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The Dynamics of Two-Party Politics

Party Structures and the
Management of Competition

Alan Ware

COMPARATIVE POLITICS

THE DYNAMICS OF TWO-PARTY POLITICS

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of Competition*

ALAN WARE

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For Villa Cretin and our friends

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Worcester College, Oxford University
September 2008

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Introduction

Since the publication of two famous books, written respectively by Ostrogorski and Michels, parties have been among the most intensively studied political institutions.¹ Over the course of the subsequent one hundred years, and especially during the last 50 years, much has been learnt about a number of aspects of parties: about their ideologies (and changes in those ideologies), about the transformation of party organizations over time (and the modified role now played by party members and activists), about the interactions of factions in particular parties, and so on. However, there is one important aspect of party activity that has been the subject of remarkably little attention—how parties in liberal democracies can manage the competitive environments in which they have to operate when seeking control over government.

The cause of this omission lies in how the link between *parties* and *party systems* came to be understood by most political scientists. By some, parties are conceived as essentially epiphenomenal—as the manifestations of particular social groups, so that what was interesting about how they competed in the political ‘market’ was how they were constrained by both their social origins (and their traditions) and also by the continuing pull of their core support within society. Other political scientists regard parties as lacking agency for a very different reason: the logic of competitive electoral politics forces them to take up particular policy positions at any given election. Failure to do so will result in defeat, or so the argument runs; like firms in an economic market, parties respond directly to the demands of particular market conditions—in this case, how they situate themselves with respect to potential voters. Consequently, in the study of party systems, parties are regarded as being largely uninteresting—they are constrained by factors external to themselves in terms of how they act, so that it is those factors to which, primarily, attention should be given. The important research that has been conducted on the relationship between parties and party systems has consisted primarily of analyses as to how changes in the competitive environment have affected party strategy and structure.² What has been missing is analysis of how parties try to manage both competition and the consequences of that competition. To put the matter rather crudely, political science has generally understood the party/party-system relationship in the following way: parties are similar to (human) train ‘drivers’ on many subway systems, in that they do not actually drive their trains. Driving is done automatically, under specific rules and conditions

regulated by a computer system, whilst the ‘driver’ is there to perform either routine minor tasks or ones necessary when particular kinds of emergency arise; for the most part he or she can do little, nor is there much for him or her to do.

Largely omitted, therefore, from most discussion of the behaviour of parties within party systems are two factors: the impact of the party structures themselves, and also the interventions of individual political actors who are attempting to operate within those structures. In other words, this is an area of political science in which both structure and agency are largely ignored. At the risk of some oversimplification, it can be argued that political science has been a battleground in which different schools of thought, and advocates of different methodological approaches, have competed over the relative importance to be accorded to four types of causal factor: (i) social forces and action; (ii) the rules governing political interaction and the incentives that these rules generate; (iii) the particular organizational forms through which political action is coordinated; and (iv) the activity and choices made by individual politicians, especially, but not exclusively, those operating within organizations. Since the 1940s the history of political science has been dominated by its practitioners’ attempts to explain the utility of focusing on one of these causal factors; this was true from the emergence of behaviouralism in the 1950s to the competition it was to face two or three decades later from rational choice analysis, historical institutionalism, and (to a lesser extent) heresthetics. Not surprisingly, each of the approaches has often ‘colonized’ those subfields of political science where its methods seem easiest to apply.

The result has been that, in any given subfield, some aspects of a topic simply get overlooked. Thus it is with parties, and the individuals operating inside the parties, with respect to their party systems. This short book, or perhaps it is really an extended essay, provides an antidote; it examines the role played by structure and agency in explaining how party systems behave, though, for reasons to be explained shortly, it focuses exclusively on two-party systems. Briefly summarized, the main argument developed here is that agency can matter, but there are often circumstances in which individual actors cannot change outcomes because of the role played by structure (or other factors). Before turning to examine more closely how these arguments are developed (in section 1.4), it is necessary to consider three preliminary issues central to the subsequent discussion of two-party politics: what exactly is a party system? what is a two-party system? what are the institutional arrangements under which two-partism typically operates?

1.1. WHAT IS A PARTY SYSTEM?

Simply stated, a party system is the pattern of interactions between the political parties organized within a given political system. For that reason, regimes that

successfully permit only one party to exist do not have a *party system* as such, since there is nothing with which that party can interact. Of course, this has not prevented the term ‘one-party system’ from entering political discourse—both at the popular and the academic levels—but the word ‘system’ can be redundant (and possibly misleading) in this context.³ To examine a particular ‘one-party system’ is to examine how that party operates; there are no relationships or interactions with other parties to be examined. In polities that have more than one party, though, it is possible to look separately at how individual parties operate without reference to any other parties, and also at how they link to each other. In much the same way, an economic historian could analyse in isolation the behaviour of a particular railway company, or examine it (and other companies) as part of a railway system (or network). Nevertheless, for the parties to constitute a party system, there must be at least two of them that can provide effective opposition to each other, even though opposition need not be their only mode of operation.⁴

In fact, the relationships and interactions between the various parties in a party system typically involve cooperation as well as competition. Obviously, the precise pattern evident in the case of two particular parties will depend on the context in which they are operating. One crucial variable is whether in a given polity there are public offices subject to regular election for which a party’s candidates may compete. If there are, this increases the number of arenas in which competition or cooperation may occur. To understand this point it is necessary to begin by mentioning regimes in which open competition for public office has yet to emerge, or where it is currently suspended. Many regimes have restricted the activities of parties; some, such as the Soviet Union, did so for virtually their entire existence—and to an extent that all parties other than the Communist Party could not function. Yet not all regimes having ambitions to limit the activities of parties have actually been successful in embargoing them; many might have wished to have achieved greater restrictions than they were actually able to effect, with various forms of party activity in the society persisting.

In the absence of elections to contest, parties may seek to acquire resources (money, human labour, and so on), influence over public opinion, power over government officials, and greater control over those sectors of society from which they draw their support, and to operate in various other ways. In other words, many of the activities of parties can be, and have been, pursued in polities in the absence of formally contested elections. Parties are thereby active within parts of the social structure, and, in informal ways, within parts of the political structure itself.⁵ How does electoral contestation affect the interactions between parties? The short answer is that it adds two different arenas in which cooperation and competition between them can take place.

The first of these arenas is that of the election contest itself. A party may put forward its own candidates (or list of candidates) for the different offices, and in

doing so seek to deny election to candidates from other parties; or it might cooperate with other parties in not putting forward its own list, and agree to support the candidates of another party; or it might negotiate the composition of a shared list. It is quite possible that cooperation may occur in the electoral process between parties that are still in competition with their electoral allies in other ways. For example, in opposition to party *B*, party *A* may still be trying to actively recruit its own members, or to influence the public policy agenda in a particular direction, even when it is formally allied for electoral purposes with party *B*. Alternatively, a party might be engaged in electoral competition against another, whilst at the same time the two of them continue to cooperate against common social enemies through such activities as the mobilization of particular social groups. Of course, competition in one arena might well place strains on cooperation at the other, but it does not necessarily do so. Whether it does will depend partly on how discrete an activity electoral mobilization is seen to be: to the extent that it is seen to be separable from other activities, ‘mixed’ patterns of competition and cooperation may remain evident. However, when, for example, electoral success comes to be seen as the sole aim for a party it will be far more difficult for such ‘mixed’ patterns to survive.

In the aftermath of an election there is another arena in which cooperation or competition between parties might emerge—that is in the performing of the governing tasks for which the various offices are responsible.⁶ The most obvious context in which this arises is in a parliamentary system in which no single party secures an overall majority, and hence cannot be sure of controlling the chamber. In some systems, and in some circumstances, the patterns of cooperation and competition will be predictable—given the patterns evident in the electoral arena. For example, following the 2002 German election it was known that the Social Democrats would continue to govern in coalition with the Green party—providing that, between them, they secured an overall majority in the Bundestag. Indeed, in Germany it is normal for voters to know what the composition of a government will be should one group of parties, or another, secure a parliamentary majority. However, when there is no clear majority for allied parties after an election—as there was not in Germany in 2005—then how the parties interact may be neither predictable nor reflect the patterns of competition and cooperation evident in the preceding election. (In fact, the Social Democrats went into government with the opposing Christian Democrats, while their erstwhile partners, the Greens, did not.) In other party systems, such as Israel’s, the construction of a government takes place after an election, and has usually involved patterns of competition and cooperation between at least some parties that were not always predictable from their behaviour during the election.

