

REVIEW ESSAY

Famine to feast: New books on comparative party politics

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Peter Mair, *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), xiv + 244 pages; Moshe Maor, *Political Parties and Party Systems: Comparative Approaches and the British Experience* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), x + 279 pages; Alan Ware, *Political Parties and Party Systems* (Oxford University Press, 1996), xix + 435 pages.

Once upon a time, and not so long ago, few books in English were suitable texts for a course on political parties – that is, if one sought to teach the subject in a comparative framework. Because courses at American universities focused overwhelmingly on US party politics, the paucity of comparative texts presented little difficulty for most teachers. Their needs were met by excellent textbooks from authors like V. O. Key, Frank Sorauf, William Keefe, and others who for many years supplied campuses with revised editions.¹ But for instructors who compared US parties with party systems in foreign lands, pickings were slim in the 1960s and for decades afterward.

There were, of course, a few books that amounted to comprehensive monographs on comparative party politics. Foremost was Maurice Duverger's classic *Political Parties*, which first appeared in English in 1954 and remained in print until the early 1960s.² Duverger, however, described a party politics that was dying off by the 1960s. Leon Epstein's *Political Parties in Western Democracies* was up to date when it appeared in 1968, but it was never thoroughly revised.³ Giovanni Sartori's insightful *Parties and Party Systems* was better suited to researchers than students when it was published in 1976 and it, too, was not updated.⁴ Angelo Panebianco's excellent *Political Parties: Organization and Power*, translated from Italian into English in 1988, was, like Sartori's, a book for other scholars more than a student text.⁵ Perhaps the most text-like treatment of comparative party politics was *Politics and Society in Western Europe*, by Jan-Erik Lane and Svante O. Ersson, published in 1987 and later in revised editions.⁶ However, their book delves into policy formation and slights standard topics in party politics, such as campaigns and elections. So for decades, the bookshelf held few texts for those who wanted to teach party politics in a comparative manner.

However, three books appeared in 1996 and 1997 that merit consideration as texts for comparative parties courses. Each written by a European scholar, the books have similar titles. Two interpretations of *Political Parties and Party*

Systems come from Alan Ware, Fellow and Tutor in Politics in Worcester College at Oxford, and Moshe Maor, Senior Lecturer at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem – although Maor adds to his book the subtitle: *Comparative Approaches and the British Experience. Party System Change*, a partially overlapping title, comes from Peter Mair, Professor of Comparative Politics at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands. These books complement more than compete with one another, because their titles overlap more than their contents.

Alan Ware: Political parties and party systems

Of the three, Ware's book – despite being the longest at over 400 pages – is best suited as an undergraduate textbook due both to its breadth and depth and its style of presentation. Ware divides his book into three major parts, each somewhat longer than 100 pages. The first, on political parties individually, examines their definition, ideology, composition, and organization. Part II, on party systems, classifies party systems, asks how and why they differ, and investigates the extent and causes of party change. Part III, titled 'moving towards government,' has chapters on selection of candidates, campaigning, voter choice and government formation (focusing on governing coalitions), and parties in government (dealing with effects of parties on policy). The book's table of contents covers all the important topics on party politics and blends nicely with texts on American parties. If an instructor wants to combine American politics and comparative analysis in the same course, he or she can easily assign chapters from Ware in parallel with a second text. In fact, that is how this reviewer used Ware along with two books on US party politics for an undergraduate course on Political Parties and Elections.⁷

As for depth of coverage, Ware has hit it about right. He explains matters well yet stretches students by introducing them to parties' scholarship. For example, he examines the 'sociological' approach to the study of parties (seeing parties as representing social interests), the 'institutional' approach (claiming that institutions shape parties), and the 'competition' approach (examining parties' responses to other parties) as matters of debate within political science. To illustrate: he contrasts Duverger's idea that rightist parties suffer 'contagion from the left' with Epstein's revisionist view that leftist parties are infected by 'contagion from the right.' He explains what Lipset and Rokkan meant about the 'freezing' of European party systems in the 1920s, and describes Panebianco's 'genetic' model of party formation which emphasizes the importance of a party's origin. Students can learn a lot about comparative politics from Ware's presentation. The book not only synthesizes a great deal of existing knowledge, but it often makes original contributions in the way it unfolds and presents issues in analysis.

