a mass party that sought to modernize the country "while preserving the basic distribution of property and much of the preexisting state" (Riley & Desai 2007, pp. 838–39). Given this backdrop, why did Italy follow a path of violent fascism via the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (PNF), whereas India turned to the nonviolent, antifascist Congress Party? The difference, Riley & Desai argue, can be explained in part by the "timing of the threat from the left relative to national unification": In unified Italy, on the one hand, a turn to fascism occurred due to "mobilization from below," fueled by a dense web of cooperatives and mutual aid societies; during India's struggle for nationhood, on the other hand, British colonialism gave Indian elites in the Congress Party a target against which to mobilize and thus a means to co-opt popular unrest (Riley 2005, pp. 298–301; Riley & Desai 2007, pp. 839–40).

Other work moves in a different direction—from state, to movement, to party—showing how the structure of political institutions shapes social movements, whose agendas are then incorporated into those of national parties. In Martin's (2008) analysis of how tax policy leapt out of relative obscurity to become a recurring flash point of partisan contention in the United States, the interplay of movements and the state is central. Martin shows, first, that administrative attempts to modernize tax collection in the

1960s and 1970s generated a variety of antitax movements in states all across the country, but the reforms they championed spanned the ideological spectrum and had not yet found a regular home in either party. A crucial turning point came with the passage of California's Proposition 13 in 1978, which gave the most conservative approach to tax relief (i.e., property tax limitation) the imprimatur of popular legitimacy and captured the imagination of key Republicans. Among them was Ronald Reagan, who embraced a new antitax philosophy when it became clear that Proposition 13 had not immediately destroyed California's public finances.

Other policy-oriented work highlights the party-state nexus with a focus on explaining policy outcomes. In his account of race-based affirmative action in employment, Chen (2007, 2009) finds, among other things, that Republican control of "veto points" in the states and Republican control over the balance of power in Congress contributed to the slow spread of strong fair employment practice laws, thereby creating a regulatory vacuum that led (ironically) to the advent of affirmative action. Amenta & Halfmann (2000), meanwhile, call for an "institutional politics theory" of social policy places, refreshing emphasis on party organization to understand state-level variation in the regulation and operation of the Works Progress Administration during the New Deal. Reminiscent of power-resources research, they find evidence that the patronage-oriented parties and left-party regimes in state politics are correlated with political support for more generous wage policies and levels (Amenta & Halfmann 2000). Last but not least, Halfmann's (2011) comparative analysis of abortion politics and policy in Britain, Canada, and the United States finds that abortion became a main object of contention in party politics after the "long 1960s" because "American parties were more open to new movements than parties in [the two] other countries" (Halfmann 2011, p. 132). This difference, in turn, was an effect of party organization, stemming from the fact that decisions about candidate nominations, party leadership, and



party platforms are all governed by rules that admit to a higher degree of input from below in the United States compared with Britain or Canada.

Looking beyond North America and Britain, in the 1990s a resurgent literature on parties by European political comparativists raised the question of Western European parties' cartelization, advancing a Michelsian-Weberian argument that parties have abandoned civil society ties by professionalizing, bureaucratizing, and converging with states: By invading and marrying themselves to the state via new rules and financial practices, Western parties have "cartelized," growing increasingly disconnected from civil society and exhibiting "a pattern of interparty collusion" (Mair 1997 [2004], p. 108; Katz & Mair 2009). Citing a valuable collection of otherwise scattered data on parties' internal organization, memberships, and financial dependencies (focusing especially on state-based, rather than member-based, funding—or subvention), European comparativists argue that cartelization is widespread and has fostered a professionalized, capital-intensive politics that is contained and managed by party elites (Katz & Mair 1995, 2009; Mair 1997 [2004]; Bartolini & Mair 2001; Biezen & Kopecky 2007). A related literature on depoliticization identifies a general downgrading of politics itself, where good governance amounts to some combination of legal, interest-group, and expert rule with minimal interference by political elites (Burnham 2001; Mair 2006, 2008).

