Interests, Identities, and Institutions in Comparative Politics

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Institutions and Innovation

Voters, Parties, and Interest Groups in the Consolidation of Democracy—France and Germany, 1870–1939

Marcus Kreuzer

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Preface

In writing this book, I became deeply indebted to history. History came to my rescue for the first time in early 1989. During that winter and spring, glasnost and perestroika toppled not just communist regimes but also most proposals that had been carefully drafted for the dissertation-writing seminar in which I participated at Columbia. Witnessing the emergence of brand-new liberal democracies and free markets quickly jaded my enthusiasm to contribute yet another study on how the Greens were going to solve the solid-waste crisis and reform bureaucratic parties. Yet this newfound excitement quickly yielded to the sobering realization that CNN-style headline history lacks the data sets, the secondary sources, and the distinct outcomes required for the effective deployment of the methodological apparatus that modern social science demands. Faced with the predicament of joining the ranks of transitologists, I was rescued by history a second time when somebody pointed out that the very same issues that kept us rushing for the newspaper each morning had made their historical debut in interwar Europe. The possibility of studying democratization through historical examples offered a tempting solution to the methodological problems posed by analyzing the present day transitions to liberal democracy. The passage of 70 to 80 years provided distinct outcomes and voluminous political histories that together enabled the formulation of a theoretically informed, methodologically self-conscious comparative study.

The political histories of interwar Europe offered more than just redress to methodological problems. They also suggested two key factors affecting the fate of interwar democracies. First, they placed an inordinate amount of attention on political parties. This emphasis might be explicable by the fact that interwar democracies lacked corporatist arrangements, constitutional courts, or supranational organizations, which nowadays act as rival channels to parties for the representation of societal interests. Much more than nowadays, interwar parties were the principal game in town for assisting citizens, voluntary associations, and economic interest
groups to voice their interests and for keeping politicians, bureaucrats, and generals accountable. In short, interwar parties constituted the principal democratic fulcrum on which societal actors could leverage their political influence. Second, the general importance of parties stands in striking contrast to the actual leverage they offered citizens in different countries. In some countries, parties acted like voter-oriented, innovative entrepreneurs, while in others they behaved like inert, inward-looking bureaucratic behemoths. This difference in the willingness to innovate and take risks was particularly pronounced across French and German parties, which is one reason (further reasons are listed in the introduction) that I concentrate my analysis on these two countries. Interestingly enough, the centrality of parties and their entrepreneurialism increasingly emerge as themes in the analysis of postcommunist societies; thus, we might indeed learn a few lessons from history.

While history inspired this book, it did not readily divulge compelling explanations. Many strictly historical explanations were either unnecessarily exceptionalist or complex in accounting for the differing innovativeness of parties and the varying leverage they offered societal groups. On this front, the vast American literature on Congress and its rapidly growing comparative offspring provided invaluable insights. It gratifyingly integrates formal institutional analysis with rational choice models and provides extremely compelling and empirically thoroughly tested accounts of how formal representative institutions structure the choices of political actors. This literature provided the indispensable theoretical road map for piecing together the innumerable but highly scattered references about political institutions made by historical monographs. Once these institutional fragments were linked together, it became apparent that institutional incentives were key for explaining the varying innovativeness of parties.

These efforts to trespass back and forth between history and political science would not have been possible were it not for the support that I received from many different sources. I obtained generous financial support from the Canadian Social Science Council, Canadian Institute for Peace and Security Studies, Columbia University, DAAD (German Academic Exchange), Council for European Studies, Mellon Foundation, and Institute for Human Sciences (Vienna, and Villanova University). The MTA's Capital Improvement Funds are to be thanked for restoring the tracks and rolling stock of New York subways to the point where I could actually get some work done on my daily rides to and from Brooklyn.

I received intellectual advice and much-needed moral support from Mark Kesselman, Lisa Anderson, Jeffrey Olick, and Robert Paxton, who also generously served on my dissertation committee. I would like to thank Chuck Myers, Kevin Rennells, and Eric Dahl for their help in preparing the final manuscript. Mark Lichbach, in turn, used all his intellectual breadth to situate the argument more comfortably in the different theoretical literatures from which it draws. Mark Zacher kindly and persistently nudged me to get done and reminded me that scholarship is equal parts perspiration and inspiration. I counted 20 singled-spaced pages of comments I received over the years from anonymous referees. The best way I can thank them is to point out that their comments delayed the manuscript's completion by over two years. Were it not for their many small and large criticisms, this would have been a different book. Thanks also to Comparative Politics for permission to reprint parts of "Electoral Institutions, Political Organization, and Party Development: French and German Socialists and Mass Politics," vol. 30, no. 3 (April 1998): 273–92, and Social Science History for permission to reprint "Money, Votes, and Political Leverage: Explaining Electoral Performance of Liberals in Interwar France and Germany," vol. 23, no. 2 (summer 1999): 211–40.

In navigating the perilous waters of interdisciplinary scholarship, support was of first difficulty to find but ultimately all the more generous and rewarding. Stathis Kalyvas had just traveled these difficult waters and shared his lessons as well as recommendations of first-rate Mediterranean restaurants. As a long-standing and accomplished practitioner of historically grounded social science, Ira Katznelson reassured me that doing history is not only okay but also of profound intellectual significance. Finally, the comments of Peggy Anderson were unrivaled in their insightfulness, subtlety, and above all thoroughness. They helped retrieve insights from muddled passages that even I could no longer retrace; they added invaluable historical nuances; and their wit and kindness always served as a welcome morale booster. Maybe her generous style of commenting explains why it has been such a pleasure to read the works of her fellow historians.

