

On political parties

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Abstract

Political parties are unpopular in many democracies, prompting calls to weaken or even to do away with them. Recent literature, rejecting principal-agent models of representation, has defended new normative accounts of what parties should do by defending “partisanship,” variously understood. Missing from this literature is sufficient attention to the full implications of abandoning principal-agent accounts and to the best ways of structuring electoral competition to get partisan parties to govern in the public interest. Rather than ask how much authority, and under what conditions, voters should cede to politicians, I attend first to the natural monopoly character of power and then ask how best to manage it both democratically and in the public interest. This leads to a distinctive defense of majoritarian democracy with large strong parties incentivized to bundle issues, rather than decentralized decision-making that empowers intense minorities and makes it harder to hold governments accountable over time.

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Political parties are unpopular across the democratic world. Denounced as out of touch with voters, polarized sources of gridlock, gripped by money and special interests, or helpless in the face of populist demagogues, parties are often derided as incapable of governing in the public interest. The widespread ennui is reflected in low turnout in many elections, fragmenting parties, and growing support for anti-system causes and candidates. Calls for change are endemic and sometimes acted on, as when legislative paralysis prompts efforts to strengthen executive power. But strengthening presidential authority also means weakening parties in the legislature. Is that a good thing? Such questions prompt more basic ones: what are political parties, and what role should they play in democratic politics? These are my subjects here.

Calling for accounts of what parties are and should be is easier than delivering them. Even the briefest survey reveals great variety. Some parties are highly centralized and tightly controlled from above. Others are decentralized, with vital decisions reserved for annual conventions and mass memberships. Unions, business groups, funders, and other entities play different roles—sometimes formal, sometimes informal. If there is any sustainable generalization, it is that party governance is endemically contested with leaders, officials, backbenchers, would-be candidates, and members perpetually second-guessing one another and vying for influence. No status-quo is long immune from challenge.

Debates about what parties should be are often shaped by concerns about the gulf between voters and the politicians. Direct participation might have been viable in small city-states and principalities, but it is not scalable to populations in the tens and hundreds of millions, where coordination problems and other challenges limit widespread participation in public decision-making. In the modern democratic world this makes representative government all but

inevitable. People authorize politicians to act in their stead, and the challenges involve preventing politicians from abusing the power voters give them. Much writing about electoral politics, what is said to be wrong with it, and what would address the inadequacies is viewed—explicitly or implicitly—through this principal-agent lens.¹

Perhaps voters must cede authority to representatives, but why must they be organized into parties? The imperative to assemble sustainable coalitions when majorities, and sometimes supermajorities, are needed to enact or block legislation makes parties indispensable. Just as voters need representatives in order to be efficacious, representatives need parties for the same reason. But parties are both a help and a hinderance to voters. They help by providing them with information about politicians and by increasing the likelihood that the politicians they elect will be effective in the legislature. But parties hinder by creating additional principal-agent relationships inside legislative parties and between voters and parties. Legislators might collude with one another to the detriment of voters. When back benchers delegate authority to party leaders to enhance their effectiveness, this can also work to the detriment of voters when the leaders develop agendas that voters—and sometimes even their representatives—oppose. These challenges are as old as the American republic. In 1824, when none of four contending candidates won an Electoral College majority, Congress picked John Quincy Adams over Andrew Jackson despite the latter having the most popular and Electoral College votes. Jackson mobilized the resulting voter anger to create the new Democratic Party that he led to victory four years later, spawning America's two-party system.

Disjunctions between voters and party leaders are seldom that dramatic, but voters often denounce parties as run by unaccountable elites motivated by their own agendas. Frequent calls for greater grass roots control of decisions, platforms, leadership and candidate selection all

reflect this concern. Likewise with efforts to enhance direct citizens participation via referenda, ballot initiatives, deliberative polls, and new forms of internet democracy. The goal is either to enhance voters' control over politicians, or to liberate voters from the principal-agent relationship entirely enabling them to reclaim the capacity act for themselves. In short, parties might help voters monitor representatives, but who monitors the monitors? Much recent dissatisfaction with parties emanates from the difficulties of doing that effectively.

Here I argue for a different view of the relations among voters, representatives, and parties, one that rejects principal-agent thinking entirely. Rather than start by asking how much authority, and under what conditions, voters should delegate, my point of departure is to attend first to the nature of power relations and then ask how best to manage them both democratically and in the public interest. Taking power relations rather than delegation as the point of departure offers two advantages. It is, first, more accurate historically in that no democracy was ever created through acts of delegation envisaged in the principal-agent story. Rather, power was first centralized in embryonic national states.² Demands for democracy came later, as those subjected to that newly centralized power pushed back. Some might invoke the U.S as an exception, but that ignores the imposition of a new order on propertyless white men, women, slaves, and African and Native Americans—all of whom would later demand democratic rights. Political parties were vital to the vindication of those demands.

My alternative point of departure is also more appealing analytically because it conditions arguments about governance on the nature of power relations, and in particular on recognizing that power is a natural monopoly. This matters not only by shaping the possibilities for managing power relations in the public interest, but also for the justification of majority rule that lies at the heart of democracy's appeal. This connection to democracy is ironic because it

was the seventeenth-century social contract theorists who first discerned the link between the natural monopoly character of power and majority rule, yet they are frequently seen as classic proponents of principal-agent views of politics with little, if anything, to say that is relevant to democratic theory. But we will see that this view misses their insights. Hobbes held that the majority does and should prevail when a new state is founded by representatives, as it does when the government is a representative assembly. Locke went further, grounding all political legitimacy in majority rule. Yet neither posited principal-agent relations between the people and their rulers.

Many who agree that parties should govern democratically in the public interest nonetheless disagree about how to structure politics to produce that result. On one predominant view good government results when contending parties are forced to compromise, either by negotiating coalitions in multiparty systems or by legislating across the aisle in two-party systems which, like the American one, have been designed to make unilateral government by one party difficult. Here, too, I defend a minority view: that good democratic government is fostered by competition between large parties with strong incentives to run on programs that will best serve most voters, implement those programs as governments, and then be held to account at the next election. Rather than act as voters' delegates or respond to their preferences, governments try to govern in their interests—hoping to be rewarded accordingly.

I begin by detaching the idea of majority rule that is essential to democratic politics from all principal-agent thinking. But unlike critics of principal-agent views who invoke deliberation and judgment,³ compromise,⁴ or theories of public reason⁵ and public justification⁶ to constrain parties to govern in the public interest, my focus is on the dynamics of power relations and electoral competition. Drawing on undernoticed logic first explored by Hobbes and Locke, I

argue that collective action is ubiquitous to human interaction and that power is a natural monopoly best whose exercise is best understood as authorized by majority rule. In part II I contend that interest-based models of retrospective voting capture the relations between politicians and voters better than preference-based models that trade on principal-agent thinking, however implicitly. I also take up the role of parties in this process, arguing that the American founders were right to treat them as repositories of partisan interests, but wrong to see them merely as such—or at least not necessarily so. The challenge, I contend, is to structure political competition so that partisan parties will govern in the public interest as much as possible.

How best to do this is taken up in the rest of the paper. In part III I make the case that two-party competition will more likely achieve this than multi-party competition; in part IV that this is illustrated by the ways in which parties bundle issues into electoral platforms; and in part V that the partisan character of parties limits the Tweedledee-Tweedledum problem—whereby two parties aiming at the median voter will offer the same policies—in healthy ways. I buttress this case in part VI by reference to strengths and limitations of Joseph Schumpeter’s model of political competition. His great contribution was to portray voters as consumers of policies rather than principals who delegate authority to politicians. But his analogy between parties and firms is problematic because parties cannot be constrained to govern in the public interest if they are as answerable to their members in the way that firms are answerable to their shareholders.

If parties should not be governed by their members, the question arises who should govern them? This question is taken up in part VII. There I argue that parties are most likely to engage in programmatic competition geared to the public interest if leaders have great authority in the short term, but over time back benchers choose front benchers who choose back benchers who choose front benchers—sustaining party identities into the future. The system rests on a

Ulysses-and-the-Sirens logic by which representatives allow leaders to discipline them so as to forgo temptations that undermine programmatic competition. This dynamic model of governance is the best bet to get parties to govern in voters' interests, fulfilling democracy's promise.