A second context in which post-election interactions are different from those evident in the preceding election campaigns arises under presidentialism, when the party of the president does not control a majority in the legislature. Unlike a parliamentary system, the composition of the government itself does not have

to be negotiated here, but agreement may be necessary (or at least desirable) to secure coherent public policy outcomes. Finally, in theory at least, there is yet another context under presidentialism in which post-election patterns of interaction may differ from those evident during an election; this is when there are a number of different offices with separate *executive* responsibilities, and members of different parties are elected to these different offices. This form of governing is found in many American states, where particular executive functions are reserved for elected officials who have an entirely separate mandate from that of the chief executive—that is, the state governor.⁷ Again, as with the relationship between a directly elected president and an assembly, the issue is not that of cooperation to decide who formally will govern, because the various elections have decided that; rather the issue concerns the extent of cooperation and non-cooperation that will be present in the formulation and carrying out of particular aspects of public policy, when more than one elected executive can act, to use Tsebelis's term, as a veto-player in that policy arena.⁸

While it could not possibly be denied that, in many circumstances, the form that cooperation or competition (that is, non-cooperation) takes in the post-election arena may well affect the patterns of cooperation and competition evident in other arenas, the point that needs to be emphasized is that they do not necessarily do so, and, even when they do, their effects may not be that great. That is to say, the different arenas of a party system, while probably not wholly autonomous, can remain sufficiently separate from one another as to make it necessary for care to be taken when discussing *the* party system of a given country. For the most part, the notion that within a state there is *the* party system, to be analysed and compared with systems in other regimes, is widely accepted. Nevertheless, when parties are not wholly centralized organizations, the cooperation and competition patterns evident in lower units of a party may well not be replicated in higher level units. Consequently, the party system of a state may sometimes be more accurately described as a set of party *systems*—federal states being just one obvious manifestation of this.

1.2. WHAT IS A TWO-PARTY SYSTEM?

For the most part, in studying democratic polities, political science is interested either in parties in the electoral or the post-electoral arenas. Even when they have started out as primarily engaged in social mobilization, parties faced with the opportunity of fair and democratic competition tend to embrace it; only the smallest of cult-like parties turn their back on electoral mobilization as, at the very least, a means of extending their operations within the society. However opportunistic their participation in the electoral arena might be at first, once it

starts to prove a means of consolidating other aspects of the party's work, it tends to become a permanent element of a party's operations. The evolution of Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland from the early 1970s to the twenty-first century is an instance of this phenomenon. So in deciding how two-partism might best be identified the centre of attention is the electoral and post-electoral arenas: but in what manner?

The simplest, but analytically the most uninteresting, way of specifying two-partism is to define it as existing when there are literally just two parties interacting in the polity. It is uninteresting because there are hardly any cases of this sort of party system, at the level of the nation-state, with most being atypically small in respect of their population size.⁹ The price of abandoning this approach is that alternative definitions of two-partism present themselves—not only are they different from one another, but how appropriate they are depends on the particular kinds of question that the scholar is trying to answer.

The first is to define two-partism as existing when, between them, two parties normally succeed in obtaining a large proportion of the overall popular vote in elections—perhaps 85 or 90 per cent of the total. This approach has the advantage of capturing the idea that it is just two parties that between them obtain a large majority of votes: they dominate the electorate market in which they operate. That is, this approach addresses the issue of whether party power with respect to voters is duopolistic or not. However, there are two respects in which this sort of approach is unhelpful or misleading:

1. It does not discriminate between cases where, say, one party is regularly obtaining a plurality of the vote, while its rival is always the loser, from those cases where both parties have obtained pluralities at different times. Party competition is different when one party nearly always obtains a popular plurality than when it does not.
2. It does not recognize the point that the type of electoral system used affects how much of the total vote the largest party typically needs to obtain to be able to control the state and the public policy agenda—without the assistance of other parties. Usually proportional systems require that the largest party obtain a larger vote share, if it is to be unconstrained in office, than non-proportional systems. Consequently, the incentive facing parties with respect to the vote share at which they should be aiming varies, and that means that simply comparing the overall share of the vote the parties obtain in different countries may be misleading. For example, in recent decades the two largest parties in Germany have often obtained a larger share of the total vote than their two counterparts in Britain. Yet hardly anyone regards the former as a form of two-party system, as parties never govern on their own, and usually they conduct electoral campaigns on the assumption that they will enter into government with particular partners, should they win the election. By contrast,

in Britain, the largest party normally controls government on its own, and it is usually understood as being a two-party system, *at least in some respects*.

The second approach aims to address the first of these two points, and emphasizes the extent that competition in the polity is focused primarily on just two parties. It does this by examining the share of the legislative seats captured by each of the parties. Thus, in theory, Laako and Taagepera's well-known formula, which has been used most famously by Lijphart, should make it possible to distinguish between types of party system. However, whilst it can isolate a purely two-party system from any other kind, it is not so useful in distinguishing between different types of case where two parties predominate but with the presence of minor parties in the system.¹⁰ This becomes evident when considering the following cases of party systems which have remarkably similar numbers of parties (respectively 2.12, 2.12, and 2.17) according to the formula. The mean share of the seats obtained by each party at a sequence of elections is:

Party System I: party *A* 61 per cent, party *B* 30 per cent, party *C* 9 per cent;
 Party System II: party *A* 55 per cent, party *B* 40 per cent, party *C* 5 per cent;
 Party System III: parties *A* and *B* 48 per cent each, party *C* 4 per cent.

If the assumption is then made that, over time, shares of seats of parties *A* and *B* at any given election deviate up to 10 per cent of the total seats from the mean data cited above, then the following two points can be made about the application of this formula.

1. It does not distinguish those systems where a relatively similar vote share usually leads to regular change in which party controls the state (which occurs in Case III) from systems where one party has a permanent majority that enables it to control the state without interruption (Case I).
2. It does not distinguish between cases where single-party majority government is the completely dominant form (Case I, on all occasions) from those where it is the main form of government but with coalitions being necessary on a significant number of occasions (Case II, on 25 per cent of occasions, and Case III, 30 per cent of all occasions).

Furthermore, by using the same formula for both presidential and parliamentary systems, it may misrepresent the role played by the largest two parties in the former. This point requires further amplification. In parliamentary systems the proportion of seats that parties win will, in some way, reflect their respective potential for exercising control over the state. Winning a majority of seats in the legislature—whether as a single party or in coalition with others—is the usual means by which a party's base of support in society enables it to determine what the state does. In a presidential system the significance of the legislature in doing this varies, depending on the powers of the president; in some systems there is

a much more equal balance of power between president and legislature than in others. *Ceteris paribus* the greater the presidential powers the more significant is the winning of the presidency for a party—by comparison with maximizing its seats in the legislature. Were it the case that legislative election results always reflected those in presidential elections, then using the Lijphart approach would not present this difficulty. However, where, as in Costa Rica, the use of plurality voting systems in presidential contests helps to produce dominance by two parties, but the use of a proportional formula in legislative elections facilitates a type of multi-partism, it is clear that focusing on the legislature can be misleading. Or rather, it can be misleading if the researcher is interested in the respective *capacity of various parties to control the state*. This is a rather different issue from that of the *degree of competitiveness* of the parties. Whether one should follow Lijphart, therefore, depends very much on the questions the researcher is trying to answer.

Consequently, it is a third approach which is the one most appropriate for this book. Because it focuses on the capacity of parties to control the state, two-partyism is identified here with single-party, majority governments where, over an extended period, two parties (but no more than two parties) have normally controlled government on their own at different times. However, different criteria of control have to be used for parliamentary and presidential systems. With parliamentary systems there can be little confusion as to whether a single party has formal control over government or not, although there is scope for disagreement as to how often minority government can occur for single-party majority no longer to be 'normal'. If, using Lijphart's data for 1945–96, the threshold for parliamentary governments lacking a majority is set at 20 per cent of all occasions, and it is required also that all governments be just of one party, seven states would qualify as two-party, with two others (Greece and Trinidad) being so close to meeting the criteria as to warrant inclusion (see Table 1.1). The remaining twenty-two parliamentary states do not have two-party systems.

In a presidential system the situation is more complicated; while only one party can win the presidency, political pressures—such as lack of control of the legislature—may require that presidential appointees to his or her cabinet come from other parties. This is the case in Colombia, for example. However, not all instances of a president making appointments other than from his or her own party provide evidence of weakness on the part of the president's party. Such appointments may be the product of a president's desire to build his or her own personal base within the party, or alternatively they might be a strategy for extending the party's traditional electoral coalition. There is no uncontroversial way of resolving this, but if one-party government is identified with at least 85 per cent of the cabinet being from the president's party, and this is arguably a reasonable measure of party control of an administration, two presidential systems qualify as two-party systems (Costa Rica and the United States).¹¹

TABLE 1.1. *One-party governments and majority governments in parliamentary democracies, 1945–1996*

		% of time with one-party governments		
		<70	70–99	>99
% of time with minimal winning coalition governments	<50	Austria	Norway	Spain
		Denmark	Sweden	
		Finland		
		Israel		
		Italy		
		Japan		
		Mauritius		
		Papua-New Guinea		
		Switzerland		
	50–80	Belgium		
		Germany		
		India		
		Ireland		
	>80	Netherlands		
		Australia	Greece (96.4%)	Bahamas
		Iceland	Trinidad (98.1%)	Barbados
		Luxembourg		Botswana ^a
				Canada
				Jamaica
			Malta	
		New Zealand ^b		
		UK		

^a Botswana is excluded from consideration as a two-party system in this book, as one party has always controlled government.