Books rest on more than just financial patrons and intellectual mentors. The interest and perseverance propelling this endeavor would have been unthinkable without my parents, Harald and Edda Kreuzer. I owe them deeply for their constant encouragement, persistent support, and early reminder that intellectual curiosity has payoffs far more rewarding
and lasting than even the most lavish Wall Street salary. My wife, Pam Loughman, on the other hand, deserves credit for her gentle insistence that I periodically ignore my work and appreciate the other joys of life—a task recently made easier by the arrival of Lucas and Julia. As my editor in chief, Pam helped guide me through more than just the stylistic complexities of the English language.

### Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADGB</td>
<td>Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerktschaftsbund General Federation of German Trade Unions</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Action libérale populaire Liberal Popular Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANR</td>
<td>Association nationale républicaine National Republican Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BdL</td>
<td>Bund der Landwirte Agrarian League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BVP</td>
<td>Bayerische Volkspartei Bavarian People’s Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGT</td>
<td>Confédération générale du travail General Confederation of Labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNBLP</td>
<td>Christlich-Nationale Bauern- und Landvolkpartei Christian-National Peasants’ and Farmers’ Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>DDP</td>
<td>Deutsche Demokratische Partei German Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNVP</td>
<td>Deutschnationalen Volkspartei German National People’s Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DVP</td>
<td>Deutsche Volkspartei German People’s Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPD</td>
<td>Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands German Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KVP</td>
<td>Konservative Volkspartei Conservative People’s Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSDAP</td>
<td>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei National Socialist German Workers’ Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCF</td>
<td>Parti communiste français French Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDP</td>
<td>Parti démocrate populaire Democratic Popular Party</td>
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Introduction: History, Politics, and Institutions

At the turn of the century Max Weber, Moishe Ostrogorski, and Robert Michels observed the rapid growth of parties and prophesied that their inertia would obstruct democratization. Half a century later, E. E. Schattschneider, Joseph Schumpeter, Maurice Duverger, and Giovanni Sartori argued that modern democracy had indeed become party democracy but that it owed its democratic qualities to the innovativeness and entrepreneurialism of parties. This reversal, from viewing parties as bureaucratic behemoths that endanger democracy to regarding them as responsive entrepreneurs advancing democracy, underscores the close but little-studied relationship between political innovation, party development, and democratic performance. The question of how parties became risk-taking entrepreneurs contributing to the development of democracy is an eminently historical one, which explains why it has received little attention from political scientists. Political scientists primarily study parties in established, Western democracies, where they already behave like innovative, voter-oriented entrepreneurs. This ahistorical perspective means that insufficient attention is paid to factors facilitating and impeding the erstwhile advent of entrepreneurial parties so central for the proper functioning of democracy.

France and Germany provide two special opportunities for studying the development of competitive parties. Since the late nineteenth century, their political histories have been significantly shaped by political parties and their deficiencies. French and German parties are accused of having impeded democratization by having been undisciplined, doctrinaire, controlled by economic interest groups, autocratic, and unable to govern. These indictments add up to a more general failure of parties to innovate and properly translate voter preferences into policy outcomes. Furthermore, France and Germany provide a central clue for what shapes the development of entrepreneurial parties. In rebuilding their democracies
after 1945, German and French politicians agreed that the ineffectiveness of parties had undermined their interwar democracies and that their ineffectiveness could be traced to poorly designed electoral and parliamentary procedures. They recognized that it was not just parties that affected democracy but that the particular constitutional configuration of democracy also influenced the proper functioning of parties. They consequently set out to re-engineer parties by changing the constitutional environment under which they operate (Williams 1958; Fromme 1960; Oberreuter 1990). The insight that politicians gained after 1945 from the malfunctioning of interwar parties was not available to politicians in 1870–71 when France and Germany introduced universal male suffrage and when parties in the modern sense did not yet exist. The absence of any ex ante knowledge about the effects of institutions on parties only made these effects more open-ended and hence significant (Schanbacher 1982; Albertini 1961; Duverger and Seurin 1955).

Unlike political scientists, historians have analyzed the link between institutional design, the innovative capacity of parties, and democratic performance. They are attentive to these three elements and weave them into their larger historical narratives. Despite this attention, the causal interconnections between these three elements are insufficiently explained. Existing historiography is characterized by a peculiar disjuncture. On the one hand, innumerable party monographs and electoral histories provide highly particularistic accounts of how institutional and noninstitutional factors affect the internal politics and development of parties. Unfortunately, these studies do not systematically analyze the effects of institutions, nor do they pay specific attention to the role parties play, in the two countries’ democratic performance. On the other hand, macrohistorical accounts in the form of either national histories or cross-national comparisons engage the issue of democratization but often view parties as epiphenomenological proxies of large-scale, sociohistorical forces. They treat parties as organizationally undifferentiated, single unitary actors that are unaffected by institutions. Neither historical perspective explicitly studies how institutions structure the internal decision making of parties and thereby affect their capacity to innovate and respond to changes in their political environments.