The revival of Weberian themes of parties' ties to states (and through those ties, parties' policy effects) is matched by a revival of distinctively Marxian emphases on how parties act back on society—in particular, the hard Gramscian stance that parties actively articulate politically consequential social groups, and not vice versa. Leading figures are Cedric De Leon, Manali Desai, and Cihan Tuğal, who draw from Gramsci, Althusser, and Laclau to emphasize "the process through which *party practices naturalize class, ethnic, and racial formations as a basis of social division by integrat-*

*ing disparate interests and identities into coherent sociopolitical blocs*" (De Leon et al. 2009, pp. 194–95).

Analyses of political development in Turkey, the United States, and India put the articulation perspective to work (for a comparison of class politics in the United States and Canada along these lines, see Eidlin 2012). Tuğal's (2007) study of contemporary Turkish politics—based on multisite ethnography of Sultanbeyli, a poor, conservative suburb on the eastern edge of metropolitan Istanbul—tracks how the activities and strategies of the center-right Turkish Justice and Development Party fostered the rise of a partially secularized form of "moderate Islamism" by appropriating "Islamist strategies" and putting them to the "use of non-Islamist causes" (Tuğal 2007, p. 8). De Leon's (2008) novel analysis of the American Civil War also situates party-led articulation as a leading cause of political transformations. Engaging with Moore's (1966) account of the Civil War as a bourgeois revolution ("no bourgeoisie, no democracy"), De Leon investigates historical alignments between antebellum Midwestern farmers and segments of the working class with formerly Whig-sympathetic, anti-Southern, urban industrial elites behind the Republican Party. De Leon argues that a splintering of the party system combined with the Republican Party's critique of "dependency under slavery" and thereby radically diminished "once potent class distinctions that placed industrialists, financiers, and their sweated hirelings at odds with farmers and independent artisans" (De Leon 2008, p. 66). Republicans were thus able to form a mass coalition in support of liberal capitalist democracy between 1854 and 1857, eventually leading to the American Civil War and the overthrow of Southern planters. Last but not least, Desai's (2002, 2003, 2007) comparative work on Kerala and West Bengal, India, places parties and their "relative autonomy" at the center of welfare state development, explaining Kerala's more extensive social and antipoverty policies in terms of left parties' "strategies and tactics." The left party



in West Bengal, which lacked a coherent bloc of leaders with experience in organizing mass movements, “came to power later, with leaders who were far more isolated from popular movements,” leading it to “focus first on securing political power and less on social reform” (Desai 2003, p. 170). Kerala’s left party leadership, forged in the crucible of anticaste movements earlier in the century, embraced the nationalist Congress Party as early as 1934, enabling it to attain power earlier on a tide of popular support and putting it in a stronger position to concentrate on implementing a social program rather than winning reelection.

### Reviving a Notion of Parties as Social, Cultural, and Institutional Forces

Recent works in the articulation school do more than counter unidirectional notions of parties as expressions of social groups; parties here are key agents in the production of shared meanings and the construction of stable institutions. Beyond the works just described, this is also clear in De Leon’s (2010) analysis of discourse as a means to the legitimization of mass party competition in the United States, arguing that by mobilizing a “martial discourse” after 1824, American parties proactively legitimated their own existence by endowing local party leaders with a symbolic, militaristic role (as “sentinels” or “guardians”), such that local elites “could carve out an identity for themselves in the emerging mass party system” (De Leon 2010, pp. 136–138). Others echo the articulation school’s concerns with how parties produce shared political meaning, but they draw from pragmatism and institutionalist lines of thought. Alexander (2004, 2010), for instance, mobilizes Goffman (among many others) in his call for “cultural pragmatics,” arguing for a view of party politics as “a stream of decision and meaning-making” (Alexander 2010, p. 410). Here parties are stage setters in struggles for “performative success,” in which “cultural scripts achieve verisimilitude through effective *mise-en-scène*” (Alexander 2004, p. 527). Jansen (2007), meanwhile, introduces yet another

theoretical angle, drawing from institutionalist notions of path dependence to add a distinctively time-sensitive dimension to meaning-making processes: Jansen uses a processual model of memory work (“path-dependent memory work”) to conceptualize “how movements use . . . historical symbolism to achieve political ends” in an analysis that focuses partly on movement-party-state ties (Jansen 2007, p. 956). These latter works are notable, in particular, for their theoretically innovative ways of emphasizing party politics as a deeply cultural, symbolic, and performative set of processes that shape and structure political communication.