^b New Zealand's long period as a two-party system ended in the 1990s when, following the adoption of a new electoral system, the era of single-party government ended.

Source: Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 110–11.

1.3. THE INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF TWO-PARTISM

From the early 1950s onwards, following Duverger's statement of what came to be known as his 'Law', it has been widely accepted that there is a strong association between certain kinds of electoral rules and two-partism.¹² What is contested is whether these rules necessarily bring about two-partism, or whether the adoption of the rules and two-partism are both consequences of other factors operating within a polity. However, it cannot be denied that some electoral rules, but not others, provide mechanisms favourable to two-partism. On Duverger's account it is the single-member plurality (SMP, or 'simple-majority') system used

for elections to legislatures and assemblies which produces these conditions, and three points about his claim are worth emphasizing.

First, Duverger does not argue that the simple-majority, single-ballot system is either a necessary or a sufficient condition for two-partism. Two-partism might be evident when other electoral systems were in use, and might be absent despite its use. In fact, since he wrote *Political Parties*, it has been clear that at least one other electoral system type—the so-called ‘reinforced’ system, a version of which is used now in Greece—can generate at least as strong an incentive for voters to vote for one of the two largest parties as does SMP.

Secondly, Duverger had little to say about how plurality voting worked in presidential contests—for the obvious reason that, in the early 1950s when he was writing, the United States was the only exemplar of sustained presidential democracy. However, in addition to there being no good reason for not extending Duverger’s Law beyond the parliamentary regimes with which he was mainly concerned, there are actually grounds for believing that, *ceteris paribus*, it might have greater predictive power in presidential contests.

Thirdly, despite the tendency of some later commentators to focus on the emergence of two-partism at the national level of politics, Duverger’s own claim about this is an indirect one. He believes that national two-partism will follow from its development at the local level. Here it is important to be clear as to the precise nature of his argument—something which he outlines in his analysis of one of two mechanisms (‘elimination’) that, he argues, bring about and sustain two-partism.¹³ For Duverger, elimination worked on a constituency-by-constituency basis. That is, any ‘squeezing’ of third parties evident from a national perspective was the product of the mechanism working within particular constituencies. Consequently, he recognized that, when third parties had voting support that was geographically concentrated, they might still be able to elect legislators, and they would not be subject to voter defection in constituencies where such voters were disproportionately concentrated. Thus he noted that: ‘[the simple-majority single-ballot system] tends to the creation of a two-party system inside the individual constituency; but the parties opposed may be different in different areas of the country. The simple-majority system therefore makes possible the creation of local parties or the retreat of national parties to local positions.’¹⁴ At first glance this would appear to be an admission by Duverger of a major limitation in his argument’s applicability to the operation of national politics, but he did not regard it in quite that light.

The use of the term ‘local’, rather than, say, ‘regional’, indicates that he assumed that these concentrations of third-party supporters would actually be rather small. He did not seem to envisage a polity where there would be relatively large populations of territorially based social groups, whose identities and interests could not be embraced by one of the two major parties nationally. Moreover, to the extent that there were such concentrations, Duverger undoubtedly saw them as an element of an older political world that was being replaced by divisions

and issues that were national in scope. Thus he went on to argue: ‘the increased centralization of organization within the parties and the consequent tendency to see political problems from the wider, national standpoint tend of themselves to project on to the entire country the localized two-party system brought about by the ballot procedure’.¹⁵ In other words, for Duverger, the interests and issues mobilized by the two major parties nationally would simply supplant others, and the greater organizational resources available to these parties would enable them to make locally based parties irrelevant. To use a term that will be deployed again later, Duverger seemed to believe that relatively ‘pure’ forms of two-partism would emerge—that is, neither at the local, regional, nor national levels would third or minor parties be anything other than very small in size.

Having made such a sweeping argument about the nationalization of politics, Duverger then does not expand on it or justify it. Like many political scientists of his generation he assumed that the political future would be dominated by interests that were national in scope, and most especially by class. Local concentrations of interest—whether based on familial ties or whatever—would either become less important, or support for them would be taken up by the major parties. Undoubtedly, Duverger was correct in assuming that there were, and would continue to be, strong nationalizing tendencies.¹⁶ Indeed, Sartori was later to show how this nationalization was linked to the process of ‘structuration’ by parties and that the national impact of plurality electoral systems would be evident only subsequent to that process. Sartori makes explicit an important implicit assumption of Duverger’s analysis:

... when allegiance is given to the party more than to notables or chieftains, that is, when the voter relates to abstract party images, at this moment it is no longer the individual boss or leader that ‘elects’ the party, but the party that elects (puts into office) the individual. As the process develops, it is the party system that becomes perceived as a natural *system of channelment* of the political society... plurality systems have no influence (beyond the district) until the party system becomes structured...¹⁷

However, five decades of experience since Duverger wrote his masterpiece suggest that, in two respects, not all of his assumptions about the nationalization of politics were warranted. Some forms of identities that happen to have a territorially based component have become more, and not less, important over this period. This has been the case in several two-party polities, as well as in others, such as Belgium. Moreover, it has become evident that party-building in territories where one of the two major parties was always weak is not always successful. Embracing the interests of voters in such territories may prove impossible because of a long-standing hostility to that party; this enables other parties to organize there in opposition to the locally dominant major party. (An instance of this was the demise of the Labour party in certain areas of southern England after the late 1970s, when the Liberal party (and its successors) was able to establish

itself as the main opposition to the Conservatives.) For now, the significant issue is that Duverger believed that his constituency-based argument was generalizable to national polities, but it hinges on implicit assumptions that might not hold.

Having noted these points, the discussion can now turn to the incidence of two-partism in the thirty-six democracies identified by Lijphart.¹⁸ Of the thirty-one parliamentary systems, nine conform to the definition of two-partism being used in this book.¹⁹ Of these nine polities, seven utilize SMP—the exceptions being Greece and Malta. Of the other thirty-one democracies, only one, Botswana, does so. Though there appears to be a strong association between plurality voting and two-partism under parliamentarism, the first two of the three exceptions are worth discussing briefly. (Botswana is not since it is not a counter-example to Duverger's point; it is a polity dominated by one party, rather than a multi-party system.²⁰)

As noted earlier, Greece today uses a variant of an electoral system that Duverger did not examine—because there were no examples confronting him—but which also provides a strong incentive for political forces to consolidate behind one of the two largest parties. (In Greece, the party with the largest number of votes receives an additional forty seats, 13.3 per cent of all seats.²¹ Were the largest party always to receive sufficient seats to provide it with an overall majority, the incentive for voting for one of the two large parties would be greater than under SMP.) In this kind of system the possibility that a smaller party might be able to exercise a brokerage role in parliament is relatively small: in Greece the leading party has to obtain fewer than 42.7 per cent of other seats in order for the 'reinforcement' not to produce an overall parliamentary majority.

Malta is a different case, and were there many more Maltas in the political universe Duverger's Law would not hold. It is a unique example among established nation-states of proportional representation producing two-partism. There are two reasons why this case is of relatively little significance though. First, because it is the only exception, and Duverger's Law identifies an (alleged) tendency, and nothing more than that. Secondly, Malta is such a small democracy, and it might be argued that in these sorts of regimes there are fewer interests around which parties can form, so that two-partism is always likely to be more common there, irrespective of the voting system. Certainly the small democracies are disproportionately exemplars of two-partism. However, if the regimes with populations of less than one million are excluded from Lijphart's data, then Duverger's Law appears particularly impressive—albeit with a smaller number of instances of two-partism. Of these twenty-six parliamentary democracies, only six exhibit two-partism—with all but Greece using SMP.

Among the five presidential democracies, a modified version of Duverger's Law, namely one relating to presidential elections, also seems to hold. The two countries that do not use plurality voting (Colombia and France) have multi-party systems, while two of the three countries (Costa Rica and the United States) that

do use it exhibit two-partism. A potentially controversial case is Venezuela. Here is a country that utilized plurality voting, but where it is widely accepted by scholars and political observers that between 1958 and the new constitution of 1999, an agreement (the ‘puntofijismo’) between the three major parties led to the artificial channelling of party competition into a strictly two-party form for presidential elections. Certainly, there have usually been more than two parties elected to the legislature, and whether, absent the ‘puntofijismo’, Venezuela could have followed Costa Rica in displaying two-partism at the presidential level of politics is difficult to establish conclusively, but seems improbable. It can be argued that, without the ‘puntofijismo’, a ‘presidentialized version’ of Duverger’s Law would not hold for this case. If it is excluded from consideration, the fit between two-partism and plurality voting appears to be as strong as it is in parliamentary systems. For purposes of analysis here, Venezuela is excluded from the study on the grounds that it is not really a two-party system at the presidential level, and it is certainly not at the parliamentary level.