The notable exception is the work undertaken by Ferdinand Hermens in the 1940s and 1950s. Yet he attributed Weimar’s collapse so single-mindedly to its electoral system that subsequent scholars found it difficult to look beyond his institutional reductionism and give due consideration to his more valuable insights (Hermens 1941). This state of affairs is regrettable for three reasons. First, advances in the study of electoral systems allow us to place Hermens’s argument on a much firmer and more differentiated theoretical basis, while 50 years of extensive historical research now permits a methodologically self-conscious comparative analysis. Second, democratic transitions in Eastern Europe and Latin America have put the role of parties during democratic consolidation back on the scholarly agenda (Mainwaring and Scully 1995). Third, recent debates in French and German historiography have questioned previous exceptionalist accounts (Blackbourn and Eley 1984; Passmore 1993; Russo 1991). The explicit comparison of parties and electoral politics in both countries will help to differentiate similar and dissimilar elements within this subplot of French and German history.

The Puzzle: Similar Historical Contexts, Different Political Consequences

Conceptually, this study hinges on a comparison of how French and German parties responded to changing historical circumstances. And innovation will be evaluated in terms of how readily parties adapted themselves to four sets of historical circumstances: mass politics, interwar economic crisis, electoral volatility, and fragmentation. A quick review of these four circumstances underscores the rationale for comparing French and German parties. It also demonstrates that despite their similar deficiencies, German parties proved even less entrepreneurial than their French counterparts.

Mass politics constituted the most significant and enduring factor challenging French and German parties. It was set in motion by universal male suffrage and the industrialization that transformed the social and organizational basis of electoral politics. Mass politics confronted French and German parties with similar exigencies for modernizing their organizations, political platforms, and campaigning styles. Before 1914, French and German parties responded to these exigencies in similar ways by establishing effective national organizations, articulating distinct ideological profiles, and becoming increasingly entrepreneurial in their electioneering strategies. After 1918, however, French and German parties responded in a strikingly different manner to the continued challenges of mass politics. Germany’s established parties—the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (German Social Democratic Party, SPD), Deutsche Demokratische
Partei (German Democratic Party, DDP), Deutsche Volkspartei (German People’s Party, DVP) and Deutschnationale Volkspartei (German National People’s Party, DNVP) became far more inert than before 1914. Their programs became more dogmatic, their organizations increasingly bureaucratized and less participatory, and their campaigning style less innovative and entrepreneurial. Conversely, France’s established parties—Section française de l’internationale ouvrière (French Socialist Party, SFIO), Parti radical (Radical Party), and Union républicaine démocratique (Republican Democratic Union, URD)—continued along their pre-1914 trajectory. They debated and periodically reformed their electoral platforms, expanded their organizations without lessening grassroots involvement, and modernized their electioneering strategies.

Economic turmoil in the interwar years constituted a second challenge confronting parties. The French and German interwar economies were highly volatile and rocked by a series of economic crises. These crises politicized economic issues on an unprecedented scale, posing a short-term programmatic challenge for parties that interacted with the long-term effects of mass politics on their ideological development. The postwar inflation raised troubling questions for liberals of how to reconcile their deflationary orthodoxy with the need to minimize its unequal distributional consequences. The Great Depression confronted socialists with the challenge of rethinking their Marxist orthodoxies and adopting new Keynesian policies that promised to alleviate unemployment. And the agricultural crisis compelled conservatives to reconsider their objections to rural relief programs. I do not deny that the problems in the economy, in foreign policy, and in legitimacy were much greater for a defeated Germany with a changed regime than for a victorious France with an unchanged constitution. Nevertheless, these well-known differences should not obscure others that are often missed: French parties readily modified their agendas, organizations, and electioneering practices while German parties failed to adapt theirs.

Throughout the book, the innovative capacity of parties is assessed primarily in terms of their responses to mass politics and to the interwar economic crisis. I would like to supplement this historical benchmark with a few aggregate, quantitative measures, presented in Table 1. Volatility and fragmentation are used as proxy indicators for the constraints interwar historical contingencies imposed on parties. Electoral continuity, polarization, breakaway parties, and start-up parties, in turn, are meant to express how innovatively parties responded to these constraints.

Electoral volatility measures the vote shifting between parties. It can be viewed as a proxy measure for various short-term historical circumstances destabilizing voter allegiances. Table 1 shows that France’s interwar volatility of 13.7 percent and Germany’s of 17.8 percent were both considerably higher than the European average of 9.9 percent for the same period. Yet while French and German voters both frequently shifted their allegiances, they realigned themselves in very different ways. These different realignment patterns manifest themselves in the electoral continuity of established parties and the vote share of extremist parties (i.e., polarization). These patterns can serve as a measure for the adaptiveness of parties. French voters switched between established parties. In the last interwar election, in 1936, France’s established parties managed to maintain 88.2 percent of the seats they had won in the first interwar election. They also lost only a modest amount of their parliamentary strength to extremist parties, which won on average only 5.1 percent of the seats. The ability of France’s established parties to woo each other’s voters assured the electoral continuity and limited polarization and ultimately can be taken as an indicator of their innovativeness. Germany’s unsettled voters, on the other hand, defected at ever increasing rates from established parties beginning already in 1924 (Jones 1988). By 1932, Weimar’s older, established parties,

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<td>Third Republic</td>
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<td>Realignment patterns</td>
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<td>Volatility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continuity of established parties\a</td>
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<td>Seat share of extremist parties\b</td>
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<td>Fragmentation patterns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effective number of parliamentary parties</td>
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<td>Breakaway parties\c</td>
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<td>Start-up parties\c</td>
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Source: Faller, Lindenberger, and Schuman (1986); M. Schlesinger (1989, 45, appendix); Bartolini and Mair (1990, appendix).

\a Calculated as seats won in last election as percentage of seats won in first election. In Weimar, results were used for first election and 1932 results for last election. The average given is based on DDP, DVP, SPD, and DNVP. The average increase to 49.6% if the Zentrum and BVP are included.