I. Reject principal-agent thinking root and branch

Democracy is often portrayed, as Lincoln famously did at Gettysburg, as government not only of and for the people, but also by them. Principal-agent views seem normatively appealing because they embody this idea that democracy is at bottom about the people ruling themselves. The people are the principals, and they delegate authority to politicians as their agents. But how can this work for millions of people who hold different values, interests, and agendas?

The early social contract theorists can help here. Even though they had little to say about democracy, they thought about representative institutions and majority rule by reference to a very different logic than that of delegation. They rejected principal-agent thinking because “the people” cannot literally rule themselves, but they nonetheless saw majority rule as foundational to representative government. Hobbes and Locke both regarded the people as authors of the commonwealth, but neither conceived of the sovereign as an agent whose job was somehow to track, represent, or embody the peoples' preferences. Consent of the people was the font of political legitimacy, but the relevant agreement was not between them and the government. Rather, it was among the people— “every one with every one” as Hobbes said—to obey the government so long as it governs in their interests.⁷ Locke was unequivocal in declaring compliance to be universally binding unless one is willing to risk outright revolution, hoping that others agree. Without endorsing a right to resist, Hobbes also conditioned compliance on the government's doing what he took to be its job: protecting them. That is why he counseled Charles II's Royalist supporters to swear allegiance to Parliament during the Engagement

Controversy once Charles—who had fled to Europe—could no longer safeguard them or their property.⁸

Both theorists saw that majority rule offers a way of reconciling the tension between the monopoly character of power and the irreducible diversity of interests and opinions. Having lived through a civil war, they understood that unless power is exercised as a monopoly destabilizing conflict is a permanent possibility. But if peoples' desires and interests differ, then any decision will frustrate some of them. The majority will likely prevail as an empirical matter because they will be more powerful, but it also makes normative sense. As Locke put it, "by barely agreeing to unite into one political society," each person "puts himself under an obligation, to every one of that society, to submit to the determination of the majority."⁹ The reason? In diverse societies, someone must prevail. Even if everyone could be consulted, "the contrariety of interests which unavoidably happen in all collections of men" would render "the mighty Leviathan of a shorter duration, than the feeblest creatures, and not let it outlast the day it was born in." That is why actual assemblies typically deploy majority rule. "The act of the majority passes for the act of the whole, and of course determines, as having, by the law of nature and reason, the power of the whole." Hobbes also insisted that if people inaugurate a commonwealth by selecting representatives, they are bound by "the major part." He elaborates: "Because the major part hath by consenting voices declared a Sovereign, he that dissented must now consent with the rest...or else justly be destroyed by the rest." Like Locke, he rejected unanimity rule as impractical because it turns everyone into a veto player. "If the Representative consist of many men, the voice of the greater number, must be considered the voice of them all."¹⁰

Contemporary writers in this tradition sometimes pay lip service to power's monopoly character, but they often misconstrue its implications for political accountability. Rather than reason from the nature of power to arguments about how best to render its exercise legitimate, their point of departure is the—sometimes tacit—assumption that unauthorized collective decisions are illegitimate. Among its other defects, this cedes the conceptual high ground to democracy's libertarian critics who—writing in Arrow's wake—are often quick to assert that collective decisions should be kept to a minimum because “the people” cannot authorize them.¹¹ For Nozick this limits legitimate collective action to what is needed to maintain the power monopoly: “the night watchman state of classical liberal theory.”¹² For everything else, anyone may veto collective action. Buchanan and Tullock are less draconian, permitting departures from unanimity rule only when the costs to each person of authorizing those departures exceed those of living with adverse outcomes.¹³ Here we see the principal-agent model doing its work: unauthorized collective actions are not legitimate. Because there is no coherent way for “the people” to consent to them, the authorizing authority reverts to each individual—turning her into a veto player. Whereas for Hobbes and Locke the monopoly character of power implies that the people authorize the majority, proponents of principal-agent views struggle to authorize anything because “the people” are not—and never can be—univocal about what they want.

It is better to think about accountability without going down the principal-agent path. After all, the system of rights that libertarians prefer—to private property and state enforcement of contracts—is itself a collective action regime that imposes costs on those who prefer an alternative.¹⁴ Holding changes to the status quo hostage to unanimity rule entrenches it.¹⁵ The earlier theorists would have been untroubled by the libertarian critique, because their allegiance to majority rule had nothing to do with amalgamating preferences into general wills or social

welfare functions. It was rooted instead in managing the power monopoly in ways that prevent people from hamstringing governments. “It is the unity of the Representer, not the Unity of the Represented,” as Hobbes said, that transforms a multitude into a governable people. “Because the Multitude naturally is not One, but Many; they cannot be understood for one; but many Authors, of every thing their Representative faith, or doth in their name.”¹⁶ Hobbes was an absolutist only in holding that the state’s monopoly on power must be supreme; otherwise, we get civil war. But a majority can be sufficient to authorize that monopoly and, if the government is a representative assembly, then it will operate by majority rule as an “absolute democracy.”¹⁷ Locke withholds absolute power from all governments, natural rights and the right to resist being infeasible. But he is unequivocal that legislative majorities can enact laws, including laws imposing taxes, because everyone who enjoys the state’s protection “should pay out of his estate his proportion for the maintenance of it.”¹⁸

II. Retrospective voting and partisan parties

Theories of retrospective voting can help incorporate these early modern insights into democratic theory. As Mansbridge notes, these theories abjure principal agent thinking entirely. Rather than see governments as trustees or bearers of mandates to implement voters’ preferences, they portray governments as implementing policies that they believe will serve the interests of most voters, so that majorities will supply ex post ratification by re-electing them.¹⁹ As Page puts it, the retrospective view “orients government responsiveness toward fundamental needs and values of the people rather than ephemeral or weakly held policy preferences.”²⁰ Parties in government do not ignore voter preferences; they govern in anticipation of those preferences. If they govern well and there are good outcomes for most people, they can anticipate satisfied

voters.²¹ If not, not. They are “Schumpeterian entrepreneurs, motivated to try to attract the votes of future customers”²² and even mobilize them.²³

The Schumpeterian view that Mansbridge invokes is often called minimalist and in some ways it is,²⁴ but it also rests on a useful view of parties as constrained to govern in the public interest. This differentiates it from the American founders’ conception of parties as nothing more than institutionalized factions, calling to mind instead the account sketched by Edmund Burke. Like Washington and Madison, Burke held that parties embody specific points of view, but he did not embrace their clientelist contention that they invariably pursue sectional interests to the detriment of others. For Burke a party is “a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed.”²⁵ This “particular principle” embodies a partisan point of view, but adherents argue that it will promote the public interest better than the alternatives. The challenge is to structure political competition in ways that increase the likelihood that this will be true.

But what is the public interest? At least since Schumpeter’s attack on Rousseau’s discussion of the general will and the common good,²⁶ it has been standard to shift the burden of persuasion to proponents. Theorists sometimes start from the economist’s conception of public goods, and some, such as Nozick and Riker, eschew more expansive conceptions.²⁷ But candidates and parties routinely promise many rivalrous and excludable goods: utilities, education, unemployment insurance, medical and retirement benefits, funds for research and the performing arts, and more. And even when strictly defined public goods are at stake, parties compete over how to allocate the externalities and other costs—as recent debates about infrastructure and environmental protection underscore. When a policy would manifestly deliver benefits or harms to particular groups, as with adopting or abolishing environmental regulations,

proponents invariably claim to be doing this in the public interest. They sense that voters discern a difference between shelling out clientelist payouts and governing for the country as a whole, and that they expect politicians to do the latter.

III. Partisan competition and the public interest

Much recent work on parties and representation has been focused on developing “partisanship” as a regulative ideal for thinking about how parties should govern.²⁸ I agree with these authors that parties should govern in the public interest, but my focus is on the electoral incentives that will constrain them to do so. Here America’s founders stumbled onto part of what I will argue is the right answer by opting for single member districts with plurality rule that, under the conditions that prevail in the United States, usually produces two large parties.²⁹ Two party systems are distinctive in generating winner-take-all, and therefore loser-lose-all, contests. This incentivizes parties to embrace platforms that will appeal to as many voters as possible, because that last vote your party fails to win might be the difference between winning and losing everything.³⁰ This need not be true in multiparty systems, where no party expects to form a government on its own. If a party’s prospects for expanding its electoral appeal are limited to a particular interest or identity group, satisfying an intensely motivated base will often trump other considerations. This can be an effective strategy if a small party is needed to form a government, as is often the case with Israel’s religious parties.