Finally, intersecting literatures on neoliberalism, populism, and neopopulism—notable for their interdisciplinarity and broad geographical range—match an emergent sensitivity to parties and the production of shared meanings with attention to their destabilization and reorganization (Weyland 1996, 2003; Mudge 2008, 2011; Comaroff 2011).<sup>17</sup> Recalling Alexander’s interest in party politics as dramaturgy, scholarship on (neo)populism draws attention to how large-scale economic and political transformations (neoliberalism, European integration) have generated democratic exclusion and alienation; altered the strategies of established parties, giving rise to right-wing movement-parties; and produced a new sort of political theater in the process (Betz 1994, Holmes 2000, Rydgren 2007, Berezin 2009, Comaroff 2011). Comaroff (2011), for instance, argues that “late liberalism” has produced a new, diversionary politics that is organized around profit, theater, and narcissism, encouraging party “leaders and followers to bypass the more cumbersome apparatus of democratic consultation and participatory governance” in favor of theatrical performances through mass media, leading

<sup>17</sup>This is a large set of literatures, and so by necessity we discuss it in rather broad terms here. See Jansen (2011) for a useful review of the literature on populism and neopopulism; Mudge (2008) reviews neoliberalism literatures in a particularly party-focused way (cf. Wacquant 2012). Neoliberalism has also been a central emphasis of the articulation school (e.g., Desai 2011; Tuğal 2009, 2012).

to a form of populism that offers little hope for sustained, critical political engagement (Comaroff 2011, p. 105; on populism, cf. Jansen 2011). Whereas some strands of this scholarship invoke Weberian themes of parties as bases of charismatic leadership, particularly on the right, others emphasize the professionalization and closure of mainstream parties with emphasis on the left: Bourdieu, for instance, emphasizes the neoliberal period as one of the professionalization of politics to an extreme, in which mainstream parties produce “issues, programmes, analyses, commentaries, concepts and events” for citizens who are “reduced to the status of ‘consumers’” and thus politically dispossessed (Bourdieu 1991, p. 172; see also Bourdieu 2002 [2008]). Focusing on language as the coin of the political realm, Bourdieu argues that dispossession is particularly problematic for parties of the left: The further removed a party politician is from the positions of those represented—say, a poor community whose members do not speak the qualified language of professional politics—the less their representative claims are reconcilable with the interests of the politician. Mudge (2008) also calls attention to parties of the left—particularly given the rise of what she identifies as a late-twentieth-century neoliberal politics built on a market-centric common sense that is particularly anathema to the left’s historical commitments.

## OPENINGS FOR A RENEWED SOCIOLOGY OF PARTIES

Reclaiming the breadth of the classical traditions and, in more than a few ways, moving beyond it, the renewed sociology of parties points in exciting new directions. In this section we focus, in particular, on six lines of inquiry that a continued renewal of the sociology of parties might fruitfully pursue: looking inside parties; placing parties in politics; explaining intraparty change and interparty change; identifying party effects; embedding parties in time; and considering the importance of performance, symbolism, and meaning making in party politics. The first four are well anchored in classical

traditions—although we suggest that looking inside parties, in particular, deserves greater attention. The last two, meanwhile, go beyond the classical traditions, marking out important areas for new investigations within what we hope will be the continuing reclamation of the party as a full-fledged sociological object.