\b Classified as extremists in Germany, KPD, USPD, NSDAP, DVFP, and DNVP (after 1930); in France, PCF, Parti d’unité prolétarienne, Parti social français (PSF) (after 1936), Parti agraire.

\c Only counting parties winning at least one seat. Breakaways are formed through defections from existing parties, whereas start-up parties are formed de novo.
which had founded the Republic, retained only 44.3 percent of their original parliamentary strength in 1919. They also lost a disproportionate amount of their support to extremist parties like the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (German Communist Party, KPD) and the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' Party, NSDAP). The polarization became particularly striking after 1930, when extremist parties won on average 54.4 percent of the votes, compared to only 14 percent before 1929. The dramatic electoral loss of Weimar's established parties provides a measure for their ossification and inability to compete with new start-up parties.

Fragmentation provides another measure of historical contingencies capturing especially societal cleavages. It is a somewhat imperfect measure of historical circumstances because the number of parties also is determined by institutional constraints. Yet fragmentation still is worth a brief consideration, because the type of fragmentation we can observe—factionalism or segmentation—provides insights into how intransigent and risk-averse actors are in dealing with each other. According to Laakso and Taagepera's measure of effective number of parties (N_e), both party systems displayed extremely high levels of fragmentation. The magnitude of France's 7.2 parties and Weimar's 6.0 parties becomes apparent when compared to the N_e 2.4 that Taagepera and Shugart report for 44 democracies in the early 1980s (1989, 83–84). France's and Germany's high levels of fragmentation, however, mask two very different types of fragmentation.

The French fragmentation can be described as fluid factionalism. It was characterized by weakly cohesive parties that permitted ambitious politicians to advance their political careers by setting up their own parties. Of France's 19 new interwar parties, 14 formed as breakaways from existing parties. The other five parties, in turn, were start-ups formed entirely de novo. These start-up parties were even more insignificant and ephemeral than many breakaway parties. What offset the brittle quality of the French party system, however, were the frequently changing electoral alliances like the Bloc national, Union nationale, Cartel des gauches, or Front populaire, through which parties cooperated. In this context, factionalism thus attests to the entrepreneurialism of French politicians.

German fragmentation, on the other hand, resembled rigid segmentation. The eight breakaway parties were far less numerous than in France and were mostly the result of expulsions (four out of eight) rather than politically ambitious faction leaders. Weimar also had a slightly higher number of start-up parties (eight) than France, which, moreover, won a far greater share of the votes. Parties like the Wirtschaftspartei, the Landbund, the Volksrechtspartei, and above all the NSDAP were significantly larger than any of their French counterparts. Weimar parties also engaged in little electoral cooperation, since it was not necessary under proportional representation (PR). Michaela Richter nicely captures this segmentation when characterizing Weimar parties as pursuing "mobilization strategies which aimed both to create strong 'boundaries' around their constituencies and to develop a 'siege mentality' among their supporters. ... The point ... was less to mobilize hitherto untapped sources of support than to ensure the absolute loyalty and solidarity of a party's traditional electoral base" (1986, 120). Segmentation underscores the intransigence and ideological rigidity of German politicians, especially for incumbent politicians. This inflexibility reflected timidity, risk aversion, and lack of imagination much more than it did deeply held political passions and principles.

French and German parties thus differed fundamentally in their innovative capacity, especially after 1918. This difference played a crucial role for the distinct ways in which the two countries responded to mass politics, interwar economic turmoil, volatility, and fragmentation. We thus face the puzzling disjuncture between the fairly similar historical conditions shaping development of parties and the very different political consequences resulting from the parties' response to these conditions. Historical differences like Germany's lost war, regime change, or severe economic depression account for some variance in the two countries' political performance, but, as subsequent chapters show, they cannot account for all or even most of it. If anything, with Germany's final democratization in 1918, the two countries became even more alike at the same time as the innovative capacity of their parties diverged more than ever.

The principal explanation can be found in how electoral mechanisms structure a politician's three principal activities: securing a candidacy, mobilizing resources, and winning votes. Elections are among the most highly regulated of political activities, so we should expect the specific nature of these regulations to affect the collective actions of politicians inside parties, their relationships with economic interest groups, and their interaction with voters. In other words, electoral mechanisms affect the conduct of politicians at the pre-electoral stage, when they fight over nominations and court economic interest groups, as well as in the electoral marketplace, when they finally woo voters.

Moreover, electoral mechanisms provide a compelling starting point for explaining French and German party development. Both countries used the same double ballot system until 1918. Under this system, election
on the first ballot was possible for the candidate winning an absolute majority (greater than 50 percent). If no candidate obtained such a majority, elections were decided by a runoff ballot and plurality. After 1918, the Third Republic kept the double ballot system, whereas Weimar introduced one of the purest forms of PR ever designed. The empirical chapters (chapters 3 to 6) explain cross-national differences in the electoral fortunes of four sets of ideologically paired parties: socialists, liberals, conservatives, and fascists.

Legal provisions other than those found in the electoral law also affect how entrepreneurial a politician will be in carrying out his representative tasks. Executive-legislative relations, parliamentary committee structures, geographic divisions of power, constitutional review, and referenda are additional institutions that have to be analyzed to fully explain what historians call the national histories of interwar France and Germany or what political scientists label political systems or democratic performance. This book does not study such extra-electoral institutions and instead limits its analysis to the performance of individual parties within the electoral arena.