Some will wonder whether there is less to this distinction than meets the eye. The large catchall parties in two-party systems are themselves coalitions that would constitute distinct parties in multiparty systems.³¹ In one case the coalition forms before the election and in the other afterwards, but perhaps it doesn’t much matter. After all, the alternation between left-of-center social democratic policies and right-of-center pro-market policies since World War Two

has not obviously been that different in a multiparty system like Germany when compared with the United Kingdom's two-party system. They have comparable welfare states, universal health insurance, and environmental regulation. Indeed, if there is a difference, some scholarship suggests that multiparty systems are more responsive to median voters, and therefore more redistributive, than two-party systems.³²

There are good reasons to suspect, however, that the greater relative responsiveness of PR systems to median voters was an artifact of features of their economies that no longer hold: large industrial workforces, comprising the bulk of the working population, whose interests were well-represented by large left-of-center social democratic parties. The decline of industrial jobs and unionized workforces, accompanied by the splintering of traditional left parties, has led to a new reality in which diminished social democratic parties are protecting a shrinking industrial workforce less effectively, and other workers even less well—if at all. At the same time, splintering among right-of-center parties has produced ethnic and anti-immigrant parties with strong incentives to cater to narrow interests at the expense of most voters.³³

The winner-take-all dynamic in two-party competition creates stronger incentives for governments to pursue programmatic policies that will appeal to as broad as possible a swath of voters than do the post-election dynamics in multiparty systems. One reason is that those who create the big-tent parties in two-party systems have an interest in internalizing the costs of the deals that they make to sustain the party, whereas in multiparty systems the incentive is to externalize those costs when forming a coalition. If a pro-business party that values industrial peace joins with a pro-labor party that values protecting workers' wages, the incentive might be to externalize the costs on the general public in the form of higher prices or on the long-term unemployed in the form of fewer jobs.³⁴ Likewise, if an agrarian party joins a coalition, the deal

will likely include agricultural subsidies for which taxpayers must pay, and higher food prices for consumers.

In two-party systems, by contrast, angering taxpayers, workers, or consumers might be the difference between victory and defeat. Both parties therefore face incentives to avoid alienating them any more than necessary. That concern must be at the backs of their minds when party strategists negotiate compromises among traditional supporters and interest groups, lest the alienated voters turn out to be decisive in the election. Parties in two-party systems will seek to internalize the costs of the deals they must do as much as possible to minimize that risk, reducing incentives to dole out clientelist benefits to those in the coalition at the cost of those who are not.

Some will claim that this exaggerates the difference, because parties in multiparty systems must worry about alienating potential future supporters. But factoring in future considerations accentuates rather than mitigates the difference. In two party systems, both parties expect to be campaigning as the same parties into the indefinite future. They build and expect to preserve their identities as parties, anticipating that activists and voters will identify with and support them going forward.³⁵ Parties in two-party systems do sometimes disintegrate, as happened with the American Whigs during the 1850s and Britain's Liberals early in the twentieth century. This is neither typical nor expected, however. Marriages sometimes end in divorce, but people do not generally marry expecting to divorce. Likewise, parties in two party systems expect to stay together and try to plan for it. They are composed of what Bawn and Rosenbluth describe as "long coalitions," committed to sustaining their policy brands over time, as distinct from the "short coalitions" that we see in multiparty systems—where uncertainty about future partners makes this harder.³⁶ After being part of four consecutive grand coalitions, in 2021 Germany's SPD formed a government with the Greens and the libertarian Free

Democrats. Multiparty governments are more like hookups than marriages. Gratifying as they might be in the present, all bets are off for the future.

This difference becomes more pronounced as the number of parties grows, as has been happening in recent decades.³⁷ The greater the number of parties, the less predictable future alliances will be. They might be among ideologically adjacent parties, as is often true in Israel. But they might be among parties from multiple parts of the ideological spectrum as happened there and in Germany in 2021, or coalitions of even stranger bedfellows—as in Greece in 2015 when the radical left-wing SYRIZA allied to form a government with the far-right ANEL.³⁸ Parties in such coalitions will not likely identify with others in what Nancy Rosenblum describes as a common project of “regulated rivalry” geared to governing in the public interest.³⁹

An analogy from industrial arbitration can illuminate the different incentives at stake here. When management and unions cannot agree, sometimes they turn decisions over to arbitrators who listen to both sides, do independent fact-finding, and then determine a binding outcome. Expecting the eventual outcome to be a compromise, both sides have incentives to exaggerate their demands. But a different kind of “last-best-offer” arbitration changes the incentives: instead of designing a compromise, the arbitrator must pick one final offer. This dispels incentives to take extreme positions, lest they drive the arbitrator to opt for the other side. Unsurprisingly, last-best-offer arbitration produces less tactical posturing and more realistic offers.⁴⁰

Two-party competition is analogous to last-best-offer arbitration. Everyone knows that the party most voters pick will likely be the government. Accordingly, their incentive is to run on platforms that aim at the political middle. In multiparty systems, by contrast, where everyone knows that the election will be followed by negotiations, the ex-ante incentive is to create a

surplus that can be bargained away.⁴¹ This incentive becomes more powerful with identity-based or other single-issue parties that have few, if any, prospects for expanding their electoral support, so that the election is mainly about turning out core supporters. For them, every election is like a base election in the U.S., or, put differently, most supporters are more like primary voters in the diverse catch-all parties in two-party systems.⁴²

IV. Parties and programmatic bundling

Another distinctive feature of two-party competition is that in assembling platforms, leaders face powerful incentives to discount everything they propose by everything else they propose, an incentive that is weaker in multiparty competition—if it is present at all.⁴³ To see why, consider this: if Americans are asked whether they support abolishing the estate tax—paid only by the wealthiest two percent of taxpayers and more than half of it paid by the wealthiest half of one percent with estates in excess of \$20 million—substantial majorities say yes. However, when asked if they favor getting rid of the tax if this also means getting rid of prescription drug benefits for senior citizens, then majorities say no.⁴⁴ In the latter case, they are discounting their preference for the tax cut by their preference for retaining the prescription drug benefits.

That is what well-functioning political parties do on a larger scale. They bundle issues into platforms, discounting everything they propose by everything else they propose in ways that they believe—or at least hope—will appeal to the broadest possible cross-section of voters. Deciding on issues one-at-a-time sounds like it enhances in-depth exploration and democratic participation. Actually, it involves framing policy choices to obscure tradeoffs just as ballot initiatives and referenda do.⁴⁵ Former British Foreign Secretary David Miliband put the point succinctly when commenting on defenders of Jeremy Corbyn’s far left manifesto, who insisted

that the policies were popular despite Labour’s catastrophic defeat in December of 2019: “We were sold the category error of confusing opinion poll support for individual policies with support for the programme as a whole.”⁴⁶

Brexit was a dramatic illustration. When British voters chose to leave the European Union in June 2016 by a vote of 52 to 48 percent, substantial majorities of both the parliamentary Tory and Labour parties were pro-Remain.⁴⁷ This outcome might suggest that both parliamentary parties were out of step with the electorate, as anti-European activists insisted. But the evidence suggests otherwise. A year after the referendum, voters once again elected predominantly pro-Remain Labour and Tory delegations to Parliament. Bogdanor notes that 16 out of the 23-members that Theresa May’s 2017 cabinet had, like her, been Remain advocates a year earlier, and he estimates that overall the Parliament elected in 2017 was more strongly pro-Remain than the Parliament elected in 2015.⁴⁸ Even in December 2019, when Labour imploded and many Tories were traumatized by Boris Johnson’s Brexiteers, 373 of the 608 or 61 percent of MPs for whom data was available had been pro-Remain in 2016.⁴⁹

The reason is not that British voters were schizophrenic or muddled. More likely, it reflected the reality that when the MPs bundled their constituents’ preference for autonomy from Europe with other things they knew are important to those constituents—employment security, access to European goods and services at reasonable prices, and economic growth—they calculated that on balance remaining in the EU is better for their constituents. Considering Brexit in isolation from these other issues is as artificial as offering California voters a tax cut—as was done with Proposition 13 that limited property taxes to one percent of assessed value and was adopted by an almost two thirds majority in 1978—without reference to the downstream effects on the quality of schools, the viability of local government services, and other undiscussed costs.