The case for Ware's book as an undergraduate text is also strengthened by its design and layout. British books often contain tables that report election

results and so on (and this has twelve tables), but they seldom feature well-drawn figures designed for communicating abstract ideas to students. This book contains twenty informative figures portraying such matters as party leaders' positions on political issues and spatial distributions of electorates on a policy continuum. The book also combines the comparative and configurative approaches to party politics by dividing most chapters into A and B 'sections.' The themes mentioned up to now fall in Section A, the comparative section. Section B employs these themes in detailed accounts of party politics in five countries: the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, and Japan. Clearly written as they are, these sections still presume too much political knowledge about those countries for most American undergraduates. Perhaps the material would work better in a course that did not also study American parties; my students experienced information overload.

One final comment on Ware's commitment to comparative analysis of political parties: He takes his charge seriously and, à la Duverger, is willing to include virtually *all* parties of the world in his purview. Whereas most comparative analyses of party politics deal only with democratic polities, Ware has a chapter on 'Parties in Non-Liberal-Democratic Regimes' and one on 'Party Systems in Non-Liberal Regimes.' These chapters offer informative insights into the operation of political parties in such countries as South Africa, Turkey, and Mexico. Ware's book is, to my mind, the best textbook in print for teaching undergraduates about the varieties of parties and party systems across the world.

Moshe Maor: Political parties and party systems

In a book with the same title, Moshe Maor ratchets up the level of analysis a few notches. Unlike Ware's book, it offers no chapters titled 'The Selection of Candidates and Leaders' or 'Campaigning for Election.' Instead, one of Maor's eight chapters is 'Party institutionalization' (British spelling throughout), one 'Models of party organisation,' and another 'Cohesion and dissent' – all invoking more abstract concepts. Whereas Ware reviews definitions in a few paragraphs, Maor's entire first chapter is on 'Classifying party definitions.' Although Maor describes his book as a 'textbook' (p. ix), he wants his audience to 'satisfy dissertation committees' (p. 236). Clearly, his text is aimed at graduate students.

Like Ware, Maor delves into parties scholarship, but Maor constructively critiques it at greater length, which befits his audience but would anesthetize most undergraduates. For example, he analyzes organizes party definitions offered by more than twenty different scholars according to three groups of research questions: '(i) What does a party do? (ii) What motivations underlie a party's behavior? and, (iii) How does a party operate? and why does it operate the way it does?' (p. 3).

Under category (i), he writes, 'A similar perspective was adopted by many

scholars who called attention to the role of parties in the manifestations of social divisions in the political process and in the process of policy formation. Expressions such as "workers' parties," "bourgeois parties" and "peasant parties" are utilized in this perspective in order to describe the prevalent social composition of a party's electorate, membership, policy, and sometimes even a party's behavior' (p. 5). For his own book, Maor works within the last group of definitions, (iii) how parties operate and why, because he concentrates on the types of internal tradeoffs facing leaders and groups within the party. Indeed, he says, 'My mission in this book is therefore to explain these trade-offs and their consequences for party organisational strategy and behavior' (p. 14).

Maor pursues his mission with determination. In his chapter on institutionalization, he notes that an expanding electorate pushes parties to form extra-parliamentary organizations. Such organizations constitute a threat to parliamentarians and other party members in office and thus constitute 'a trade-off between the task of organizing popular support for themselves among the newly enfranchised voters and the derived consequences in terms of their room for manoeuvre' (p. 66). In his chapter on organizational models, he observes how developmental models 'address the trade-off between the need of the party elite to modify the party's electoral strategy, for example, following societal changes, and their need to accommodate their party organisation to these changes' (p. 93). He interprets intra-party bargaining in terms of the trade-off faced by elites between the need to commit the party to co-operative relationships and the need to ensure party cohesion – and so on.

Maor's book is especially valuable for graduate students because he incorporates the parties' literature explicitly into his analysis. In his chapter on institutionalization, he praises Panebianco's 'integrated theory.' Nevertheless, he also challenges it on several grounds, and concludes that 'Panebianco "stretches" the concept of "institutionalization" such that the term becomes vague and imprecise' (p. 72). In discussing models of party organization, he concisely analyzes four varieties of developmental models: Duverger's mass party, Epstein's electoral party, Kirchheimer's catch-all party, and Katz and Mair's cartel party. For exchange models, he considers the work of Downs, Wright, Schlesinger, and particularly Strom. Again, Maor sees great value in Strom's model, but he notes that it can be challenged on two grounds: (1) Leaders and followers are not internally homogeneous, and a single dominant inventive or preference may not be attributable to either group; and (2) if labor comes as a gift (voluntary) for social and recreational activity, perhaps an exchange relationship is not necessary. Graduate students should learn much from Maor's evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the models and approaches that he considers.