The electoral performance of individual parties arguably played a key role for the overall political stability of France and Germany, but the two should not automatically be equated. Explaining actions of individual parties tells us little about the legislative process, the role of bureaucrats and judges, or the hidden powers of the military and captains of industry. We therefore have to be careful before relating the effects of electoral institutions to the performance of entire political regimes. But their centrality has been widely recognized. The French prime minister Aristide Briand declared that the double ballot system had “rendered his country and its republic one of the largest services. It installed the regime and consolidated it” (cited in Cotteret 1960, 11). In Germany, in turn, the list of scholars and public commentators attributing Weimar’s woes to PR was long indeed. It even included Oswald Spengler, who added PR to his otherwise mostly metaphysical reasons for the decline of the Occident (Pollock 1932, 250).

In a decidedly less anecdotal fashion, the conclusion addresses how the focus on electoral politics affects our ability to draw more general insights for the performance of democracy in interwar France and Germany.

Combining Historical Narrative with Theoretical Generalizing

Social scientists generally see little virtue in adding historical context, perceiving it as pesky background noise standing in the way of edifying theo-

retical parsimony. The previous section, however, identified French and German party development as a historical phenomenon, without being too historical to preclude generalizations. It showed that we need an explanatory framework that incorporates the highly contingent forces pushing the development of parties forward while simultaneously providing a systematic account of how mechanical, transhistorical electoral procedures translated these historical forces into such different political outcomes. I will first elaborate the obstacles to such an interdisciplinary framework before specifying its particular variables.

The central obstacle to combining historical and social science research comes, I would suggest, from an overly strict observance of disciplinary boundaries. This intellectual segregation contributes to the respective disciplinary orthodoxies that an explanation has to conform in its entirety to either an idiomatic, interpretive logic or a generalizing, axiomatic one. Of course, many scholars do not subscribe to this disciplinary segregation and refuse to make uniform, undifferentiated theoretical claims for all the variables they employ. Nevertheless, the disciplinary divide is deep enough and common enough to require closer attention before a more ecumenical alternative is proposed.

Most political scientists have difficulties treating historical phenomena because they see themselves as primarily concerned with discerning the systematic from the random. As Sewell (1996, 258–59) points out, the commitment to generalize requires finding units of analysis, not unlike in the physical world, that are qualitatively equivalent and independent of chronologically prior events. These requirements make it difficult for political scientists to analyze phenomena that change through time or interact with sequentially prior events. Criticizing King, Keohane, and Verba for subscribing to such assumptions, Sidney Tarrow observes that “the function of qualitative [historical] research is not to peel away layers of non-systematic fluff from the hard core of systematic variables, but also to assist researchers to understand shifts in the value of systematic variables” (1995, 472). Tarrow makes an important point. King, Keohane, and Verba (1994, 101) come close to conceding Tarrow’s point in quoting O’Hear: “There may be no true universal theories, owing to conditions differing markedly through time and space; this is a possibility we cannot overlook. But even if this were so, science could still fulfill many of its aims in giving us knowledge and true predictions about conditions in and around our spatio-temporal niche.”

The assumption of operating within a temporal niche is perfectly suitable for analyzing many political phenomena, but it becomes problematic
when studying historical processes that extend across historical niches and whose chronological sequencing affects outcomes (Collier and Collier 1991, 27–39; Kiser 1996, 254). The assumption of time as a constant even permeates the work of historically minded social scientists. Skocpol (1979), North (1990), and Levi (1981), for example, consider something as historical because it occurred in the past and not because it extends through time (Sewell 1996). This neglect of time makes it difficult to differentiate between meaningful sounds in the historical background, which matter, and ahistorical background noise, which is genuinely irrelevant. Mass politics, for example, indisputably influenced party development, yet political scientists would treat it as a historical, nonsystematic factor, something as random as the eye color of voters. This disregard for time may be attributable to an overextended analogy between the physical world (where the theoretical models originate) and the social world (where they are applied). Morris Cohen captured this point when observing that “if we have the mechanical or physical coordinates of a body or physical system, we do not need to inquire into its past history to determine its future course. . . . Organic [i.e., societal] phenomena are not so independent of time. A tree bears the evidence of an injury to it a century ago when it was a young shoot” (Cohen 1947, 118). Cohen’s point that the past has an even more persistent and unchangeable influence on society than on inanimate nature is pertinent for articulating a theoretical framework suitable for explaining party development.

Historians, on the other hand, are interested in explaining historical persons, events, and changes within structures, rather than identifying general phenomena, which precludes them from observing systematic regularities. The historian’s subject matter thus has the exact opposite properties of cases: they are unique (hence lacking any possible equivalence) and are linked to chronologically prior events (thus incapable of ever being independent). Historians’ interest in the historically embedded prevents them from observing possible regularities across space. The neglect of such a possibility frequently produces exceptionalist explanations that risk overestimating historical particularities and neglecting the systematic, cross-national factors. King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) are correct in pointing out that such historical and qualitative research frequently lacks the methodological self-consciousness necessary to increase confidence in exceptionalist claims.