Some will object that it is not literally the same electorate that votes on ballot propositions and referenda as those who turn out in elections to legislatures. This is often true. Anti-tax activists were more heavily represented in the Yes vote for Proposition 13 and pro-Brexit voters turned out at disproportionately high levels in the 2016 Referendum. In effect they are like members of a single-issue party who are empowered to impose externalities on the rest of the population. By unbundling issues, they create the illusion of greater voter control, but the effect of allowing serial single-issue votes undermines the possibility of programmatic policy.⁵⁰ It's like letting a child eat as much candy as he wants without thinking about the stomachache that is coming later or the complaining about it that others will have to put up with.

Single-issue activists invariably turn out in higher numbers for pet causes. As the Proposition 13 example underscores, they might also be better-resourced than their opponents. Proposition 13 was, after all, the start of the anti-tax crusade whose members were determined to “starve the beast” —cut the size of government by every possible means until it was small enough to be drowned in the bathtub, as Grover Norquist would subsequently put it. Norquist founded Americans for Tax Reform, the group that extracted pledges from Republican candidates for national office never to vote to raise taxes lest they face a primary challenge or the sorts of attacks that Newt Gingrich unleashed on George HW Bush for violating his 1988 “read my lips: no new taxes” pledge three years after he made it.⁵¹ And of course, starve the beast does not work anyway: faced with the political costs of cutting programs like Social Security and Medicare that their constituents want and need, Republicans, like Democrats, balk—borrowing the money instead.

Brexit also illustrated the leverage of activists in party governance. Tory MPs, most of whom had opposed leaving Europe, were ill-positioned to stop Brexit after the referendum

because the activists on the fringe of the party, who were overwhelmingly pro-Brexit, were disproportionately represented among Party members who participate in candidate selection. They could and did threaten to “deselect” MPs who tried to stop Brexit.⁵² No doubt this partly explains why, of the 129 Tories who had been pro-Remain in 2016 and were reelected in December 2019, all but five had reversed themselves.⁵³ A comparable dynamic played out in the Tory leadership election following Theresa May’s resignation in June 2019. The party’s 160,000 members who make the final selection were well to the right of the median Tory voter and strongly pro-Brexit, making it all but inevitable that only a staunch Brexiteer could win.⁵⁴

Brexit also underscores a different kind of incoherence that single-issue unbundling can produce. A large part of the reason that in 2019 no majority in Parliament would vote either for the leave proposal that Theresa May renegotiated with the Europeans or for any of the proposed alternatives to it was that there was no agreement on what those who wanted to leave Europe favored.⁵⁵ Hard-core Tory Brexiteers imagined a future in which, unshackled from stifling bureaucratic tentacles emanating from Brussels, Britain would reinvent itself as a hard-charging bastion of capitalism, a kind of Singapore on the Thames. On the left of the Labour Party, by contrast, the aspiration was for more robust state planning and social spending than can be achieved within the EU; a latter-day version of Socialism in One Country. It is scarcely surprising that MPs accountable to such divergent interests—not to mention the plethora of conflicting positions on the customs union, free movement of peoples, and the Irish backstop—could agree neither on Brexit nor on any alternative leave arrangement, and that there was also a blocking coalition against calling a second referendum.

The Brexit Referendum obscured these realities because voters did not have to confront what the alternative to remaining in Europe would be. Had they done so—had they in effect been

forced to bundle their preference of staying or leaving with their other policy preferences—voters would likely have wound up closer to their MPs and elected to remain in the EU. Their dissatisfactions over Europe would have been handled like they had been in the past—as part and parcel of electoral competition. When Margaret Thatcher, who had campaigned in 1983 on a manifesto that had recognized the EU as “by far our most important export market” from which withdrawal “would be a catastrophe for this country,” she nonetheless called for a renegotiation that would reduce Britain’s contribution to the EU budget and “shift the Community’s spending priorities away from agriculture and towards industrial, regional and other policies which help Britain more.”⁵⁶ She did this the following year, negotiating an annual UK rebate as compensation for the common agricultural and fisheries policies that worked to Britain’s disadvantage.⁵⁷ This did not give Eurosceptics everything they wanted, but it dealt with enough of their grievances to be compatible with Conservative victories in the next two general elections. In a like spirit, in 1986 Thatcher secured qualified majority voting instead of unanimity rule on tariffs and other barriers to trade in negotiations over the Single European Act. This curtailed the veto power of countries like France, Germany, and Italy that had locked in advantages for themselves before the UK joined.⁵⁸

The one exception to this approach before 2016 had been the referendum called by Harold Wilson in 1975, the first national referendum in British history, following Edward Heath’s taking the UK into the EU two years earlier. At that time the Tories were predominantly pro-European, whereas Labour was conflicted because the unions expected membership to diminish their power and limit the statist agenda favored by Labour left-wingers like Michael Foot and Tony Benn. Seeking to avoid conflict between them and Labour moderates like Roy Jenkins, Dennis Healy, and Shirley Williams, Wilson opted for a referendum to take the issue off

the table. The result, a two-to-one victory for Britain to remain in the EU, led Wilson to crow that "...it was a matter of some satisfaction that an issue which threatened several times over thirteen years to tear the Labour movement apart had been resolved fairly and finally ... all that had divided us in that great controversy was put behind us."⁵⁹

But Wilson was wrong. Five years later, left-wingers like Benn disavowed their earlier acceptance of the referendum result and began pushing for Labour to commit to taking Britain out of the EU without another referendum—one of the main issues that triggered the departure of leading Labour moderates to start a new social democratic party that would subsequently ally and then merge with the Liberals to form the Liberal Democrats.⁶⁰ The better medium term course for Labour would have been to hammer out a compromise position on Europe, perhaps by pressing for the EU to accede to the Council of Europe's Social Charter.⁶¹ This would have taken the battle to the Tories in what was then the mainstream of British political opinion. Instead, Foot led Labour to a catastrophic defeat in the 1983 general election (the Tories won a 188 seat majority) on a hard-left manifesto subsequently immortalized by Labour MP Gerald Kaufman as "the longest suicide note in history,"⁶² a record that would stand for thirty-six years—until Jeremy Corbyn's even longer and more radical program produced an even more devastating Labour wipeout.⁶³

Bogdanor defends Britain's 1975 referendum on the grounds that at the time all three major parties favored remaining in the EU, leaving voters who wanted to leave with no way to advance their cause through the electoral process.⁶⁴ Yet he never asks the obvious question: why did all three parliamentary parties favor remaining in the EU? The reason should by now be plain. When bundling continued EU membership with the other issues that mattered to their constituents, most MPs and party leaders concluded that leaving would not be part of a viable

electoral strategy to retain voter support over time. Referendums empower intense single-issue activists to impose their preferences on the rest of society without confronting the costs.

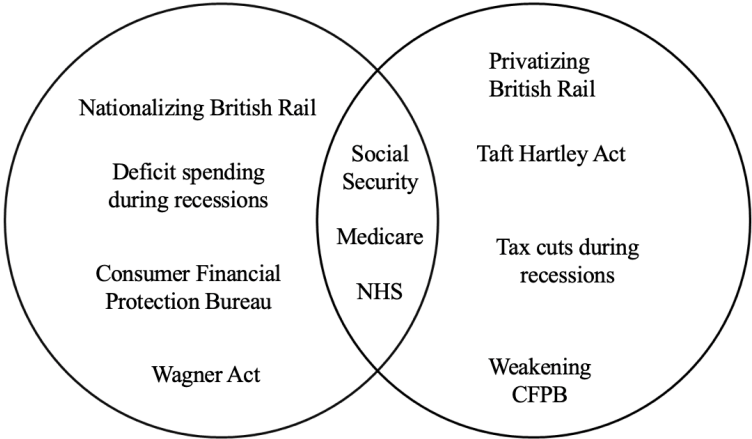
A final difference between two-party and multiparty systems concerns accountability. Accountability depends on parties that take clear positions in campaigns and then “muster the cohesion to enact those plans” as governments, giving voters “a clear and easy way to express or withhold their approval at the next election.”⁶⁵ In two party systems, the “loyal” opposition is a government-in-waiting; it criticizes the government and defends its alternative. In multiparty systems, by contrast, there is less accountability and no coherent alternative. There is less accountability because parties can deflect blame for failures to others in the coalition, or to compromises forced on them during coalition negotiations. There is no coherent alternative because no one knows who will be negotiating after the next election.⁶⁶ Multiparty systems are more representative at the electoral stage, but this comes at the price of accountable government.