A first line of inquiry, which is arguably a prerequisite for all others, involves looking inside parties more closely. This has perhaps received the least attention in the renewed sociology of parties. Although party organization was a central consideration of the classical sociology of parties, the new sociology of parties has not engaged systematically with organizational questions. Amenta (1998), Schwartz (2006), Halfmann (2011), and European comparativists associated with the “cartel party thesis” (among others) do, however, point in useful directions on this count. How are parties organized and how are authority and power allocated within them? Are parties top-down organizations, more integrated with states than with civil society, structured to preserve and enhance the discretion of leaders and elites; or are parties bottom-up organizations (“movement parties,” to borrow Schwartz’s term) that admit to significant influence from activists and the grassroots? What accounts for any observable variation? How are party leaders and activists selected and recruited? How much discipline, solidarity, and coordination does a party exhibit, and how is it related to the way it is organized? How do parties raise money and spend it? How are different aspects of party organization related to the degree of “relative autonomy” (Desai 2002) that parties enjoy from state and society? Many of these topics remained largely within the purview of political scientists (e.g., Mayhew 1986; Shefter 1994; Galvin 2010, 2012; Hacker & Pierson 2010), who have made considerable headway. Yet it seems to us that present-day students of parties have a formidable range of tools for pursuing such questions, including network analysis, political ethnography, field and institutional theories, and the concepts and methods of organizational sociology. These tools have, to

date, been more often trained on phenomena around parties than on parties themselves.

A second area of inquiry might aim to place parties in politics—to borrow and repurpose Mayhew's expression. How are parties embedded in dynamic political interrelationships with state and society? Where do parties fit into the larger political system? What seems especially promising is the move toward analytical granularity that many recent studies exhibit, treating both state and society—and indeed parties themselves—as differentiated entities that interact over time in complex ways (cf. De Leon 2014). This type of approach is exemplified, for instance, in Martin's (2008) analysis of how taxes became a flashpoint of partisan politics—an analysis that carves out a role for state and local tax administration, antitax movements, state-level policy-making institutions, and public opinion. Placing parties in politics will enable sociologists to generate more compelling evidence that parties matter by distinguishing their influence from that of other individual and collective political actors—or, alternatively, generating more compelling evidence that parties matter precisely because their boundaries overlap with other organizations, groups, and institutions. In a Weberian mode, the roles of party-based professionals—consultants, pollsters, experts, and advisers—merit particular attention (Weber 1919 [1958]; Bourdieu 1991, 2002 [2008]; for a notable recent work along these lines, see Laurison 2013), taking parties as sites of “alliances and points of contact” between professional and political struggles and tracking them both within and across national boundaries (Abbott 2005, p. 253).

A third line of inquiry focuses on parties as causal effects, namely, explaining intraparty change and interparty change. Classical questions about party formation should remain high on this agenda, but other questions are important as well. Why do the policy commitments of parties—evident in their party platforms—shift over time or remain the same? What explains the emergence, nature, intensification, or decline of intraparty factionalization? How does

factionalization relate to both types of party change? What accounts for patterns of change and continuity in the composition of party supporters, at the level of interest groups as well as of ordinary voters? What explains shifts in the observable pattern of interparty conflict and competition? These questions have again been treated largely by sociologically minded political scientists (e.g., Burnham 1970, Kitschelt 1994, Karol 2009, DiSalvo 2012) and have long been a focus in European comparative politics (Budge et al. 2001, Klingemann et al. 2006), but they merit attention from political sociologists as well. One especially intriguing possibility is the not yet fully tapped opportunity to explore the preferences, strategies, and political capacities of the affluent and wealthy, as well as various segments of organized business, tracing their connections with different party factions and in turn illuminating their impact on both intraparty and interparty change.

A fourth line of inquiry centers on assessing what parties do: What do parties, and factions within them, set out to pursue, why, and to what effect? The critical question here is less whether parties matter—which we take as a given in democratic contexts—than how and why parties matter. Under what conditions do they largely mediate between more fundamental social or economic forces and political outcomes? Under what conditions do parties serve as channels through which elites, the mass public, or particular group-based constituencies achieve their preferences and exert their will? Under what conditions do parties exert their own, independent influence?