Having indicated the limitations of historical analysis, however, it is important to resist the all-too-common and highly unfortunate canard that historians, by virtue of not pursuing lawlike generalizations, engage in mere storytelling. This haughty caricature overlooks the fact that historians pursue distinct explanatory objectives that go well beyond recounting just “one damn thing after another” (H. A. L. Fisher, cited in Burnham 1994, 59). Historiographical debates, for example, about the origins of fascism concern themselves with generalizing about chronological proximity and sequencing of historical events to a particular outcome. To what degree was Nazism the product of the Protestant Church’s subordination to the state in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the failed “bourgeois revolution” in the nineteenth century, the Great Depression in the twentieth century, or the particular sequencing of these and other events? Historians focus on the chronological rather than spatial regularities. They generalize along the durable-transient continuum rather than the systematic-random. They are concerned with historical continuities and discontinuities, periodization, or what we social scientists call path dependence. Historical research takes place at the edges of temporal niches to see when qualitative changes over time amount to a change in kind (i.e., mark a genuine disjuncture or period). Or it takes place across temporal niches to investigate whether or how long the causal impact of specific events extends through time. In either case, historians display a concern for the very temporal regularities and irregularities that social scientists ignore. If historians can be said to own a variable, it would be time.

Historical and social scientific research thus clearly conform to distinct explanatory logics whose respective strengths nicely complement each other. I therefore pursue a more ecumenical course that involves two steps. First, I relax the assumption that an explanation has to conform in its entirety to a single explanatory logic. Rather than tarring all variables with the same broad epistemological brush, I ascribe distinct explanatory specifications to individual variables. I assign an axiomatic, generalizing logic to institutions and agency (e.g., actors defined as rational utility maximizers) and attribute a narrative logic to socioeconomic developments and political events. As the next section demonstrates, this strategy rests on the assumption that agency and institutions are less time-sensitive and more static variables than socioeconomic/political events and consequently more amenable to generalizations.

Second, I configure the individual variables into a joint explanatory framework. The goal of this framework is not to produce lawlike, predictive generalizations that would themselves be sufficient for explaining party development (Katzenelson 1997; Lichbach 1997). The impact of
historical factors on party development makes such an objective impossible. Instead, these generalizations most closely correspond to what economic sociologists and cognitive psychologists term analysis of causal mechanisms (Elster 1989; Hedström and Swedberg 1998a, 1998b). "To explain an event . . . takes the form of citing an earlier event as the cause of the event we want to explain together with some account of the causal mechanism connecting the two events" (Elster 1989, 3). In this case, the psychological properties of agents making decisions and the mechanical incentives of electoral mechanisms will provide the causal mechanisms for explaining why French and German politicians responded differently to socioeconomic changes and political events whose similarity has been underestimated. In other words, they will provide a systematic account for how mass politics, electoral volatility, and levels of fragmentation were translated into such different organizational trajectories, polarization and realignment patterns, and types of fragmentation.

Theoretical Potential of Different Variables

Specifying different explanatory logics for individual variables rests on the assumption that variables have distinct properties and that these properties affect their potential to either generalize across space or account for change across time. It therefore is necessary to elaborate on the static, "transhistorical" and hence generalizable qualities of agency and institutions and the dynamic, historical and mutable characteristics of socioeconomic factors.

Rational choice theorists have demonstrated the enormous theoretical potential of agency. In focusing on utility maximization, they have identified a psychological constant with recurring and hence generalizable properties. Rational choice theorists focusing on electoral politics have identified the benefits of office holding (i.e., prestige, income, policy influence, career advancement) as discrete, readily identifiable, and largely unchanging goals that politicians seek to maximize (Downs 1957; Mayhew 1974; J. Schlesinger 1975). Utility maximization and office seeking are theoretical constructs that are, of course, not immutable constants and are not entirely autonomous from historical circumstances (Monroe 1991; Tsebelis 1990, 31-36; Simon 1985). They constitute, however, a realistic empirical approximation of electoral politics from the late nineteenth century onward. Historians, following contemporaries like Michels, Weber, and Ostrogorski, discuss the advent of political careerism and profession-alism during this period. As the first chapter will show, office-seeking politicians did not emerge instantaneously and uniformly across the political spectrum. Nevertheless, from the 1890s onward, there was a significant behavioral convergence of politicians around the self-interested, office-seeking model discussed by rational choice theorists.

Agency alone, however, is insufficient for explaining French and German party development. While politicians might all be utility maximizers and office seekers, they still differ with regard to various nonpsychological factors. They differ in their resources, levels of information, and organizational cohesion. Variance across such nonpsychological endowments underscores that politicians act in highly contingent economic, technological, and organizational contexts. Overlooking an actor's context inevitably yields "undersocialized," "underinstitutionalized," and purely static explanations (Granovetter 1985; Taylor 1993). Put differently, without configuring agency with institutional and socioeconomic variables, it would be impossible to assign probabilities to the payoffs politicians seek to realize.

As a variable, political institutions closely resemble agency. Their mechanical properties create consistent and recurring incentives and constraints that are constant even across "temporal niches." Their constitutional status assures institutions' considerable durability and provides them with a degree of formalism that makes them analytically discrete and readily identifiable. There are few reasons to assume that the incentives and constraints of electoral mechanisms have changed since the turn of the century. Historical monographs from the interwar period, for example, report numerous complaints by politicians about the constraints that electoral procedures imposed on them. This anecdotal evidence is very consistent with the institutional effects that the literature on electoral systems has demonstrated across countries (Rae 1967; Taagepera and Shugart 1989; Lijphart 1994; Cox 1997).