Although Duverger’s Law seems to hold for both parliamentary and presidential elections, focusing on it tends to obscure an important distinction within two-partism—between what are called in this book its ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ versions. Many of the larger polities exhibit tendencies towards the latter, with other parties being competitive in some electoral arenas. By contrast, in the largest of the two-party democracies, the United States, consolidation of the position of the two largest parties is evident after the beginning of the twentieth century, producing an even stronger tendency than previously towards a ‘pure’ version. This seems puzzling because the conditions that facilitated the growth of an extensive two-party system in the 1830s were starting to erode seven decades later. The linked ambition of individual politicians via multi-level patronage, which had made this system possible, was replaced in twentieth-century America by the demise of patronage and the seeming rise of candidate-centred politics, in which the connections between individual politicians were much weaker. (There was considerable regional variation in the timing of candidate domination, with it appearing in the South by the early twentieth century, and in many western states within the following two decades, but it was not evident in much of the rest of the country until the 1960s.²²) This should have made American parties more vulnerable during times of internal division, and hence made them more prone to collapse; if 1912 was too early for this to occur, then why was not it evident, in say 1968 or 1992—both years in which major third-candidacies for the Presidency were launched? Yet far from twentieth-century America moving towards embracing some elements of multi-partism, as other established two-party democracies were to do late in that century, the dominance of the two parties actually increased in the US.

The key to understanding the paradox is this. There are two sets of contrasting conditions in which there are strong incentives for dissident activists and politicians to keep their grievances and ambitions within a two-party framework. The

first, which were present in nineteenth-century America, occur when the goals pursued by an individual politician are linked to those of others, and when for all of them being part of a national majority is essential for the realization of their goals. The Jacksonian system of interconnecting patronage provided for such linkage; individual goals could be pursued only through being part of a 'team' that had the capability of winning a national majority.²³ Third parties operating in the arenas of individual states would provide less than could a major national party, and for that reason there was enormous pressure to build a viable national party; third parties would always be peripheral, and used for the promotion of particular issues. The other set of conditions favouring 'pure' two-partism are those when everyone, including dissidents, can get what they want by participating in one of the major parties. That is, if the parties are completely open to everyone, and can be used effectively as a vehicle by everyone, why bother to move outside the two-party framework? These were the conditions that were to emerge during the twentieth century. Almost anyone could pursue their goals by contesting party nominations in the Democratic or Republican parties, thereby making third parties largely superfluous. Occasionally, 'third candidacies' developed at both federal and state levels, but not third parties.

Late twentieth-century American parties were no longer teams linked in complex ways, but largely 'shells' within which individuals and groups could pursue their own aims in open contestation with others. The major parties had now become central to the organizing of the political system largely because they were unimportant as ways of linking individual politicians to each other. Of course, this account both simplifies the situation, and also somewhat exaggerates the 'individual-centred' nature of contemporary parties, but, allowing for this, the key point remains valid. American parties today differ from those elsewhere in that the idea of the party 'team' is a looser one within the United States. But, it might reasonably be asked: why are there parties at all in such circumstances? The answer to this is that there are a number of procedures and institutional rules, inherited from the era of strong parties, which serve to direct individual politicians into the party structure. For example, in many states access to the ballot for individual challengers and new parties is much more difficult than the requirements for running in a Democratic or Republican primary election, which is the alternative way onto the ballot. Then there are the rules relating to the organization of legislatures; for instance, it is the parties in Congress that assign memberships of committees. If the major parties want to, they can make life difficult for independent or third-party members of the legislature. (When there are few of the latter, or when their support is crucial for a party obtaining a majority, so that it can organize a legislative chamber, major parties tend to be much more accommodating to them, of course.) Finally, that there are often incentives to move from one political arena to another—from city council to state legislature and then to Congress, for instance—gives an advantage to the major parties. Having used the party label in one arena makes it easier for the individual

politician to take advantage of it in the next electoral arena to which he or she is moving on.

It would, of course, be stretching credulity to imagine that the United States just *happened* to move from one set of circumstances favouring 'pure' two-partism to another, and very different, set that also did so. This is where it is possible to begin to see just why American two-partism is so different from two-partism elsewhere.²⁴ Along with the idea that the winning of public office entitled the victorious party to the spoils of office, Jacksonianism had another crucial dimension. This was the belief that parties were *the* device that made democracy possible; democracy happened through parties, and only through parties. For that reason, until the twentieth century, Democrats often referred to their party simply as 'The Democracy'. One consequence was that, whatever else they were, parties had to remain centres for political participation. Thus, when massive population increases necessitated a move from informal internal procedures to more formal ones, any reforms had to be consistent with the idea of parties remaining open to participation. That circumscribed the kind of reform that could be enacted, and was one reason why, from the late nineteenth century onwards, it was the direct primary that was to emerge as the way of nominating candidates. Yet, it was the direct primary itself that, several decades later, was to be the device that made possible the transition from a party-oriented to a candidate-centred form of electoral organization. The direct primary that helped to create the 'empty shell' kind of party, with its looser notion of a party 'team', had its origins, therefore, in a political movement that had earlier created such strong 'teams' in America.

All of this was very different in the other long-established democracies. Not only have few countries approached the nineteenth-century United States in the way that parties linked different political actors to one another, but none of them have ever conceived democracy in such strongly party-centred terms. The transition that America made from the 1830s to the 1970s, and which helped to create and preserve a 'pure' form of two-partism, was unique to America. That is why conceiving of two-partism as essentially an 'Anglo-Saxon' phenomenon, which is common among many European political scientists, is so misleading. The form of 'pure' two-partism found in the United States was, and remains, radically different from that found in other countries usually described as 'Anglo-Saxon'.²⁵ The kind of 'impure' two-partism that is found in Britain and Canada, and the collapsed two-partism in contemporary New Zealand, have a lot in common with the 'impure' two-partism evident in Costa Rica, and elsewhere in some of the consolidating democracies of Latin America. What they share are rules of the game which, though differing from one country to another, similarly provide an incentive to cooperate in just two 'teams' or to merge into two 'teams'; but these incentives are not normally so strong that they produce just two parties throughout the political system. In the US, on the other hand, there are strong pressures for two-partism at all levels of politics, making for a rather different kind of two-partism.

1.4. PARTIES, STRUCTURE, AND AGENCY

To resume the earlier discussion. This book is concerned with both the relationship between agents within the major parties and also those party structures that shape what they can do to affect the environment of competition in which they operate. It examines what parties (and the elites acting in a party's interest) can (and cannot) do to protect themselves from adverse consequences originating in that environment and also to improve their position within it. It deals with three crucial aspects of a party organization's capacity for survival and growth in competition with others:

- (i) Under what conditions do major parties occasionally collapse and lose their status as major parties within a party system (Chapters 2 and 3)?
- (ii) When will collapsed major parties then dissolve, and alternatively when might they survive, albeit as minor parties (Chapter 4)?
- (iii) How might they increase their size through merger with small or minor parties (Chapters 5 and 6)?

In brief, the answers developed here to these questions are as follows. First, large parties in two-party nation-states are largely protected by their own presence in an electoral market from the possibility of collapse. There are unusual circumstances in which collapse does occur, but these are conditions in which it is extremely difficult for parties to manage their environments at all. Secondly, following collapse, it is the party's structure, the strategies pursued by other parties, and the incentives facing the participants in the party that determine whether it will dissolve or persist as a third or minor party in the system. Finally, the main opportunities for active party management of their environments relate to the expansion of their coalitions—through mergers or alliances with smaller parties; although there seems to be a strong incentive for a major party to try to keep its coalition larger than its opponent, both actors external to the party and those within it make coalition-building difficult in practice.

Why has the book been organized around these particular themes? The starting point in answering this question is to identify the mechanisms that, in theory, could alter how a particular party system operates. Three such pairs of mechanisms relevant to the mechanism of party politics can be specified: (1) surge and collapse; (2) formation and elimination; and (3) fusion and fission. However, in the analysis of two-party politics three of the mechanisms are of much greater significance in explaining how the dynamics of the party system actually operates; the reasons for this will now be examined.

