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# When Parties Prosper: The Uses of Electoral Success

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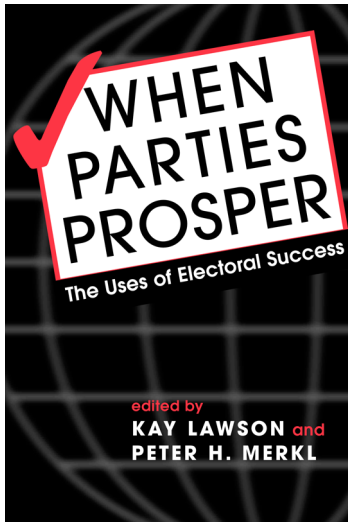



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# Contents

# 1 Political Parties in the Twenty-First Century

KAY LAWSON AND PETER H. MERKL

Major changes in the world have changed the rules of the game of party politics, as well as the players and the arenas in which the game is played. New forms of communication and new ways to finance ever more expensive campaigns characterize the spread of globalization and domestic politics alike. New parties have proliferated, and older parties have come back to life by adding new leaders, new followers, new policies, and sometimes new names, even as they maintain strong links to the ideas and programs of the past.

Have these changes reversed what so many, ourselves included, once described as the decline of parties (Lawson and Merkl 1988)? Do they mean that parties are now prospering as never before? Perhaps, but then what does it mean for parties to prosper? Does it mean parties are now better able than ever to discover the popular will, incorporate that will into their programs, educate and guide, and ensure that public policy is consistent with the resources, needs, and hopes of those they represent? Are they working better than ever to enhance the workings of democracy, and the spread of democratization?

Or does the parties' new strength conceal new weaknesses as agencies of linkage? Are parties and party systems in fact continuing to decline, as voter abstention grows, as social movements and nongovernmental organizations take on more and more of their representative roles, and as special interest groups control the selection of their candidates and the agendas of those who win election? Has party renewal come at the cost of abandoning their supposed most essential functions: the aggregation and articulation of interests, and the selection and election of representatives with close links and strong ties to a popular base? Is their prosperity limited to the size of their campaign treasuries and the fortunes they make for their leaders and those they serve? We remain convinced that vital, resilient democracies are not possible without

strong, prosperous parties. Their obvious capacity for successful adaptation to the changes that have taken place is no doubt worth a few lapses, perhaps even to the extent of being willing to overlook some instances of corruption. But have they gone too far? Are they in fact now serving more as agencies of *de*democratization than of democratization?

Clearly the time has come to give the ongoing debate about whether or not political parties are still in decline—or quite the opposite—a more modern, more discriminating, and more realistic focus. In order to sort out what it means to prosper, we can begin with the recognition that the word "prosperity" may or not be synonymous with "success" in the world of party politics. Winning an election is a sign of success, of course, but then again some party or combination of parties wins every election that is not instantly overturned by the military. Gaining the right to govern is another sign of success, but so is the ability to join others who do so. Does a small party prosper when it gains a foothold, however small, in a coalition government, when it changes the outcome of the electoral battle between larger parties, or simply when it gains representation for a minority or keeps an unpopular ideology alive? On the other hand, how successful is a consistently winning party when it amasses power and wealth for itself and its major donors by choosing policy paths contrary to its campaign promises and the will of its followers? Can one kind of prosperity be gained at the cost of another? At the cost of democracy?

In keeping with our own past work, together and separately, we have chosen the method of comparative study to seek answers worthy of the complexity of these questions. *When Parties Prosper* relies on the ability of eighteen experts in a wide range of nations to address these and related questions in substantive and analytical depth, to provide historical context, but also to take a hard look at parties as they exist today, and to give us and the readers of this book their answers, clearly and straightforwardly.

We have organized their chapters by partisan identification: Part 1 addresses parties of the left, Part 2 addresses parties of the right, and Part 3 compares parties from both sides of the spectrum. We have chosen this plan in recognition of the fact that left-right identification is as important for organizations as for individuals. From the very beginning of party history, successful parties were those that overcame existing dominant structures (based on aristocratic, colonial, or corporate hegemony) by identifying and taking sides in the cleavages predominant among those who contested for power, and these cleavages were clearly identifiable in left-right partisan terms (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Rokkan 1970).