Yet, just like agency, institutions alone are insufficient for explaining party development. The ultimate, political consequences of institutional constraints depend on their interaction with noninstitutional factors. A candidate's resources, for example, influence the degree to which logistical requirements created by electoral mechanisms will constrain his actions. Institutions interact with purposive actors and historically contingent factors. Overlooking the interaction between institutions and agents yields overinstitutionalized explanations, while neglecting the interaction between institutions and historical factors leads to static explanations.
This dual reductionism is particularly pronounced in the literature on electoral systems, which correlates the number of parties, their parliamentary size, or any other quantifiable outcome with various electoral mechanisms. Socioeconomic and political factors lack the durable and recurring properties that would make them amenable to the kind of theorizing undertaken by rational choice and institutional theorists. Class structures, economic conditions, wars, or political crises are dynamic and historical variables that either do not repeat themselves or change over time. These factors differ markedly today from the turn of the century and even changed during the period of our analysis. They lack anything equivalent to the mechanical properties or psychological constants of the other two variables. Furthermore, socioeconomic and political factors are analytically less discrete and identifiable than institutions. Institutional taxonomies, for example, are far less controversial than occupational categorizations.

Yet, for all their theoretical limitations, socioeconomic and political factors are enormously important in explaining French and German party development. Historians and political observers around the turn of the century widely agreed that socioeconomic changes as well as political events like the First World War transformed notable politics into mass politics and constituted a profound structural and qualitative transformation of electoral politics. Such changes made voters less deferential, shifted the relative distribution of resources, and transformed voter preferences. They are crucial for understanding the different historical opportunities to which politicians responded.

While socioeconomic and political factors provide the crucial dynamic that is missing in rational choice models or institutional explanations, they too are insufficient for explaining party development (Sartori 1969). They played a crucial role in inducing, without causing, the organizational trajectories and realignment patterns of French and German parties. They do not provide a “rock bottom” or “ultimate explanation” of party development but only account for the possibility of its occurrence (Taylor 1993, 91–92). Socioeconomic factors cannot explain outcomes but help to “cut down the feasible set of abstractly possible courses of action and reduce it to a vastly smaller subset of feasible actions” (Elster, cited in Cohen 1994, 9). Furthermore, a purely socioeconomic explanation runs the risk of stressing historical contingencies to the point of producing exceptionalist explanations. It therefore is important to check for possible regularities across time and space to avoid the geographic and temporal reductionism that characterizes exceptionalist explanations.

Research Design and Different Case Configurations

To explore fully the theoretical potential of agency and institutions requires close attention to methodological considerations. The central goal of every research design is to maximize the confidence that the explanatory variables actually cause the outcomes observed on the dependent variable. This general goal raises specific methodological issues when applied to qualitative research based on few cases ("small N"), such as is undertaken in this book. King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) identify three possible sources of biased inferences: selection of cases, endogeneity, and omitted variables. I briefly discuss how these three problems are addressed.

Selection Bias. The selection of cases on the dependent variable is a common source of bias in qualitative research. The small number of cases prevents random or large N sampling. Qualitative research also is often problem-driven, leading investigators to select cases that have a particular outcome in common. Such case selection creates a bias by eliminating variance on the dependent variable, which is necessary to actually observe the causal effects of the independent variable (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 128–48). I seek to avoid such selection bias by choosing my cases on the independent variable and truncating French and German party development into two historical periods (1870–1914 and 1918–1933/39). This strategy assures variance on the independent variable (i.e., PR versus double ballot) and on the dependent variable (i.e., different historical contexts, organizational trajectories, fragmentation, and realignment patterns).

Endogeneity Bias. Endogeneity, in turn, refers to inferences that are biased by wrongly estimating the causal direction. Endogeneity bias occurs when the dependent variable has a feedback effect on the independent variable or when the independent variable subsumes factors that are causally prior (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 187–205). Fortunately, King, Keohane, and Verba illustrate this problem with Weimar's fragmented party system. They point out that the common attribution of this fragmentation to the permissive effects of its PR system overlooks that Germany's fragmented society led to the adoption of PR in the first place (1994, 189–90). Thus, it was societal cleavages that caused party fragmen-
This example illustrates the larger point that the choice of institutions is first of all a political process in which the multiplicity of institutional effects, goals other than vote maximizing, and insufficient information shape the institutional choices far more than societal cleavages (Shvetsova 1998). The choice of institutions therefore is sufficiently indeterminate to establish that their causal effects are independent of causally prior factors. In a similar vein, Ellen Immergut observed that the “origins of institutions are chronologically independent from the actors and their strategies. That is, institutions are constraints created by political actors engaged in a struggle for power. However, the actors that participate in the battles over institutional design are only rarely identical to those that participate in later policy conflicts. Thus the view that institutions are somehow concealed societal structures is not especially helpful” (1992, 85).

Omitted Variable Bias. The most serious source of biased inferences is the omission of variables that are causally significant. This omitted variable bias also is referred to as the issue of controlling for alternative variables (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 168–84). Failure to address it leaves a high degree of uncertainty over whether connections “between dependent and independent variables ... suggest only association but not cause” (Laityn, cited in Kalyvas 1996, 15). The omitted variable bias also creates a particularly thorny problem for explanations incorporating temporal variables. I address this source of bias by multiplying the number of cases and configuring them into sets of comparisons that try to reduce bias resulting from omitted systematic variables as well as historical events.

For simplicity’s sake, I so far have equated case with country. This is common practice even though there are many other ways to specify a case. Ragin rightly argues that “the term case and the various terms linked to the idea of case analysis are not well defined in social science” (1992, 1). The subsequent analysis disaggregates each country into four actors—socialists, liberals, conservatives, and fascists—and two time periods, 1870–1914 and 1918–1933/39. One case therefore becomes one party during a time period. This case specification makes sense since I am interested in the development of individual parties over time. It also increases the number of cases and permits three different sets of comparisons.