Surge and collapse

In an established two-party system a surge in electoral support by a new party, or a minor party, is certainly a theoretical possibility. However, it could occur

only if two conditions were present. First, there must be a sufficiently large ‘pool’ of previously unmobilized voters whom the party can seek to convert into loyalists. In their absence a new party would have to rely on attempting to detach voters from parties with which they identified already. Secondly, even when that condition is present, for a surge to be possible neither of the two major parties must have experienced a major electoral collapse, for if they had, they too would be in a position, indeed usually a better position, to attract some of the unmobilized electorate. Gerring, in the conclusion to his study of minor parties operating in plurality voting systems, put the point thus: ‘it may be put forth as a general hypothesis that minor party performance is endogenous to major party performance. Minor parties owe their successes or failures more to cracks in the armor of the major parties than to their own efforts.’²⁶

The key to understanding this second point is that in a two-party system each of the two major parties plays a role that is somewhat analogous to the phenomenon that Schelling once called a ‘focal arbiter’.²⁷ A focal arbiter is an actor whose very presence in a context when there is more than one equilibrium outcome will ensure that one of those outcomes is the most likely to ensue. As Myerson and Weber explain:

Schelling argues that in games with multiple Nash equilibria, anything that tends to focus the players’ attention on any one equilibrium may lead each player to expect the others to act in accordance with that equilibrium. With such expectations, each player does best for himself by also acting in accordance with the equilibrium; thus the expectations are fulfilled . . . [In an election] a focal arbiter is an individual whose opinions and statements about the candidates command wide attention, giving him influence upon the outcome of the election by making focal an equilibrium in which a candidate he supports has a significant chance of winning (or one he condemns does not) . . . To become a focal arbiter, an individual does not need to have particularly good judgment . . . or even to be perceived as having good judgment. It is only necessary that he be able to get his views prominently reported to the public.²⁸

There might be numerous ways in which opposition to one large party could be expressed in voting, but the very presence of a large, second, party tends normally to channel that opposition through itself. This is partly because of the additional resources it is likely to possess through having become larger than any other possible channel of opposition, but also because the very presence of a large party in the system itself results in such channelling; usually it is in the best position to ‘get views prominently reported to the public’.

In multi-party systems large parties are also able to act as quasi ‘focal arbiters’, but it is the winner-take-all feature of two-partism that makes this role central for a large party, whether it is in government or opposition. The role helps to protect it from surges from third or minor parties, even when there are unmobilized actors in the electorate. There is a much reduced incentive to vote for parties that are unlikely to win, and in most circumstances it is the two major parties that, between

them, act in ways akin to that of a focal arbiter. This reduces the potential for surge by any other party. Surge, therefore, is an interesting factor only when a major party has collapsed to the point at which its focal arbiter role is much reduced; it is to the possible causes of major party collapse to which attention must primarily be turned when trying to explain why two-party systems sustain themselves. That is why the focus in Chapters 2 and 3 is on party collapse.

Formation and elimination

In a two-party system the formation of a new party is, in itself, relatively uninteresting; minor parties are created quite often—to publicize specific grievances, as a protest against particular politicians, or whatever. In most countries there are relatively few barriers to starting a party; the real problem for such a party is the presence of focal arbiters that act, indirectly, as a barrier to its growth. It is the factors that restrict the potential for surge, rather than any barrier to party formation *per se*, that are of interest. Correspondingly, small parties often dissolve after the issues leading to their formation have either been resolved or become irrelevant. More interesting, though, is the question of what happens to previously large parties that have experienced a massive collapse in electoral support: under what circumstances subsequently might they persist, and when might they ‘go out of business’? Given that such parties would have contained individuals driven by a desire for public office—rather than being motivated just by protest or the promotion of a single issue, for example—the question can be raised as to what happens to a party when its focal arbiter role is lost. Why stay in a party when most others are evidently acting in ways that preclude the use of that party as a vehicle? This aspect of elimination is important in explaining how a two-party system responds to change, and in Chapter 4 it is argued that how extensively a party has penetrated different levels of politics influences how individuals then respond to party collapse.

Fusion and fission

Parties can, and do, split—with some individuals leaving their original party and founding a new one; similarly separate parties can ally themselves in various ways, either temporarily or permanently. Several examples of both processes at work have been observed in the past; however, under two-partism the incentive to win means that the cost of fission can be much higher than under multi-partism, while correspondingly the incentive to fuse should be that much greater. However, there is another significant difference between the two processes. Calculated exit from a party certainly does occur: the creation of the Social Democratic Party in Britain is such an example, resulting in 1981 from growing tensions over a period of years within the Labour party.²⁹ Yet, exit can also be the result of short-term miscalculation by elites about the response of the party to particular actions—this

was the case with Chamberlain's exit (though not that of his Whig allies) from the British Liberal Party in 1886, and also with the formation of National Labour in 1931. By contrast, fusion is always planned. Parties do not just merge on a whim; there are too many interests at stake for that to happen, even when one party (or both) is sufficiently weak that little bargaining is necessary to effect an alliance. Chapters 5 and 6 concentrate on fusion, and not fission, because the book's focus is on how political actors can shape their environment when they are seeking to achieve their ends, rather than on circumstances in which actors may have had insufficient time to choose appropriate strategies. Obviously, contingency matters greatly in politics, but the focus of this book is on the opportunity for, and constraints on, choice by political actors.

The choices facing parties in managing their environment are often not straightforward; rather they are made complex by two crucial factors. First, decisions made by all kinds of political actors outside the party itself bear directly on the choices that the party must make in maximizing its position in the electoral market, and these actors do so in a persisting dynamic interaction with the party. That is, the party's external environment is not a 'given' to which it must respond, but rather something that the party is partly creating through its conflicts, cooperation, and communication with a whole array of different kinds of actors. Those interactions are themselves continually restructuring that environment: it is a dynamic process. Secondly, the party is itself both a single actor—with a distinct set of interests—and is also composed of individual actors whose own interests can conflict with, as well as be aligned with, those of the party. How the party relates to its various components is crucial in explaining how it can interact with its external environment. To understand this point it is useful to explain why an increasingly cited analogy used to explain differences between American and European parties is so misleading.

It is sometimes said that European political parties resemble a team sport, in that their structure demands cooperation between the various participants, whereas the candidate-centred politics found in American parties is more like that of an individual sport. This analogy both misrepresents the differences between parties on the two continents and also misses an obvious point about team sports; with the vast majority of team sports, there is some conflict between the interests of the team and those of the individual, but the balance between the conflictual and cooperative elements varies greatly between sports. There are a few sports—rowing is one—where the individual can succeed only by subsuming his or her strengths completely to those of the team as a whole. There is an identity of interest; no political parties in the democratic world resemble this model. Equally, though, there are not any political parties, and this includes those in the US, that resemble a sport like golf where there is simply no link except that of direct competition between one contestant and another.³⁰ All parties are teams, but, like different sports, they vary with respect to the opportunities they provide for individuals to pursue their own interests within that team. (In baseball, for

instance, the batter has less autonomy with respect to the way that he will try to hit the ball—the coach may call for him to bunt, perhaps—compared with a batsman at cricket.) How much autonomy the individual has within a given party depends on the various ways in which the party is structured, and, in turn, individual autonomy and the party's rules will interact to affect the way in which the party itself responds to its external environment. While there are important differences in this regard between American parties and parties in other regimes, they do not justify treating the former as a product of American 'exceptionalism', such that they should be excluded from comparative analysis.

The sceptical reader might be persuaded by this point, but raise another objection. If the book is dealing with the relation between structure and agency in explaining how party systems operate, why limit its focus to two-party systems? He or she might complain that it is now several decades since political scientists thought that two-partism was an especially useful category of analysis, and that the main reason given for its significance in the 1950s (that two-partism was uniquely associated with supposed 'Anglo-American' democratic stability) has long since been discredited.³¹ The case for focusing on two-partism here is different, and quite straightforward: it simplifies the analysis in one crucial respect. With two-partism it can be assumed that the interests of a major party lie solely in its being large enough to win—that is, it must receive enough votes to defeat its main opponent. Size is all that matters, because the rewards of office (irrespective of what they are) go only to the winning party. Under multi-partism size usually matters, but does not necessarily do so. Maximizing its power or its longevity in government may require that a party remain pivotal, that is, at the centre of the political spectrum, and in some circumstances that goal can, and does, conflict with maximizing its size. Because there is no such potential conflict of goals with two-partism, these systems are ideal for analysing the capacity of parties to pursue their interests in the face of both other actors in the political system and also of elements within the party itself.

This last point is hugely significant. As single structures, parties themselves operate within a party system; as will be seen in Chapters 2 and 3 their very presence shapes how competition in the polity is channelled. But they are also forums in which individual actors pursue both their own goals and, to some extent and at various times, the goals of the party itself. This is true of any organization except for the most rigidly hierarchical ones in which there is little scope for the latter. Nevertheless, by comparison with many organizations, parties in liberal-democratic regimes have usually been especially open to the pursuit of individual goals by their participants; only those organized on the Leninist principle of democratic centralism, and to a lesser extent some right-wing parties, have actually restricted the opportunities for individual action in their rigidly hierarchical structures. Moreover, there is a growing belief among political scientists that autonomy for the various elements within a party is increasing.³² How the party is organized affects the incentives facing these individuals, and how they

respond to given sets of incentives will vary, depending on the kinds of structures within which they are operating. For example, the extent to which there is exit by leaders and activists from a party that has lost much of its electoral support will depend on how the party has shaped, and continues to shape, the expectations of those individuals. The ability of that party to respond to the decline will in turn be framed by how the individuals are behaving.