One key to exploring this set of questions is fully grappling with the role of public opinion (e.g., Burstein 2010), which is only unevenly incorporated into the sociological literature on parties (Manza & Brooks 2012; but see Baldassarri & Bearman 2007 and Baldassarri & Gelman 2008); these concerns should, of course, deal with public opinion as “public attitudes—in their full complexity, across contexts, and over time,” maintaining an awareness of how parties themselves drive polling technologies, as well as their representational

consequences (Manza & Brooks 2012, p. 106; cf. Bourdieu 2002 [2008]). Another key is devoting further thought to the role of partisan elites. Scholars as strikingly diverse in their intellectual commitments as De Leon et al. (2009) and Carmines & Stimson (1989) carve out a central place in their analysis for partisan elites, which are seen as important, top-down sources of political change. This view contrasts with the view of Manza & Brooks (1999), Lee (2002), Karol (2009), and Schickler (Feinstein & Schickler 2008; Schickler et al. 2010), who stress the limits or constraints that partisan elites face, arguing for the importance of bottom-up forces such as social movements or interest groups. At the same time, recent work that eschews a bottom-up versus top-down dichotomy altogether—linking Schwartz’s call for a network perspective on the party with classical sociological emphases on their cleavage bases, showcasing the potential of network analysis in the process (e.g., Parigi & Sartori 2014)—presents the possibility of a new, more synthetic perspective.

A fifth area of inquiry may be seen as part of a broader effort to embed “politics in time” (Pierson 2004). Temporal processes—and specifically ideas about the importance of sequencing—were put to good analytical use in the modern sociology of parties (e.g., Lipset & Rokkan 1967) and now take center stage in the renewed scholarship as well (e.g., Baldassarri & Bearman 2007, Riley & Desai 2007, Slez & Martin 2007, Baldassarri & Gelman 2008, Baldassarri 2011). We think it is enormously promising for political sociologists to continue thinking about “parties in time” as they explore how parties fit into the analysis of performative practices in party politics, political identity formation, the decline and transformation of parties, and a range of other political outcomes.

Sixth and finally, there is a turn toward meaning making that suggests promising possibilities for a distinctively practice-oriented, cultural sociology of parties. Pursued in particular by the articulation school and in recent work on neoliberalism and populism, these concerns

remain largely immanent in the renewed sociology of parties. How do political parties and cultural production intersect, and how do these intersections shape civic culture, political engagement or alienation, or how voters relate to particular parties or candidates? How do parties produce, shape, and reshape shared meanings over time, how do they use symbols and cultural products to achieve political ends, and how do macrohistorical and macroeconomic conditions shape these processes? An attentiveness to the dramaturgical, symbolic, emotive, and performative aspects of party politics is key to addressing these sorts of questions. Similarly important is the analytical incorporation of media structures, which remain at best peripheral concerns in the sociology of parties both old and new, despite the centrality of media and communication technologies in both established party politics and in recent movements such as Occupy and the Arab Spring. The scholarship on neoliberalism and (neo)populism also offers interesting ways of linking macro-level structural change (neoliberal deregulatory processes, globalization, European political and economic integration) to both the organization and strategies of parties and party leadership and the roles of practice, symbolism, and emotion in party politics.

On a final note that cross-cuts all the lines of inquiry just discussed, we highlight that the renewed sociology of parties’ epistemological, analytical, and conceptual advances is complemented by a deeply historical and broadly international bent. This is only right, but it calls for careful attention to the specification of historical and contextual scope conditions in order to avoid false universals and nonmutually exclusive claims—a tendency to which the study of parties has succumbed in the past. If, in some cases and time periods, parties have emerged because of the self-interested behaviors of politicians, it need not be true that they never emerge because of organized policy demanders; parties can be primarily expressions of existing cleavages in some cases and times and actively forge political blocs in others; they may also tend toward power seeking over

principle under certain historical and organizational conditions but not others. As classical thinkers recognized, parties are not stable or developmentally unidirectional; they are fraught with tensions, power struggles, and conflicting orientations. Careful theory building focused on the explicit identification of scope conditions is thus paramount, particularly as party scholarship continues to extend

its purview across the globe and back in time.

The lines of inquiry and analytical strategies we have suggested are far from exhaustive, but we argue that they should be pursued if sociologists wish to fully reengage with the broad-ranging intuitions and insights that their disciplinary forebearers introduced into the study of parties nearly a century ago.

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