In essence, Maor's coverage of party topics is not as broad as Ware's, but it probes more deeply the topics it considers. In chapters titled 'Cohesion and dissent' and 'Intra-party conflicts and legislative bargaining,' he moves beyond synthesizing the literature to make original contributions. Maor

observes that the traditional argument for bargaining contends that the more centralized the party structure, the easier for the party to remain in a governing coalition. But he asks, 'Why are centralised parties considered to be effective coalition actors if they lack structural mechanisms for the diffusion of dissent?' (p. 169) He then argues quite plausibly that decentralized parties are better able to handle internal opposition without forcing members to leave the party. Referring to supporting research, he turns the traditional argument on its head.

Maor also delivers in integrating his subtitle, 'the British Experience,' within his analytical framework. Excluding the introduction and conclusion, every chapter ends with an extensive section that interprets British party politics using concepts introduced earlier. For example, Maor's begins his chapter on organizational models by discussing the characteristics of a centralized party, including who selects the party's candidates. After discussing the British experience, he says, 'To sum up, candidate selection in the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrats share three common features: First, a formalized and codified recruitment system which ensures a relatively meritocratic and open process. Second, a localized and democratic process as members have some influence especially at the last selection state. Third, central office intervention is evident in the parties' (p. 128). As one might expect, his reports of the British experience presume even more knowledge about British politics than Ware's descriptive accounts in his Section B. Maor's discussions are probably suitable for students in the UK, but they are certainly beyond US undergraduates.

Maor's book has more competition from other books as a text for graduate courses than Ware's book has as an undergraduate text. Books by Panebianco and by Lane and Ersson are viable competitors, for instance. Nevertheless, Maor's work is both most up to date *and* demonstrates consistently high analytical quality.

Peter Mair: Party system change

Peter Mair's volume, titled similarly to the other two, is different in origin and content. Seven of its nine chapters had been published elsewhere between 1989 and 1996 (including one co-authored with Richard Katz). Because the volume collects much of Mair's more important works, scholars in the field will be familiar with some of its contents, which focuses mainly on party systems rather than on individual parties.

Political scientists outside the parties field may not appreciate the difference between the party system and the individual party as units of analysis. In a nutshell, party systems are coterminous with nation-states, so both exist at the same level of analysis. The properties of party systems often become variables that interest scholars who study nations, which means about everyone in comparative politics. Individual parties, which operate within nations, reside

at a lower level of analysis. Properties of parties – as opposed to party systems – attract the smaller subset of comparativists interested in theoretical linkages between and within organizations and in the effects of environment (the nation) on organizations (its parties). Many data sets assembled for cross-national analysis, such as the *World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators*, contain data on party systems, but not on individual parties. Scholars who collect data on party systems often do not study organizational characteristics and other traits of individual parties. Mair is one who does.

Because he studies parties in addition to party systems, Mair's *Party System Change* is not exclusively about party systems. In fact, his chapter with Katz sees 'the emergence of a new type of party, the cartel party, characterized by the interpenetration of party and state, and also by a pattern of inter-party collusion' (p. 108). Cartel parties collude for organizational survival – e.g., negotiating state subsidies to parties – even at the expense of individual partisan losses or gains. Although Katz and Mair introduced the concept of a cartel party only in 1992, their model was quickly accepted within the literature, and it figures prominently in the books by Ware and Maor.

Mair is, perhaps, best known for his work on party systems, and his several writings are conveniently contained in this volume. (That convenience, which recommends it for graduate courses on comparative parties and politics, is countered by a steep hardcover price that will surely repel students.) Apart from conceiving of the cartel party, Mair is most closely associated with explaining (and defending) the contention by Lipset and Rokkan that European party systems were 'frozen' into place in the 1920s and persisted into the 1960s. Mair devotes three chapters – 'On the Freezing of Party Systems,' 'The Problem of Party System Change,' and 'Myths of Electoral Change and the Survival of the "Old" Parties' – to this subject, which amounts to a third of the book. Mair examines the theoretical status of the freezing 'hypothesis' and concludes that it is not really a law and not even a hypothesis. He explains that Lipset and Rokkan did not say that specific parties would be frozen in place, only that the basic political cleavages (primarily the left-right cleavage) would be frozen in place. He further notes that most 'old' parties from the 1920s have tended to survive and remain fairly healthy into the 1980s anyway.