The party structures within which these individuals operate are largely the product of decisions taken previously, in some cases decades earlier, by party participants. In the short term they are largely fixed, because in a large and complex organization changing rules and procedures can rarely be effected quickly.³³ Unlike gang organization, for example, as analysed in Martín Sánchez Jankowski's classic study, party structures can be adapted to changes in their environment only slowly—or at least more slowly than may be required to deal effectively with changed circumstances.³⁴ As in gangs, though, it is individuals who also take action in the interests of their party—to improve its competitiveness, or whatever. These individuals are agents to the extent that they are either taking 'non-obvious' decisions in their organizations, or are themselves setting up the situations in which others must choose. To understand this point consider what party leaders do in the simplified model of two-party politics introduced by Anthony Downs.³⁵ If their party is too far from the centre of the ideological spectrum, they will change its ideology so that it attracts the marginal actor in the future. Assuming that they know where the centre is, this is an 'obvious' decision in which the actors are not required to exercise any particular judgement; to that extent, those taking it do not have agency. (Of course, they could take a different decision, but no purpose—save contrariness—would be served by it.)

Non-obvious decisions are ones that are taken in conditions when it is unclear what the outcomes will actually be, and where judgement has to be exercised in choosing. But agency is also evident, and supporters of Riker's analysis of heresthetics would claim it was especially evident, in those actors who structure the alternatives for others in ways that lead to these herestheticians' objectives being pursued. The heresthetician displays agency, even though he or she is not the one who takes the decision, or initiates the action, that leads to the realization of the particular objective.³⁶ Both of these types of action are forms of leadership. Once at the centre of political analysis, leadership moved to its peripheries, partly in response to the separation of political science from the discipline of history (in the early to mid-twentieth century), and partly because it was difficult to operationalize systematically in comparative analysis.³⁷ In a sense, what Nagel called macro-heresthetics in relation to New Zealand prime minister Richard Seddon's 'grand, overarching strategies that aimed at preservation of his legislative and electoral majority and that shaped his specific tactics and practices' was merely formalizing what historical and biographical studies had done for decades.³⁸ Even so, while Riker's framework has stimulated other studies such

as Nagel's, agency, necessarily perhaps, remains an undertheorized approach in political science relative to others—except in the subfield of political psychology, which itself remains largely disconnected from comparative politics.³⁹

A central theme of this book is that, with the notable exception of major party collapse, over which party elites may have little control, what political actors do can, and in some circumstances does, matter. Nevertheless, the activity of elites acting on behalf of party interests is constrained not just by the advantage that organization gives to major parties but also by the incentive structures created by a combination of party organization and electoral rules. How constrained they are depends on the particular pattern of incentives. Thus, it will be seen that in the US the interdependence of former Whig politicians, through the vehicle of party, meant that it was in the interests of most of them that a viable major party be established as quickly as possible after 1852, and that was to limit what party elites could do to preserve their party. This was to have huge consequences for the party. However, external factors and party structures are not the only factors shaping the behaviour of parties within a two-party system. Party elites do face choices where their judgement about alternative outcomes affects their party's competitiveness or that of another party; to merge their party with another, to completely drive out of business an electoral competitor, and to keep in business a minor party promoting a particular interest (that will draw away support from its main opponent) are all examples of this. In making these choices they are neither at the mercy of immovable social forces nor incentive structures that are the equivalent of 'offers that they cannot refuse'. What they should do to pursue optimally their goals is often unclear. Absence of information about the preferences and strategies of others complicates their decisions; the consequences of particular decisions produce party politics of a kind that would have been different, had they chosen differently. As Marx put it, in the gendered language of his age in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances'. As will be shown, political actors can indeed shape, at least in part, the systems in which they operate, though doing so is far from straightforward.

Why Major Parties Collapse

Both this chapter and the subsequent one are concerned with what might be assumed to be a crucial aspect of a party's control over its environment: the prevention of collapse by a major party into being just a minor party within the party system. For the purpose of analysis here party 'collapse' is defined as having occurred when a party that had previously controlled government on at least one occasion on its own (i) loses its place at an election as one of the two largest parties in the system, and (ii) then fails to regain that place at any election in the next decade.

Between them the eleven parliamentary and presidential democracies identified in the last chapter as having two-party politics have experienced a total of about 900 years of rule involving the mobilization of mass electorates by political parties. In that time there have been only three instances of a major party collapsing. These instances were the Whigs in the US in the 1850s, the Liberals in Britain after 1916, and the Progressive Conservatives (PC) in Canada after 1993. Party collapse is a rare phenomenon, therefore. But why might it occur at all?

In fact, there are two, reinforcing reasons, for believing that it would *not* occur. One reason was introduced in the last chapter. An established, large, party will act in a way akin to a focal arbiter in a formal rational-choice model; it can channel opposition to the other major party towards itself, and away from new or minor parties. Its very presence and its size in the party system combine to help it become the focus for opposition. Moreover, under any electoral rules, once a party has become large its leaders and activists normally have an incentive to preserve its status as a large party. That incentive is stronger still under two-partism because of the opportunity this presents to govern without concessions to other parties. (Unlike multi-party systems there is not a competing incentive for the party to remain pivotal in the party system, even at the expense of size.) *Ceteris paribus*, therefore, it might be expected that major parties would continue to survive in two-party systems because they are in a privileged position to act as a beacon in attracting public support and because there is so much at stake for all who have participated in them. Why then could a formerly major party have failed not only to retain second place at an election but also to regain it subsequently? The political science literature suggests two possible answers to this.

The first answer is that such a party has simply failed to align itself close to the position of the median voter, and has then left itself open to being replaced either

by a minor party or a new one. By not following the logic of Downsian competition it had become uncompetitive, which in Downs's model meant that it had strayed too far from the political centre ground.¹ Undoubtedly, in the long term, were a party to continue with that behaviour it would surrender its major party status eventually. But as an explanation of party collapse this is evidently defective.

One argument against it is that party leaders are not fools; they understand all too clearly when they have mispositioned their party in the electoral arena, and normally they proceed to rectify that. There is simply too much information available to them about public attitudes, and about the potential for the party either channelling them, or trying to change them, for party leaders not to know when their party has misaligned itself.² It may take them more than one electoral cycle to make all the needed adjustments, but they do not persist with a strategy that has endangered the party. After its electoral debacle in 1983—when its manifesto was famously described by Gerald Kaufman as the longest suicide note in history—the British Labour party moved back to the political centre. It may have taken ten years to complete the process, but even by 1987 it was in less danger of losing second place to the Liberal-SDP Alliance. The rise of moderate Republicanism in the US, after 1938 and as a response to massive defeats by Democrats earlier in the decade, is another example of party adjustment.³

A further argument is that, unless there are particular conditions present, and these are discussed later in this chapter and the next one, a single electoral defeat does not, in fact, usually doom a major party. At the time political commentators often refer to overwhelming defeats in terms of the 'political landscape changing', or of 'an earthquake shaking the political environment'.⁴ (Moreover, with its emphasis on the role of single elections to change political competition, 'realignment theory' in American political science has made its contribution to a widespread belief that defeated parties are at the mercy of forces beyond their control.⁵) Yet parties are remarkably adept at regrouping as a team in ways that will ensure their survival. Sometimes this happens quickly; four years after its crushing defeat in the 1993 National Assembly elections, which was widely heralded at the time as being difficult to reverse in the short term, the French Socialists regained control of the Assembly. It took twelve years, though, for the Progressive Conservatives in New Brunswick to become the governing party again, although this had followed a defeat in 1987 that had seen the incumbent government lose all its seats in the provincial parliament. While the party split in the intervening years it then revived. The fact is that parties often do recover from even the most overwhelming of defeats, so that a misjudged 'Downsian calculation' is unlikely to prove fatal in the short term. The first answer cannot account for party collapse, therefore.

A second answer is that, at least until the second half of the twentieth century, parties emanated from particular interests in society and were one of the main vehicles for the different ideologies associated with those interests. Were the structure of cleavages to change—because of the relative decline, or rise, of

various interests—existing parties would be constrained in their response to that. Grounded as they were in particular interests in society, they could not easily seek to expand their electoral strength by appealing to other social groups. A major party that was facing a relative decline in its core vote would thereby be vulnerable; it could do nothing to prevent the rise of a party founded on some other social group that was sufficiently large that it might expect to win a legislative majority. There are three obvious objections to this argument.