V. Tweedledee and Tweedledum

Some worry that parties with strong incentives to aim at the electoral middle will offer the same policies, giving voters little meaningful choice.⁶⁷ That might be true in theory, but in fact partisan conceptions of the public interest operate differently in two-party systems. On some issues, both parties do offer substantially similar policies. The National Health Service in the UK, enacted by Clement Attlee’s postwar Labour government in 1946 and put into operation two years later, remains exceedingly popular with UK voters—topping the popularity of all British institutions seven decades later.⁶⁸ There are partisan disagreements over funding and coverage at the margins, but the institution is bulletproof politically. Even during the heyday of privatization under Thatcher, there was no question of abolishing the NHS.

But not everything is like that. British railways were nationalized in 1948, reprivatized in 1982, and might be renationalized by a future Labour government. Likewise, in the U.S., Social Security, enacted as part of the New Deal in 1935, and Medicare, part of the Great Society in 1965, are so popular that neither party can scrap them, but the parties diverge sharply on other matters. Democrats created strong protections for trade unions in the Wagner Act of 1935 that were sharply curtailed by Republicans twelve years later in the Taft-Hartley Act, adopted over President Truman’s veto. Democrats created the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau as part of the Dodd-Frank law in 2010, but Republicans subsequently eviscerated it. Left-of-center parties typically favor deficit spending during recessions, whereas right-of-center parties push tax cuts and fiscal discipline. Partisan conceptions of the public interest overlap where there is broad consensus, but they diverge on many issues.⁶⁹

Partisan conceptions of the public interest



These differences are the stuff of electoral competition. They partly reflect politicians’ beliefs about how the costs and benefits will affect their supporters, they partly reflect divergent ideological outlooks, and they partly reflect disagreement—and perhaps uncertainty—about

which policies are in fact most effective. Programmatic competition is competition over these questions, in which both parties try to convince as many voters as possible that their approach has been best in the past and will continue to be best in the future. The cost of appealing to smaller groups of core supporters or sectional interests will likely be defeat, loading the dice against clientelism. But the parties will be Tweedledee and Tweedledum only when there is widespread agreement about what is best.

VI. Schumpeter's limitations

A version of the Tweedledee and Tweedledum objection is sometimes leveled at Schumpeter's analogy between parties and firms, where it takes the form of objecting to the oligopolistic character of two-party political competition on the grounds that this promotes collusion.⁷⁰ This criticism misses the mark. Whereas both parties in two-party systems have incentives to run on platforms that can win as many voters as possible, we have seen that it is multiparty systems that generate incentives for coalition members to collude in ways that create negative externalities for others. The winner-take-all character of two-party competition militates against this.

There is, however, a different difficulty with Schumpeter's analogy. This does not have to do with likening voters to consumers, policies to goods and services, votes to profits, or political accountability to consumer sovereignty. These all enlighten up to a point, even if they grate on the sensibilities of participatory and deliberatively inclined democratic theorists. Rather, the difficulty is that there is no good political analogy for shareholders—no political equivalent of a residual claimant. This difference renders parties unusual, though not unique, organizational forms. Nonprofits like private American universities are illuminatingly similar. If Harvard sold all its assets and paid all its debts, it is unclear who would be entitled to what remained. This is

why university governance is inherently contentious, with faculty, students, administrators, trustees, alumni, and others all vying for authority and often objecting to what they see as the excessive influence of others.⁷¹ The governance of parties is contentious for the same reason.

Some will maintain that party members are the logical analog of a firm's shareholders, but that thinking—while superficially appealing—leads down an infelicitous path. To see what is at stake, consider the changes made in leadership election rules for Britain's Labour Party in 2015, based on a review led by Lord Collins. Previously, an "Electoral College" had given one third weight to the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) plus Labour members of the European Parliament, one third to individual party members, and one third to trade unions and affiliated societies. This system had in 1981 replaced the long-standing arrangement whereby the members of the PLP selected their leader. The Collins reforms destroyed any meaningful role for the PLP in leadership selection. In the new system, eligibility to stand required support from only 15 percent Labour MPs (30 MPs in 2015), after which all members were eligible to vote. The 306 Labour MPs plus 20 Labour members of the European Parliament were a drop in the bucket of the 550,000 Labour Members who were eligible electors in a contest that Jeremy Corbyn won with 251,419 (59.5 percent) of the votes cast.⁷²

Labour Party membership was open to anyone willing to pay the £3 fee. Unsurprisingly, membership is disproportionately attractive to activists who are well to the left, ideologically, of typical Labour voters and even further to the left of typical British voters. The result was that, notwithstanding efforts by Conservatives, Greens, and others to join solely for the purpose of influencing the outcome to Labour's disadvantage (members of other parties were eventually banned from participating), the PLP had a leader most of whose policies they could not support while retaining a realistic hope of re-election in their constituencies. Unsurprisingly, a year later,

following mass resignations from the shadow cabinet the PLP adopted a no-confidence resolution in Corbyn by 172 to 40, prompting another leadership contest. Labour's National Executive Committee raised the fee for voting eligibility to £25 in what turned out to be a vain attempt to limit the disproportionate influence of far-left activists, many of whom were middle class.⁷³ Corbyn was reelected by 62 percent, underscoring the reality that Labour had abandoned Britain's long tradition of strong, disciplined parties. In effect, as with the Tea Party's hostile takeover of the American Republicans via primaries and caucuses following Barack Obama's election in 2008, Labour was now controlled by activists on its ideological fringes. The extent of the damage was partly obscured in the 2017 general election because, even though it was Labour's third consecutive defeat, Theresa May blew a 20-point lead and her parliamentary majority—taking the spotlight off Labour's inability to craft a winning program under Corbyn's leadership.⁷⁴ Any doubt about that was scotched eighteen months later when Corbyn led Labour to their worst defeat since 1935.⁷⁵

VII. Party strength and party purpose

Bizzarro et al. define strong parties as "...unified, centralized, stable, organizationally complex, and tied to long standing constituencies."⁷⁶ To this Simmons adds a requirement that representatives "outlive the political lives of their own coalescing members," so that they invest in policies that are good for the economy over time.⁷⁷ More simply put, strong parties operate as teams on which everyone is pursuing the same goal: to devise and implement strategies that can win and retain widespread voter support over time. Backbenchers in strong parties delegate considerable authority, including the authority to discipline them, to leaders, but this is conditional on winning. As with coaches and quarterbacks, they do not last when they fail. They have enough rope to hang themselves. One symptom of the disorder of American parties is that

leaders can survive without delivering victories, as with the House Republicans for decades before 1994 or when Nancy Pelosi led Democrats to four successive defeats in the 2010s without being removed. Ineffective leaders displease back benchers, but the parties are so decentralized that coordinating to replace them is hard.⁷⁸ In April 2018, Republican Speaker Paul Ryan decided not to run for another term amidst sagging popularity and intense conflict with his caucus that had dogged him since he had replaced the even more unpopular John Boehner.⁷⁹ Yet Ryan could not be dislodged, saddling the party with a lame duck leader for the seven-month runup to the 2018 midterms.⁸⁰

Leaders should play major roles in selecting backbench candidates and in disciplining them to support a Party's national program. The reason? Whereas candidates face powerful incentives to protect themselves in their districts, whether by delivering local private goods, or by catering to intense activists or well-funded groups that might otherwise primary them, national party leaders need backbenchers who can both win in their districts and also support a winning platform. This gets harder as the distance between the median voter in the district and the party's median voter increases, and it will often involve hard judgment calls. But given the distribution of incentives, it is better for the national leadership to predominate in making those calls.⁸¹ Think of it as Ulysses-and-the-Sirens discipline. Backbenchers submit to the leadership's discipline, but only in service of a cause that is in their longer-term interest.

Some will say that the candidates that parties select and the platforms they pursue should be predominantly shaped—if not determined—by primary voters or party members, but that overlooks the problematic standing of these groups already discussed. Here it is worth recalling that, until the 1970s, presidential primaries in the U.S. were information-generating exercises through which candidates sought to demonstrate electoral viability. Presidential primaries did not

achieve their almost sovereign authorizing status in a principal-agent relationship until the McGovern-Fraser Reforms restructured the Democratic Party in the early 1970s, creating a bottom-up model for selecting candidates and writing platforms that the Republicans would soon emulate. The changes were promoted as more democratic than proverbial smoke-filled rooms. In reality, they greatly weakened both parties in unintended ways,⁸² rendering them vulnerable to hostile takeovers of the sort Donald Trump staged in 2016.