Thus, in Part 1 we begin with studies of prospering parties on the European left: Britain's New Labour Party (David McKay, Chapter 2), the Swedish Social Democrats (Tommy Möller, Chapter 3), and a comparative study of several Western European social democratic parties (William E. Paterson and James Sloam, Chapter 4). In all cases, we find that prosperity is strongly linked to a

careful edging away from socialist dogma, a careful co-optation of parts of the capitalistic order, and inevitably a growing difficulty in maintaining the support of their formerly most devoted followers.

It is also in Part 1 that we find the postcommunist left-wing parties or coalitions of Poland (Hieronim Kubiak, Chapter 5) and Lithuania (Algis Krupavičius, Chapter 6), organizations pulled together out of the remnants of old communist parties, mass organizations, military forces, and former bureaucracies, against the background of postcommunist chaos and anarchy. Their left-wing character sometimes seems more a reflection of distant and earlier communist campaigns against nationalism and clerical and feudal leftovers of 1945 than of any present anticapitalistic sentiments. However, once launched on the sea of democratization they must inexorably jettison some baggage and take on some unfamiliar passengers (and policies), modernizing their electoral strategies in order to achieve and maintain their own prosperity, even as they find themselves unable to keep the glorious promises of their new beginnings.

Concluding Part 1, Jorge Lanzaro (Chapter 7) demonstrates that the task of building a viable left-wing party after right-wing dictatorship can follow a similar path when that dictatorship has been military rather than communist. Leftist politicians in Uruguay also began their rise to electoral success by bringing together a coalition of left-wing forces long before right-wing dictatorship had fully come to an end, and they too are prospering by responding effectively to the catchall demands of democratic electioneering.

Prosperous parties on the right are the subject of Part 2. Long gone are the days when the conservative rhetoric of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan dominated the messages, if not always the actual policies, of most of the ruling parties of Europe. In Britain itself, the years of moderate conservative hegemony were followed by conservative fragmentation and strife, and similar patterns are found across the continent. But not throughout the world, and even in Europe some right-wing parties have overcome this tendency, as Frank Bösch (Chapter 8) shows to be the case for Germany's Christian Democrats. In this case, the renaissance has been brought about by many years of moderate consensus building involving business, agriculture, and the churches, plus the development of a program for governing that, if not instantly admired on the left, nonetheless avoided the kind of extreme polarization found in US politics during the same period of time.

The politicians working within Japan's Liberal Democratic Party are similarly allied with farmers, bureaucrats, bankers, and business, against a rather protean opposition, but Haruhiro Fukui (Chapter 9) helps us to see how the ability of this party to dole out its favors with blithe disregard for ideological purity or unity has placed it in a league of its own when it comes to maintaining party prosperity, despite years of rampant and undisguised corruption. Even when seeming at last to be really down-and-out, this party made a swift return to power. Fukui tells us how.

The four remaining studies of prosperous right-wing parties in Part 2 illustrate how varied are the paths to a measure of electoral success on the right-hand side of the ledger. Russia's Unity Party, the subject of Anatoly Kulik's analysis (Chapter 10), is in fact a party with no distinguishable ideology or policy of its own beyond offering support to a right-wing politician, an identity that makes it by far the most prosperous party in the nation. The various Mexican parties that Mark A. Martinez writes about (Chapter 11) all claim to serve the people (as what party does not?), but Martinez shows how even the most avowedly leftist of the three inadvertently gave aid and succor to the National Action Party, the business-oriented right-wing opposition to the corporatist right-wing Institutional Revolutionary Party, helping to bring it electoral success and the more callow forms of prosperity, licit and illicit, that traditionally accompany such success in that nation. It is a complicated but interestingly illustrative story about the seemingly unstoppable flow of power to the right in Mexico.

Israel's Shas party has, as Yael Yishai points out (Chapter 12), yet another modus operandi. It has no hope of becoming a party of government in the broader sense, but has every hope, in every election, of becoming *one* of the parties of almost any coalition the Israelis may patch together. Its religious ideology is on the right, but it seeks to serve that system of belief not by helping to guide government policy, even when incorporated into a ruling alliance, but rather by putting the wealth it gains from that government into the hands of those who most devoutly serve the mission it has set for itself.