First, it is at odds with widespread developments in the second half of the twentieth century, when most parties did attempt, and with considerable success, to move beyond their original bases; social democratic parties attracted middle-class voters, agrarian parties shed their original names and started courting centrist urban voters, and so on. Secondly, even before 1950, it was far from clear that either existing parties, especially in two-party systems, were so grounded in a single interest that they were unable to expand their electoral coalitions beyond that interest, or that large sections of major new interests could not be mobilized by existing parties. From 1885 onwards the British Conservatives were remarkably successful in mobilizing sections of the British working class, without whose support they could not have hoped to govern Britain on their own. In short, in an era when they were supposedly least able to adapt to a changed environment, some parties clearly did so. They were not at the mercy of social change that would render them uncompetitive as major parties. Thirdly, during the industrial age, let alone later, many societies exhibited cross-cutting cleavages, so that the potential for mobilizing a single party around most of the members of an emerging social group or interest was limited. Even an interest as large as the working class would not normally be unified, but was divided on religious, regional, or ethnic lines as well as being internally fractured between different levels of occupational skill, and so on. As Przeworski put it, ‘Unless workers are organized as actors, they are likely to vote on the basis of other sources of collective identification, as Catholics, Bavarians, women, Francophones, consumers, and so forth’.⁶ The problem was that the efforts to organize them could be ineffective or counterproductive; workers could, and did, reject identification as workers either because it was seen as incompatible with a more important identity, or because they did not want to be identified with those they thought of as ‘workers’.

Neither of the two answers political science has generated provides an adequate explanation of why major parties might collapse. However, this is not to deny that a failure to position a party optimally on the political spectrum or new voting groups might not play *some* part in bringing about collapse. Rather it is three other factors that, between them, account for particular parties either collapsing or remaining as a major party, and it is these factors that are examined in both this chapter and the subsequent one. They are:

1. Major parties as ‘focal arbiters’. As stated earlier, just having been a major party is a partial insulation against collapse because it acts as a kind of lightning

- rod for opposition to the other major party, thereby frustrating the efforts of new and minor parties. However, by itself it cannot prevent collapse.
2. The resources and incentives available to the party that enable it to bind individual participants (candidates, voters) to the party, and hence indirectly to each other. These vary from party to party, depending on internal structures, opportunities for parties acquiring resources, the relationship between different levels of governmental structures, and other factors. In general, though, at the level of the nation-state major party resources are usually sufficient to allow party elites to mobilize against collapse—even in the aftermath of a large electoral defeat.
 3. Having to fight against opponents on two fronts. There are rare occasions in which the first two factors are insufficient to prevent party collapse. This occurs when a party is having to deal with two new major issues relevant to its electorate, two new electoral opponents challenging different parts of its electoral base, or is internally divided on two separate lines of cleavage. In these circumstances strategies for preserving party strength and unity are far more difficult to determine, and this can result in the demise of the party.

The impact of the last of these factors is examined in Chapter 3, while the rest of this chapter is concerned with the interaction of the first two. To begin with the focus of attention is on Canadian provincial parties where party collapse has been more frequent than in nation-states. Given that there are significantly lower levels of resources available to these parties when compared to those available in nation-states, it helps expose the limits of the strength that major parties can derive just from their focal arbiter role. Comparing these provincial parties with national parties is illuminating because they are not mere subunits of the Canadian federal parties that share the same name; like national parties elsewhere they are autonomous. Legally and financially parties at the two levels are quite separate, so that party management at the provincial level is not linked to that at the national level.

2.1. PARTY COLLAPSE IN THE CANADIAN PROVINCES

Whereas the eleven parliamentary and presidential democracies classified as having two-party politics have experienced three major party collapses in a total period of about 900 years of democratic politics, between them the ten Canadian provinces have had a combined total of 1,100 years of democratic competition, but in that time there have been thirteen cases of major party collapse (see Table 2.1). Should the Nova Scotia Liberal party fail to regain second-party status before 2016, it would become the fourteenth case. Superficially, therefore, the incidence

TABLE 2.1. *Party collapse in Canadian provinces*

	Party	Last year in government	Year lost status as one of two largest parties in province	Year reacquired status
Newfoundland	n.a.	n.a.	—	—
Nova Scotia ^a	n.a.	n.a.	—	—
Newfoundland Prince Edward Island	n.a.	n.a.	—	—
Quebec	Conservatives	1897	1935	—
	Union Nationale	1970	1973	—
Ontario	NDP	1995	1995	—
Manitoba	Progressive	1932	1932	—
	Liberals	1958	1969	1988–90
Saskatchewan	Liberals	1971	1978	1995–9
	Conservatives	1982	1995	—
Alberta	Liberals	1921	1940 ^b	1952–9, 1963–7, 1993–present
	United Farmers	1930	1930	—
	Social Credit	1971	1982	—
British Columbia	Conservatives	1933 ^c	1952	—
	Liberals	1952	1952	1991–present ^d
	Social Credit	1991	1991	—

n.a. = not applicable: no party collapse in these provinces.

^a After 2006 election Liberals fell into third place.

^b Liberals had intermittently been a third or minor party 1921–67.

^c Conservatives last in coalition government with Liberals in 1952.

^d Liberals become governing party again from 2001.

of party collapse appears to be more than three times as frequent as in national polities, but even so it occurs no more than only once in every eighty years of political party activity. It is still an infrequent occurrence.

Why should there be such variation in the incidence of collapse between the two levels of politics? It is not difficult to isolate four variables, relating to how party structures link different actors in the polity (Factor 2 above), that are responsible for making major parties in nation-states, including Canada itself, normally less vulnerable to collapse than Canada's provincial parties. The presence of any one of them assists in the consolidation of a major party, so that the party elites have relatively little to do in managing the preservation of that status; the party can then rely on the effect of its focal arbiter role. As will be seen, the absence of one or more factors can increase vulnerability, as it has done in the Canadian provinces, making the parties there more exposed than is typical in nation-states.

The channelling of political careers

One of the main incentives for a would-be elected public official to be in, and remain in, a major political party is that it will facilitate movement up the 'political ladder' from one level of public office to another. A key factor explaining why there have been so few instances of different parties being successful at the state level of office in America is that being in such a party would make it more difficult for its members to switch into federal politics from state politics—because that would involve a change of party. In much of the eastern half of the US local elections are also contested on a partisan basis, and this too reinforces the incentive for nearly all ambitious politicians to run under the label of one of the two main parties. It is no coincidence that one of the few examples of a successful state-level party, the Farmer-Labor party in Minnesota, occurred in a state where, unusually, both local government and the state legislature were formally non-partisan. The career 'ladder' factor was simply less important there than in most American states. By contrast with the United States, provincial parties in Canada are not the middle rung of a national career 'ladder'. With the exception of the New Democratic Party (NDP), most parties do not formally contest local elections, and nor do provincial parliamentarians move on to the federal parliament; unlike state legislators in America, federal office is not understood as career progression for them. Only about one quarter of MPs in Ottawa have served in local government, with only 4 per cent having experience in their provincial parliaments, and only one Canadian prime minister has held a similar position in his or her province.⁷ By contrast most members of the US Congress have been elected previously to local governments or to state legislatures, while four of the last five Presidents were ex-state governors. In general, the fewer levels of public office for which a party's nomination matters the less will its candidates and officeholders' interests be linked to that of the party itself.

Partisan loyalty of voters

The more attached voters are to particular parties the greater advantage existing parties have in fending off challenges from minor and new parties. Strong party identification—leaving aside the issue of how that should be measured—reduces the incentive for would-be candidates to move outside the established party structure; the chances of success in doing so are less than in countries where voter-party links are weaker. These links are, indeed, weaker in Canada than in most democracies; massive swings in party support between elections, at both provincial and federal levels, are often accompanied by variations between constituencies, with seats changing hands against the overall trend.⁸ Consequently, at both the federal and provincial levels in Canada and by comparison with many other polities, the major parties' candidates have fewer incentives to stay with

their party—especially after a major electoral failure. They cannot rely as much on the party being able to use its resources to remobilize an electorate.

Resources required for contesting an election

Large ‘entry costs’ face most new parties when they commence contesting elections. Typically major parties have more of the required resources, because of acquisition during their earlier campaigns and their periods in government, and similarly they have more contacts with those who can supply the resources. Just having been a major party in the past is a huge advantage in the present—in resource generation, and not merely because of the party’s focal arbiter role. Their advantage over new or third parties is maximized when three conditions hold.