Congressional primaries have been around since the Progressive era, but the increased number of safe seats in recent decades has made them more consequential.⁸³ This weakens the authority of leaders over backbenchers concerned about challenges in their districts. Hence the inability of House Republican leaders to craft a bill to repeal the Affordable Care Act that their members would support once they took control of the government in 2017, even though they had voted 70 times to repeal it when out of power.⁸⁴ This outcome also cautions us against interpreting increasingly polarized roll call votes in Congress as indicative of increased party strength or discipline. As Curry and Lee have documented, the great majority of legislation, including consequential legislation, requires bipartisan support in at least one chamber to become law, and this has not changed since the 1970s.⁸⁵ In principle, parties might be legislative cartels, as Cox and McCubbins contend.⁸⁶ In practice, they are too weak to govern that way in the United States Congress.

IIIX. Conclusion

The distinctive job of political parties is to facilitate competition over the state's legitimate monopoly over the use of coercive force. This kind of competition is best served, I have argued, by strongly disciplined parties that compete for voter support by offering programmatic policies that they expect will serve the interests of as wide as possible a swath of

voters. Many will resist this view as insufficiently agent-centered, preferring to think of the voters as principals and the parties and politicians they elect as their agents. It is the apparent erosion, or outright collapse, of this principal-agent relationship that fuels perceptions that democratic politics is broken, prompting demands to unbundle platforms and assert greater voter control over parties and politicians. But the result is to diminish parties' capacity to govern effectively when in office—compounding voter alienation and prompting demands for self-defeating reforms and render parties vulnerable to populist takeovers.

Here I have sought to reject this principal-agent view. Schumpeter's market analogy is incomplete and partly misleading, but he was right that it is better to think of the relations between parties and voters as analogous to that between firms and consumers, rather than to firms and the interests of their shareholders. To the extent that they do the latter, they will deliver clientelist benefits to sectional interests, whether this turns out to be the wholesale clientelism that is extracted by single-issue parties in multiparty systems or the retail clientelism that operates in two-party systems when the parties are weak. If we want parties to cleave instead toward governing in the public interest, it is better to give them incentives to pursue their partisan conceptions in ways that will appeal to as many voters as possible over time.

Principal-agent views are superficially appealing because they speak to the idea that democracy is fundamentally about the people ruling themselves. But as Locke noted more than three centuries ago, the people can rule themselves only as a single collective entity if they are to rule themselves at all. Democratic theory does better when it starts by recognizing that power is a natural monopoly and then gets to work on how best to manage it both democratically and in the public interest, rather than insisting that the people should rule themselves without coming to grips with what that means in practice—or indeed whether it can mean anything at all.

This is a more plausible way to think about the relations between voters' interests and their preferences than the principal-agent view. After all, it's not as if in 2016 sixty-three million Americans were looking for a candidate who would promise to build a wall on the country's southern border. Rather, millions of working- and middle-class Americans were disaffected by the decades-long failure of both parties to address their stagnating economic fortunes and instead serve the interests and agendas of wealthy elites.⁸⁷ Trump saw an opportunity to mobilize their rage behind a populist agenda and acted accordingly.⁸⁸ That he promised to implement policies that would do little, if anything, for the people who elected him was beside the point. As even one of his greatest champions acknowledged, Trump's election was "a howl of rage, the end of decades of selfish and unwise decisions made by selfish and unwise leaders. Happy countries don't elect Donald Trump president. Desperate ones do. In retrospect, the lesson seemed obvious: Ignore voters for long enough and you get Donald Trump."⁸⁹ Politicians who ignore voters' interests must eventually confront their preferences. The result will seldom be pretty.

John Dewey once observed that although voters are the best equipped to know how well policies serve them, this does not make them the best designers of those policies. "The man who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches," he argued, but "the expert shoemaker is the best judge of how the trouble is to be remedied."⁹⁰ The analogy highlights the luddite quality of much of the handwringing about voter ignorance. Voters know most about their interests, and especially when they are being ill-served, but they are not deficient for failing to know much about designing policies to vindicate those interests. The analogy also supplies ballast for resisting principal-agent views: politicians are no more agents of voters than cobblers are agents of walkers. And although Dewey himself had little to say about parties or electoral dynamics, his analogy underscores the importance of promoting systems in which designers of

policies feel bound to learn as much as possible about what their supporters need, to address those needs better than competitors, and to do it in ways that compromise their other interests, and the interests of other voters, as little as possible.

Eight decades ago, E.E. Schattschneider remarked that the condition of political parties “is the best possible evidence of the nature of any regime.”⁹¹ Democratic regimes are healthier when parties aspire to govern in the public interest so as to win or retain power than when they become the ossified factions that the American founders rightly feared, or vehicles for those with intense preferences to indulge themselves while others bear the costs. There are no guarantees in politics, but strong parties, provided there are two of them, will more likely nurture that health better than the going alternatives. To paraphrase Churchill, they produce the worst kind of political competition except for the others that have been tried from time to time.⁹²

Notes

¹ Norberto Bobbio, *The Future of Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Roberto Gargarella, “Full representation, deliberation, and impartiality,” in *Deliberative Democracy*, ed. John Elster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Nadia Urbinati and Mark E. Warren, “The Concept of Representation in Contemporary Democratic Theory,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 11(2008): 389.

² Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (New York: New Left Books, 1974).

³ Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Nadia Urbinati, “Representation as advocacy: a study of democratic deliberation,” *Political Theory* 28, no. 6 (2000); Nadia Urbinati, *Representative Democracy: Principles of Genealogy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006); Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴ Jonathan White and Lea Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship* (Oxford University Press, 2016); Daniel Weinstock, “On Partisan Compromise,” *Political Theory* 47, no. 1 (2019).

⁵ Matteo Bonotti, *Partisanship and Political Liberalism in Diverse Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁶ Jonathan White and Lea Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁷ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme & Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civill*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, [1651] 2010), 105.

⁸ Quentin Skinner, “Conquest and consent: Thomas Hobbes and the engagement controversy,” in *The Interregnum: the quest for settlement, 1646-1660*, ed. G.E. Aylmer (London: Macmillan, 1972).

⁹ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, [1681] 2003), 142-3.

¹⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 2010, 100-101, 107-108. Of course, for Hobbes there are other ways of instituting commonwealths.

¹¹ Kenneth Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values* (Yale University Press, 1951); William Riker, *Liberalism Against Populism: A Confrontation Between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice* (New York: Waveland, 1988).

¹² Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).

¹³ James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962).

¹⁴ Jules Coleman and John Ferejohn, "Democracy and social choice," *Ethics* 97, no. 1 (1986): 6-25.

¹⁵ Brian Barry, *Political Arguments, 2nd ed.* (Herefordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, [1965] 1990); Douglas Rae, "The Limits of Consensual Decision," *American Political Science Review* 69 (1975): 1270-94.

¹⁶ Hobbes, (1651) 2010), 100.

¹⁷ Francis Devine, "Absolute democracy or indefeasible right: Hobbes versus Locke," *The Journal of Politics* 37, no. 3 (1975): 736-68, at 740.

¹⁸ Locke, [1681] 2003, 163.

¹⁹ Jane Mansbridge, "Rethinking Representation," *American Political Science Review* 94, no. 4 (2003): 515-28.

²⁰ Benjamin Page, *Choices and Echoes in Presidential Elections: Rational Man and Electoral Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 221-2.

²¹ Douglas Arnold, *The Logic of Congressional Action* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 17; Douglas Arnold, "Can inattentive citizens control their elected representatives?" in *Congress Reconsidered*, eds. Lawrence Dodd and Bruce Oppenheimer (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1993), 401-16, at 409; James Stimson, Michael Mackuen, and Robert Erikson, "Dynamic representation," *American Political Science Review* 89 (1995): 543-65, at 545.

²² Mansbridge, 2003, 518.

²³ Lisa Disch, "Towards a Mobilization Conception of Democratic Representation," *The American Political Science Review* 105, no. 1 (2011): 100-114, at 101 and 113.

²⁴ See Adam Przeworski, “Minimalist Conception of Democracy: A Defense,” in *Democracy’s Value*, eds. Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Cordón (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²⁵ Edmund Burke, “Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents,” in *Selected Works of Edmund Burke, Vol. 1*, ed. E.J. Payne (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, [1770] 1999), 150.

²⁶ Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: George Allen & Unwin, [1943] 1976), 250-69.

²⁷ Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Basic Books, 1974); Riker, *Liberalism Against Populism*.