Before continuing with my different case configurations, I need to briefly digress and explain why the Catholic Zentrum (Center party) is not included in this study. Its omission could be considered by many as bias-
ing inferences, especially since it was the largest party in the German Empire and remained one of the three largest in the Weimar Republic. It principally has been excluded because there is no comparable party in France. On two occasions, French Catholics formed a clerical party. In 1902, Jacques Piou founded the Action libérale populaire (Liberal Popular Action, ALP), and conservative deputies created in 1928 the Parti démocrate populaire (Democratic Popular Party, PDP) (Delbreil 1990; Le Béguin 1992: 43–45). These parties are not comparable with the Zentrum since the ALP quickly floundered and the PDP never won more than a handful of seats. Kalyvas (1996) provides an interesting explanation for the failure of clerical parties in France. The Zentrum also cannot be reclassified as a conservative or liberal party, given its confessional nature and cross-class support. In short, the Zentrum was a distinct feature of the German party landscape, and this raises the question of how its omission skews the analysis of other German parties.

The exclusion of the Zentrum creates two potential problems for my argument. First, many traditional explanations contend that the prominence of Germany’s confessional divide significantly contributed to the rigid segmentation of parties and their lack of entrepreneurialism (Lepsius 1973). They consequently would fault mine for spuriously attributing the risk taking of parties to institutional incentives rather than the constraints imposed by Germany’s religious cleavage. I would contend that the confessional divide made the German political landscape more fluid by introducing a cultural dimension that cut across the constitutional, regional, and economic divides. In the early 1870s, for example, anticlericalism formed the basis for cooperation between liberals and Protestant conservatives. This cooperation softened the economic and constitutional issues that otherwise divided these two groups. From the late 1870s onward, the Center party emerged from its isolation during the Kulturkampf and became the quintessential swing party. Generally, it aligned itself with conservatives on economic and social policy issues and with Progressives and even Socialists on civil rights and military matters (Craig 1978, 57, 97, 279). The Zentrum widened the alliance possibilities and required German politicians to engage in intricate strategic maneuvering. It thereby added to the entrepreneurialism of German politicians rather than subtracted from it.

Second, various historians argue that the Zentrum’s very size and role as a swing party make it a key element for understanding the performance of the Weimar Republic. Jürgen Falter (1991) and others have shown that religion was the strongest predictor of the Nazi vote, with Protestants far more likely than Catholics to support Hitler. John Zeender (1963) demonstrated that the refusal of Bavarian Catholics, who broke away in 1919–20 to form the Bayerische Volkspartei (Bavarian People’s Party, BVP)—a Bavarian Zentrum—to vote for the Zentrum’s candidate, Wilhelm Marx, prevented his defeat of Hindenburg. Such explanations implicitly fault mine for overlooking how the Zentrum affected the strategic interdependence of parties and thereby shaped the dynamic of the German party system. This criticism overlooks that my analysis focuses on electoral and pre-electoral activities of individual parties, where the strategic interdependence of parties is far smaller than in post-electoral activities like coalition formation, legislative bargaining, and cooperation among different branches of government. The Zentrum, for example, had no discernible impact on how other parties recruited candidates and mobilized resources. And its influence on other parties’ vote getting was arguably limited. In the Weimar Republic, the Catholic vote was regionally concentrated and highly loyal. The Zentrum won vote shares greater than 21 percent in 13 out of 35 electoral districts (37 percent), 11–20 percent shares in 4 districts (8 percent), and less than 10 percent shares in 18 districts (51 percent). In electoral terms, therefore, the Zentrum was less a swing party than it was either a dominant party in Catholic districts or a minor party in Protestant ones.

With the omission of the Zentrum, the book’s first case configuration consists of pairing socialist, liberal, conservative, and fascist parties in both countries. This pairwise, cross-national comparison amounts to a most similar system design, since each set of parties shares many important historical and socioeconomic characteristics (Przeworski and Teune 1970, 32–35). These paired parties are not identical, but they are more similar than socialist, liberal, conservative, and fascist parties within each country. The most similar system design of chapters 3 to 6 controls the variance of socioeconomic and political factors and hence minimizes the bias from their omission.

The second case configuration pairs individual parties across the two time periods. Such a comparison is not possible for fascist movements, since they only emerged after 1918. Chapter 1 provides the historical baseline by describing the organizational trajectories of parties between 1870–71 and 1914. Against this baseline, chapters 3 to 5 identify continuities and discontinuities in the development of parties. This longitudinal comparison also can be considered a most similar research design because it pairs the same party in the same national context but varies their histor-
comparisons of socialists, liberals, conservatives, and fascists. Chapter 6 deports somewhat from earlier ones by shifting attention from established parties to newly emerging fascist movements. This shift entails a slight change in the issues under consideration. As political newcomers, fascists had to be highly entrepreneurial and far less prone to the inertia and ossification of established parties. Their principal challenge instead consisted in making the transition from an extra-institutional social movement to an institutionalized political party. To explain how electoral institutions structured this transformation, chapter 6 adds a brief modification of the theoretical argument laid out in chapter 2.

Finally, the conclusion addresses two outstanding issues. It looks more closely at the interaction between transhistorical institutions and historical contingencies and draws tentative conclusions about the circumstances under which their respective importance varies. It also clarifies what inferences can be drawn for French and German overall political development from a study mostly focusing on the electoral and pre-electoral activities of politicians.