Another small party whose prosperity is based on the role it takes—or periodically threatens to take—in determining electoral outcomes is the Independent Democratic Union of Chile. It is unambiguously right-wing, if indeed not far-right, with the requisite bourgeois-military backing, hints of unrepentant fascism, and firm commitment to neoliberal/libertarian economic preferences. Alfredo Joignant and Patricio Navia (Chapter 13) show how its power to maintain itself in the post–Augusto Pinochet era rests on the old-school ties of its leaders and their strong technocratic tradition, producing a combination of obedience and efficiency that still serves to bring them the votes of the other unregenerate supporters of a bloody legacy.

Part 3 consists of chapters written by authors who chose to compare ruling parties of the left and right in Italy (Gianfranco Pasquino, Chapter 14), France (Florence Haegel and Marc Lazar, Chapter 15), and the United States (Robin Kolodny, Chapter 16). In Italy, Forza Italia owes its success to a kind of establishment opportunism that has allowed the business classes and the media under Silvio Berlusconi to forge stable alliances with former neofascists (the Italian Social Movement, now renamed National Alliance) and the regionalist, far-right Lega Lombarda. But Forza Italia is also united by an abiding hatred of the labor unions, the former communists and socialists, and the leftist intelligentsia. On the left, the Democratic Socialists have managed to create the Olive

Tree coalition and come to power, but it has never had the easy capacity to jettison conflicting issue stances among its members and partners that Forza brings to the game of winning power. Indeed, there are those who say that only the embarrassment that Berlusconi's tactics and criminal indictments caused to Italians who were in touch with international opinion—and not the superior tactics or greater appeal of the Olive Tree—sufficed to tip the scales against Berlusconi at last.

France has also been characterized in recent years by a right-wing party, the Popular Movement Union, which is stronger than its main opponent on the left, the Socialist Party. But the constitutional possibility of "cohabitation" between a prime minister of one party and a president coming from the other has kept the two in closer balance than were the Italian left and right during the reign of Berlusconi. Furthermore, both sides suffer from continuous fragmentation, never more damning than when the Socialists lost the presidency in 2002 simply because they were so unable to make common cause with their putative allies on the left that they allowed extreme-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen to supplant their own candidate, Lionel Jospin, in the runoff. And this leads to a key point that Haegel and Lazar insist upon: that we must recognize that the kind of prosperity winnable by minority "antisystem" parties is very different from that of the major parties, but may, in certain circumstances, be no less significant for the direction that national politics will take.

The final chapter in Part 3 is, like the nation and the parties it studies, sui generis, dedicated as it is by Kolodny to analyzing why the Republican and Democratic Parties of the United States are the only US parties capable of attaining national power. The answer is both crystal-clear and largely unknown: it is the laws of the realm—of all fifty states as well as of the nation—that have so secured the duopoly of the monoliths. Can it ever be broken? And if so, what will be required to break it? Kolodny has taken the trouble to find out.

This rich and fascinating array of parties, and perspectives on what makes them prosperous, leaves us with far more than we could say in a single concluding chapter. Peter H. Merkl has chosen in Chapter 17 to concentrate on what we can deduce about how a party may become a party of government. Drawing from both his knowledge of other nations' politics and the cases discussed in this book, he considers the particular significance of coalitions, powerful minority parties, the reputation of being "a natural party of government," and successive autocracy and/or a meltdown of the preceding party system. On the whole, Merkl finds that today's parties serve the existing democracies as well as one can reasonably expect.

Kay Lawson is less sanguine. In Chapter 18 she suggests that parties all too frequently serve as agencies of dedemocratization. She lists four means that parties consistently employ to achieve lasting prosperity for themselves and their supporters—strengthening party leaders and central authority, policy centrism, self-protection by legal means against the possibility of meaningful opposition,

and outright corruption—and finds multiple examples of each throughout the chapters of this book. These practices, she argues, weaken and eventually remove the direct linkage between an active democratic citizenry and its government that parties are expected to provide, contributing to the growing autonomy of the rulers from the ruled. Which is to say: they dedemocratize.