²⁸ Emilee Booth Chapman, “New Challenges for a Normative Theory of Parties and Partisanship,” *Journal of Representative Democracy* 57, no. 3 (2021): 385-400; Russell Muirhead and Nancy L. Rosenblum, “The Political Theory of Parties and Partisanship: Catching Up,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 23 (2020): 95-110; Jonathan White and Lea Ypi, *The Meaning of Partisanship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

²⁹ This follows from Duverger’s (1964) law, which holds that the number of parties is determined by district magnitude (the number of candidates elected per district) plus one. This will be true provided the districts are large and similarly diverse. If there is considerable regional variation, as in India, then there will be partly proliferation even with single member plurality districts.

³⁰ Christopher J. Anderson, “Economic voting and political context: a comparative perspective,” *Electoral Studies* 19, no. 2-3 (2000): 155-156.

³¹ See Richard S. Katz, “No man can serve two masters: party politicians, party members, citizens and principal-agent models of democracy,” *Party Politics* 20, no. 2 (2014): 183-93, at 187-88.

³² Anthony Atkinson, Lee Rainwater, and Timothy Smeeding, *Income Distribution in OECD Countries: Evidence from the Luxembourg Income Study*, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris (1995), 81-111; G. Bingham Powell, *Elections as Instruments of Democracy: Majoritarian and Proportional Visions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 159-232.

³³ The effects of increasing fragmentation are hard to predict. Negotiations among three or more parties are inevitably more difficult than negotiations among two. On the other hand, a larger number of small parties might

have to compete with one another to be part of the governing coalition—reducing the leverage of each in bargaining with the large parties (Browne and Franklin 1973, 453-69; Warwick and Druckman 2001, 627-49). Moreover, small parties are often single-issue parties with limited capacity to bargain, lest they undermine their *raison d'être*.

³⁴ This might help explain why, when left-of-center parties are part of the government, unemployment increases by 1 percent. Christian Salas, Frances Rosenbluth, and Ian Shapiro, “Political parties and the new politics of insecurity,” in *Who Gets What? The New Politics of Insecurity*, eds. Frances Rosenbluth and Margaret Weir (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

³⁵ Frances Rosenbluth and Ian Shapiro, *Responsible Parties: Saving Democracy from Itself* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 62-98; Emilee Booth Chapman, “New Challenges for a Normative Theory of Parties and Partisanship,” *Journal of Representative Democracy* 57, no. 3 (2021): 385-400.

³⁶ Frances Rosenbluth and Kathleen Bawn, “Short versus long coalitions: Electoral accountability and the size of the public sector,” *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 2 (2006): 251-65; Torsten Persson, Gerard Rland, and Guido Tabellini, “Electoral Rules and Government Spending in Parliamentary Democracies,” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 2, no. 2 (2007): 1-34; Bernard Caillaud and Jean Tirole, “Parties as Political Intermediaries,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 117, no. 4 (2002): 1453-1489.

³⁷ The average number of parties represented in the legislatures of 26 OECD countries grew steadily from 5.5 to 8.5 from 1960 to 2018. The effective number of parties grew from 3 to 4.25 over the same period (Salas et al. 2021).

³⁸ Gary Cox, “Centripetal and centrifugal incentives in electoral systems,” *American Journal of Political Science* 34, no. 4 (1990): 903-35; Gary Cox, *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 99-122.

³⁹ Nancy Rosenblum, *On the Side of the Angels: An Appreciation of Parties and Partisanship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 362-3; see also Russell Muirhead, *The Promise of Party in a Polarized Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 80-145.

⁴⁰ William Notz and Frederick Starke, “Final-offer versus conventional arbitration as means of conflict management,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 23, no. 2 (1978): 189-203; Henry S. Farber and Max Bazerman, “The

general basis of arbitrator behavior: An empirical analysis of conventional and final-offer arbitration,” *Econometrica* 54, no. 4 (1986): 819-44; Charles W. Adams, “Final offer arbitration: Time for serious consideration by the courts,” *Nebraska Law Review* 66 (1987): 213-48.

⁴¹ Matteo Bonotti, Jonathan White, Lea Leman Ypi, Gideon Calder, Mark Donovan, Peri Roberts, Andrew Vincent, and Howards Williams, “In Defence of Political Parties: A Symposium on Jonathan White and Lea Ypi’s *The Meaning of Partisanship*,” *Political Studies Review* 16, no. 4 (2018): 289-305, at 296-298.

⁴² This is not to say that when parties converge in two-party systems they always converge on the median voter. Expectations of low turnout by younger and poorer voters can lead both parties to ignore their interests in favor of those of older and wealthier voters who turn out in higher numbers and contribute more money to parties. These are among the reasons why, even as the U.S. parties have become more polarized in recent years, both parties have moved to the right (McCarty et al. 2008).

⁴³ Carlo Invernizzi-Accetti and Fabio Wolkenstein, “The Crisis of Party Democracy, Cognitive Mobilization, and the Case for Making Parties More Deliberative,” *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 1 (2017): 97-109, at 103.

⁴⁴ Mayling Birney, Ian Shapiro, and Michael Graetz, “The political uses of public opinion: Lessons from the estate tax repeal,” in Ian Shapiro, Peter Swenson and Daniela Donno eds., *Divide and Deal: The Politics of Distribution in Democracies*, pp. 298-340. (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

⁴⁵ Matteo Bonotti, “Conceptualising Political Parties: A Normative Framework,” *Politics* 31, no. 1 (2011): 19-26, at 20-22.

⁴⁶ David Miliband, “The next leadership team needs to recognize the fundamental errors that made Labour unelectable,” *The Guardian*, December 22, 2019.

⁴⁷ BBC, “Eu vote: Where the cabinet and other MPs stand,” BBC News, June 22, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-35616946> (accessed October 9, 2019).

⁴⁸ Vernon Bogdanor, “Britain and the EU: In or out – one year on,” Gresham College lecture, June 29, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jqbc7yVnojE> (accessed February 1, 2020).

⁴⁹ Hovik Minasyan, “Brexit Positions of MPs in the 2019 Parliament Compared to the 2015 Parliament,” mimeo, Leitner Program on Effective Democratic Governance. Yale University (2020).

⁵⁰ Carlo Invernizzi-Accetti and Fabio Wolkenstein, “The Crisis of Party Democracy, Cognitive Mobilization, and the Case for Making Parties More Deliberative,” *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 1 (2017): 97-109, at 105.

⁵¹ Michael Graetz and Ian Shapiro, *The Wolf at the Door: The Menace of Economic Insecurity and How to Fight It* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 26-7.

⁵² Patrick McGuire, “Now its Conservative, not Labour MPs who fear deselection,” *New Statesman American*, June 12, 2018. <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2018/06/now-it-s-conservative-not-labour-mps-who-fear-deselection> (accessed February 1, 2020).

⁵³ Decisive evidence on why MPs switched positions is elusive. Some declared “respect for the Referendum result;” some responded to years of Brexit fatigue with Johnson’s “Get Brexit done;” and some prevaricated. See Hovik Minasyan, “Brexit Positions of MPs in the 2019 Parliament Compared to the 2015 Parliament,” mimeo, Leitner Program on Effective Democratic Governance. Yale University (2020). As with studying the effects of primaries on position-taking by U.S. politicians, the possibility of deselection by “entryist” Brexiteers might have been sufficient, making an actual challenge unnecessary. Merrick, Rob, and Benjamin Kentish. 2019. “No-deal Brexit support and ‘blatant entryism’ surges among grassroots Conservatives and former Ukip voters.” *The Independent*, June 29, 2019. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/conservative-leadership-news-latest-no-deal-brexiteer-boris-johnson-ukip-jeremy-hunt-a8978206.html> (accessed February 9, 2020).

⁵⁴ In the event, Johnson turned out to be lucky that Labour was saddled with one of its most unpopular leaders ever who was touting a program that, as Miliband says, “came to be seen as more of a risk to the country than Brexit—even though every study shows that it will cost the poorest communities the most” (Miliband 2019; see also Opinium 2019).

⁵⁵ Adam Bienkov and Thomas Colson, “Brexit deadlock: MPs reject all remaining alternatives to Theresa May’s deal,” *Business Insider*, April 1, 2019. <https://www.businessinsider.com/brexit-indicative-votes-mps-reject-all-alternatives-to-theresa-mays-deal-2019-4> (accessed February 1, 2020).

⁵⁶ Conservative Party, Conservative General Election Manifesto 1983, Thatcher Archive <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110859> (accessed April 15, 2022)

⁵⁷ The rebate agreement granted the UK 66% of the difference between its share of member states' VAT contributions and its share of EU spending in return. European Commission, "Commission working document," European Commission. May 14, 2014 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014DC0271&from=EN> (accessed February 1, 2020).