In other chapters of his book, Mair addresses more specific issues. For example, he examines the conventional view that 'party system change is largely, if not exclusively, a function of, or even a synonym for, electoral change' (p. 215). Through argument and careful consideration of the contrasting cases of Denmark in 1973 and Ireland in 1989, Mair suggests that the causal arrow goes the other way; party system stability (or change) may lead to electoral stability (or change). In any event, he argues convincingly that electoral change and party system change are different phenomena. His explanation of the causes of electoral and party system instability in the post-communist states of central and eastern Europe, while not original to Mair, is concise and penetrating.

Mair's least satisfying chapter explores consequences of the size of the

'electoral market' in a nation. He says, "The actual extent of inter-party competition, and the competitiveness of parties, is at least in part a function of the relative size of the electoral market' (p. 157). However intriguing this notion, Mair leaves too many loose ends in his analysis. He fails to provide an explicit definition of the electoral market, which he equates to 'the number of voters in competition.' What it means for voters to be 'in competition,' or in competition along one dimension but not along another, is simply not clear.

But, these criticisms are merely carplings. This book joins the other two under review here as impressive contributions to a revitalized genre of texts on comparative political parties.

Why European scholars write better books on comparative parties

One cannot end such an essay without commenting on the European origins of the authors at hand and those mentioned in the second paragraph above. Among all these authors of comparative parties texts, Epstein is the only one raised and educated in the United States. Duverger, Sartori, Panebianco, Lane, and Ersson are Europeans – like Mair, Maor, and Ware. It is no accident that European scholars have provided our most insightful comparative analyses of political parties. The simple, and I believe valid, explanation for their dominance is that European scholars look across national borders more frequently and see quite different parties in politics. This gives them incentive to compare parties and sharpens their analytical capacities.

For their part, American scholars trade too readily in narrow frameworks that fit the US experience but do not travel well abroad. One example may nail down this point. To accompany the Ware text in a course on political parties and elections, I chose two fine books on American party politics: Beck's *Party Politics in America* and Wattenberg's *The Decline of American Political Parties*. Both books relied heavily on Key's venerable 'tripartite' approach to viewing parties: as the party-in-the-electorate, the party-as-organization, and the party-in-government. Over the decades, most American scholars have regarded Key's tripod as the Holy Trinity in parties' scripture.

But Ware will have none of it. He recognizes one leg of the tripod as simply electoral behavior, and for Ware (and most other European scholars) ordinary voters lie outside the institutions called political parties. He quotes the Oxford scholar Anthony King: "The notion of party-in-the-electorate seems a strange one on the face of it. It is rather as though one were to refer not to the buyers of Campbell's soup but to the Campbell-Soup-Company-in-the Market' (p. 6). Maor continues, "in this book we are concerned with the role of parties in attempting to shape that behavior, not with, to use the conception criticized by King, "the party in the electorate"' (p. 7).

However, most American students and scholars fail to see merit in Ware's remark, and they resist treating Democratic and Republican identifiers as polit-

ical consumers and thus 'outside' our two major parties. This insistence at including citizens 'in' the parties for which they prefer to vote produces this puzzling paradox for American politics: Its political parties are in 'decline' (as Wattenberg clearly demonstrates) while their state and national organizations are growing stronger (as Beck convincingly finds). This paradox is easily resolved by regarding parties as more bounded organizations, the way most other western scholars do. To analyze parties more creatively, it helps to be a European.

Notes

1. Key's well-known *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups* was first published in 1942, and last appeared in its fifth edition in 1964 (New York: Crowell). The first edition of Sorauf's *Party Politics in America* came out in 1968 (Boston: Little, Brown) and it continues in an eighth edition authored by Paul Allen Beck (New York: Longman, 1997). Keefe's *Parties, Politics, and Public Policy in America* was published by Holt in 1972 and is now in its eighth edition (Washington: CQ Press, 1998).
2. Duverger's *Les Partis Politiques* was first published only in French in 1951 (Paris: Armand Colin). The first English edition appeared in 1954 (London: Methuen). It was published in the USA by John Wiley into the early 1960s and as late as 1964 in London (Routledge Kegan & Paul).
3. Epstein's *Political Parties in Western Democracies* (New York: Praeger, 1967) reappeared with a new preface and postscript in 1982 (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books).
4. Sartori's *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976) was scheduled as the first of two volumes. The second, which was to be on individual parties, never appeared.
5. Panebianco's book was first published in Italy in 1981 as *Modelli di partito*. The English edition was published in New York (Cambridge University Press).
6. The latest edition of Lane and Ersson, *Politics and Society in Western Europe*, is the 3rd (London: Sage Publications, 1994).
7. The texts on American parties were *Party Politics in America*, now authored by Beck, and Martin P. Wattenberg, *The Decline of American Political Parties, 1952-1994* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

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