⁵⁸ Helene Von Bismarck, "Margaret Thatcher: the critical architect of European integration," The UK in a Changing Europe. <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/margaret-thatcher-the-critical-architect-of-european-integration/> (accessed February 21, 2020).

⁵⁹ Harold Wilson, *The Final Term: The Labour Government 1974-76* (London: Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1979), 109.

⁶⁰ The Gang of Four who left were Roy Jenkins, David Owen, Shirley Williams, and Bill Rodgers. Had Tony Benn beaten moderate Dennis Healy for the deputy leadership when Michael Foot became leader in November of 1980, the defecting group would doubtless have been larger.

⁶¹ See Urfan Khaliq, "The EU and the European Social Charter: Never the twain shall meet?" *Cambridge Yearbook of European Social Studies* 15 (2017): 169-96.

⁶² Nyta Mann, "Foot's message of hope to left," BBC News, July 14, 2003. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/3059773.stm (accessed April 13, 2022).

⁶³ Charlotte Riley, "For Labour, the 2019 election echoes 'the longest suicide note in history'," *Washington Post*, December 14, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/12/14/labour-election-echoes-longest-suicide-note-history/> [12-19-2019]. In 1983 the party was harvesting the consequences rule changes adopted two years earlier, discussed more fully below, that strengthened the role of activists and unions in selecting its leaders at the expense of the Parliamentary Party, a change that came just as trade union membership began falling precipitously. This would render the party decreasingly representative of the British electorate, keeping Labour in the political wilderness until the party was fundamentally restructured a decade-and-a-half later.

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- ⁶⁴ Vernon Bogdanor, “The referendum on Europe – 1975,” Gresham College lecture, May 22, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_4vNtSqahk [08-17-2022].
- ⁶⁵ Russell Muirhead, *The Promise of Party in a Polarized Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 176.
- ⁶⁶ Jane Mansbridge, “A Selection Model of Political Representation,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 17, no. 4 (2009): 369-398.
- ⁶⁷ Carlo Invernizzi-Accetti and Fabio Wolkenstein, “The Crisis of Party Democracy, Cognitive Mobilization, and the Case for Making Parties More Deliberative,” *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 1 (2017): 97-109, at 104.
- ⁶⁸ Sunder Katwala, “The NHS: Even more cherished than the monarchy or the army,” *New Statesman America*, January 14, 2013. <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2013/01/nhs-even-more-cherished-monarchy-and-army> (accessed September 22, 2019).
- ⁶⁹ See Fabio Wolkenstein, “A deliberative model of intra-party democracy. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 24(3). pp. 297-320 and Fabio Wolkenstein “Intra-party democracy beyond aggregation,” *Party Politics*, 24(4) 323-34.
- ⁷⁰ Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: George Allen & Unwin, [1943] 1976), 269 – 73.
- ⁷¹ Governance of public universities is also controversial, as was dramatically underscored by the battle between the Regents of the University of California and the faculty over the inclusion of loyalty pledges in employment contracts during the McCarthy era. See James F. Simon, *Eisenhower vs. Warren: The Battle for Civil Rights and Liberties* (New York: Norton Liveright, 2018), 66-76. But at the end of the day, faculties at public universities are public employees, and the analog of a firm’s residual claimants are taxpayers.
- ⁷² Labour List, “Number of voters in leadership contest revised down to 550,000.” Labour List, August 25, 2015 <https://labourlist.org/2015/08/number-of-voters-in-leadership-contest-revised-down-to-550000/> (accessed February 1, 2020); BBC, “Labour leadership results in full,” BBC News, September 12, 2015 <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-34221155> (accessed October 5, 2019).

⁷³ Tim Bale, Monica Poletti, and Paul Webb, “Here’s what we know about Labour’s £3 supporters – and whether they’ll pay £25 to help Corbyn again,” *The Conversation*, July 14, 2016 <https://theconversation.com/heres-what-we-know-about-labours-3-supporters-and-whether-theyll-pay-25-to-help-corbyn-again-62728> (accessed January 20, 2020).

⁷⁴ Jenny Anderson, “How Theresa May blew a 20-point lead and saddled the UK with a hung parliament,” *Quartz*, June 9, 2017 <https://qz.com/1002394/uk-election-how-theresa-may-blew-a-20-point-lead-and-gave-the-uk-a-hung-parliament/> (accessed December 19, 2019).

⁷⁵ The scale of Labour’s defeat forced the left to back down and agree to the election of the centrist Kier Starmer in 2020, but they still saddled him with a hard left deputy leader Angela Rayner who lost little time in attacking him, leading to press speculation—fed by the prime minister’s supporters—that she would mount a leadership challenge at the first opportunity.

⁷⁶ Fernando Bizzarro et al., “Party strength & economic growth,” *World Politics* 70, no. 2 (2018): 278.

⁷⁷ Joel Simmons, *The Politics of Technological Progress: Parties, Time Horizons, and Long-Term Economic Development* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 7-8.

⁷⁸ Joseph Postell, “The Rise and Fall of Political Parties in America,” *First Principles* 70 (2018): 1- 16, at 16.

⁷⁹ Mike DeBonis, “Fuming over Ryan, some conservative voices turn on the Freedom Caucus,” *Washington Post*, October 25, 2015. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/fuming-over-ryan-some-conservative-voices-turn-on-the-freedom-caucus/2015/10/25/8194f3ce-7999-11e5-a958-d889faf561dc_story.html (accessed December 16, 2019).

⁸⁰ Jason Dick, “Paul Ryan runs through the tape as lame duck Congress limps to the finish line,” *Roll Call*, December 19, 2018. <https://www.rollcall.com/news/politics/paul-ryan-runs-through-the-tape-as-lame-duck-congress-limps-to-finish-line> (accessed December 16, 2019).

⁸¹ National party leaders also have different incentives in this regard from local party leaders (see Broockman et al. 2021).

⁸² Stephen Gardbaum and Rick Pildes, “Populism and institutional design: Methods of selecting candidates for chief executive,” *New York University Law Review* 93 (2018): 647-708.

⁸³ Alan Abramowitz, Brad Alexander, and Matthew Gunning, “Incumbency, redistricting, and the decline of competition in U.S. House election,” *Journal of Politics* 68, no. 1 (2006): 75-88; David Wasserman and Ally Finn, “Introducing the 2017 Cook Political Report partisan voting index,” Cook Political Report, April 7, 2017 <https://www.dropbox.com/s/2bzk5lssu2iyir2/2017%20Cook%20Political%20Report%20Partisan%20Voter%20Index.pdf?dl=0> (accessed October 5, 2019); Alexander Kustov, Maikol Cerda, Akhil Rajan, Frances Rosenbluth, and Ian Shapiro, “the rise of safe seats and party indiscipline in the U.S. Congress.” Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago (2021).

⁸⁴ Chris Riotta, “GOP aims to kill Obamacare yet again after failing 70 times,” *Newsweek*, July 29, 2019. <https://www.newsweek.com/gop-health-care-bill-repeal-and-replace-70-failed-attempts-643832> (accessed October 5, 2019).

⁸⁵ James Curry and Frances Lee, “What is Regular Order Worth? Partisan Lawmaking and Congressional Processes,” *Journal of Politics* 82, no. 2 (2020): 627-41.

⁸⁶ Gary Cox and Matthew McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁸⁷ Martin Gilens, *Affluence and Influence Economic Inequality and Political Power in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁸⁸ Benjamin Page and Martin Gilens, *Democracy in America? What has Gone Wrong and What We Can Do About It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020); Michael Graetz and Ian Shapiro, *The Wolf at the Door: The Menace of Economic Insecurity and How to Fight It* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 1-36, 260-80).

⁸⁹ Tucker Carlson, *Ship of Fools: How a Selfish Ruling Class in Bringing America to the Brink of Revolution* (New York: New York Free Press, 2018), 3.

⁹⁰ John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems: An Essay in Political Inquiry*, ed. Melvin Rogers (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, [1927] 2012), 153-4.

⁹¹ E.E. Schattschneider, *Party Government* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1942), 1.

⁹² “Many forms of Government have been tried and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.” Winston S. Churchill, “Speech to the House of Commons, November 11, 1947.” Reproduced in *Churchill by Himself: The Definitive Collection of Quotations*, ed. Richard Langworth (New York: Public Affairs, [1947] 2008), 574.