- (i) Campaigning has to be more focused on a centralized campaign, rather than on individual constituencies, so that entry costs for a new party cannot be lowered by its focusing on just some constituencies.
- (ii) The electorate is a large and/or diverse one, so that the minimum cost of an adequate campaign is high.
- (iii) New or third parties do not have access to specific social groups that are already organized for some form of social mobilization. For example, parties that can draw on the support of a church or a trade union typically have lower costs compared with those that do not.⁹

For the Canadian provinces, the relevant aspect of this resource factor is that the smaller scale of electoral mobilization there, by comparison with the federal level, would make it less likely, *ceteris paribus*, that new entrants would be disadvantaged. However, scale is not the only relevant factor, of course. If it were then it might be expected that more instances of party collapse in the smallest provinces (those on the Atlantic coast) would be found, though in fact these are the very provinces where party collapse has been absent so far—at least until 2016.¹⁰

Rewards available to party leaders

Decisions either simply to exit a major party, or to join a new or third party instead of it, are affected by the relative rewards that the respective party leaderships seem capable of delivering. The more valuable those rewards are, the more likely the leadership is to attract support. Here a further difference between provincial and federal politics in Canada becomes apparent. Since confederation Canadian federal prime ministers have wielded vast patronage powers, especially in appointments to the judiciary.¹¹ This is one reason why, as will be seen shortly, among Canadian federal parties that have experienced major electoral defeats fragmentation has occurred only once. For participants drawn by the direct rewards of office a defeated major party normally offers a better prospect for securing them than a new party; because of what is at stake, it is not worth

gambling on a new party. Others are not likely to take that gamble either, so the defeated major party continues to offer the better chance of success, despite the recent failure. Whereas within American states the federal administration has no powers of judicial patronage except for the federal judiciary itself, in Canada the federal government (in effect, the prime minister) has many powers of nomination down to the level above that of the so-called ‘inferior’ courts in the provinces. Appointments to the Superior Courts in the provinces are controlled by the federal level, leaving only limited patronage opportunities for provincial premiers. As with the federal prime minister, power is concentrated in these first ministers.¹² Nevertheless, compared with their federal counterpart, the premiers are lacking in largesse.

Together with the argument about ‘scale’, introduced above, this is crucial for understanding why in the provinces party collapse has been more common than in Canadian federal politics. There is just less at stake in throwing in your lot with a new party there than there is at the higher level.¹³ Nevertheless, even in those six Canadian provinces that have experienced it so far, party collapse into third-party status is still a relatively infrequent event. Thirteen instances in the 720 or so years of elections in the six provinces indicates that just being a major party is an enormous advantage against minor parties, or ones still to be formed, enabling it to survive in adverse conditions. Despite lacking many of the resources available to parties in other systems, Canada’s major provincial parties are survivors for much of the time. Their presence in the party system gives them a big advantage. The extent of this ‘focal arbiter’ advantage can be gauged by considering the relationship between massive drops in electoral support at single elections and the propensity of parties to collapse subsequently.

2.2. COLLAPSE AND SINGLE ELECTIONS

Intuitively, it seems clear that there must be some kind of connection between major party collapse and exceptionally poor performance in a single election: a catastrophic electoral performance opens the way, either immediately or in the next few years, for a replacement party. Without such a catastrophe a new party would normally have considerable difficulty in ‘lifting off’—in persuading participants, contributors, and candidates that it could overcome the natural advantages that lie with a major party. In nine of the thirteen instances in the Canadian provinces this is clearly what occurred. Before turning to see what is different about the other cases, though, it is necessary to make several preliminary points about these nine.

First, the massive size of the vote loss in the particular elections (see Table 2.2) can be gauged by comparing it with three ‘earthquake’ elections in twentieth-century Britain (1906, 1945, and 1997). Excluding the complex case of British

TABLE 2.2. Canadian provincial elections since 1900 in which major loss of votes by one party was followed by its surrendering major party status

Province/party	Catastrophic election	Decline in vote share from previous election as % of total vote for all parties	Years before new major party acquired or consolidated its position
Quebec: Union Nationale	1970	21.2	6
Ontario: New Democrats	1995	17.0	0
Saskatchewan: Liberals	1978	17.9	8
Saskatchewan: Conservatives	1991	19.1	8
Alberta: United Farmers	1935	28.4	0
Alberta: Social Credit	1975	22.9	11
British Columbia: Conservatives	1933	53.3	13
British Columbia: Liberals	1952	<i>12.1</i>	0
British Columbia: Social Credit	1991	25.3	0

Columbia (see below), the *smallest* decline in a party's vote share was 17 per cent; in the three British elections the declines in the vote share of the defeated governing parties were much smaller than this: 7.4, 13.9, and 11.2 per cent respectively of the total vote. By any standards, therefore, these Canadian vote losses were large.

Secondly, one case, that of the governing British Columbia Conservatives in 1933, is unusual because splits within the party led to it not fielding any candidates at all. Although it was to contest two subsequent elections, its weakened position after 1933 resulted in its entering an electoral pact with the Liberals in 1946. Because of this it could be argued that the Conservatives did not finally lose their major party status until 1952, rather than in 1933, as shown in Table 2.2.

Thirdly, that 1952 election also saw the British Columbia Liberals becoming a minor party, but there are two problems in calculating quite what the decline in their vote share was. One difficulty is that that election was contested under the Alternative Vote (AV) electoral system, and in Table 2.2 the vote share recorded is that for the party in the first round of balloting. The other problem is how to attribute the share of the vote in the previous election of 1949 between the Liberals and the Conservatives, given that they fought the election as partners in a pact; for the purposes of Table 2.2, the two parties in 1949 are assumed to have divided the vote between them in the same way as they did fighting separately in 1952, resulting in the Liberals being attributed with a loss of 12.1 per cent of the total vote (italicized table).

What of the four instances when the loss of major party status did not seemingly follow defeat in an earthquake election? The first case, that of the Manitoba Liberals, does resemble the first nine in a number of respects, and arguably should be grouped with those cases. It differs principally in that the catastrophic electoral defeat involved a somewhat smaller vote loss (9 per cent), though one that was still large by comparison with, say, British elections. That this smaller decline in the

vote was so decisive was the result of a much larger share of the vote having been obtained by smaller parties in Manitoba than in most other provinces. The Liberals had been the largest party in each of six provincial elections between 1932 and 1953, but had received a median vote share of only 36.5 per cent; it lost each of the next four elections with a median vote share that declined by only 3 per cent. Nevertheless, with the Conservatives able to consolidate a larger share of the vote than the Liberals had during their stay in office, the Liberals were now running on average 7.7 per cent of the vote behind the Conservatives. In that context a decline of 9 per cent in its vote share in 1969 significantly shifted the balance between the Liberals and both the Conservatives and the New Democrats. They were much less able to recover from this level of vote decline than would be usual among Canadian provincial parties.

The second and third cases do not fit the more common pattern in the Canadian provinces. They involved the merging of a party into another one before an election, and it could be argued that, while they are instances of a type of party collapse, they were of a very different kind from the first ten. The governing Manitoba Progressive Party had been the political wing of the United Farmers of Manitoba, but in 1928 the latter withdrew from electoral politics to become a lobbying organization. Faced with the prospect of defeat by the Conservative Party, the Progressive Party merged into the Liberal party and contested the 1932 election on that basis. The second of these two cases, the Quebec Conservatives, was one of an eventual merger between itself and a breakaway group from the province's Liberal party. However, merger was not concluded before the 1935 election. Contesting only a limited number of seats itself in 1935, and ceding more contests that year to the Action Libérale Nationale (ALN), the Conservatives' vote declined by 24.6 per cent. Superficially this partly resembles the earthquake elections of the nine cases just discussed, but its alliance with the ALN means that it could be misleading to include it with the first ten cases, where electoral defeat acted at least as a catalyst for party collapse.

The final case, that of the Alberta Liberals, is an oddity in that the party did have intermittent periods of being the second largest party after its defeat in 1921; however even then it was a very weak competitor. In only two elections (1921 itself and 1955) did it get more than about a quarter of the total vote and its best result was in obtaining just over a third of the vote. Unlike the last two cases, there is no doubt that the Alberta Liberals declined dramatically in 1921, with a drop in their vote share of 14.1 per cent, a decline that is not that different from the cases discussed at the beginning of this section. The main doubt about including this case with the first ten lies in whether Alberta really should count as a two-party system. It would meet some definitions of two-partism discussed in Chapter 1. For example, the two largest parties regularly receive at least 70 per cent of the vote between them, and often obtain more than 80 per cent. However, successively four different parties have governed the province since 1905, and there is no regular alternation in power; one party dominates elections for a long

period until it is replaced by another party which then becomes dominant. It would meet the definition of two-partism used in this study only if the period concerned was restricted either to post-1935 or to a similarly artificial period in the pre-1935 era. Were Alberta to count as a two-party system, it would be a very odd type, and if it were not then the collapse of both the United Farmers and of Social Credit in the province should also be removed from Table 2.2. Although this would reduce the incidence of major party collapse in the Canadian provinces overall, it does not alter the point that provincial-level party collapse occurs nearly three times as frequently as at the level of nation-states.

In the absence of Alberta, there remains a reasonably strong link between huge electoral defeats and the loss of major party status. The claim can be generalized: except when they merge with other parties, major parties disappear or decline only when there has been a huge electoral defeat for them. Parties do not just 'pack up business', with their various participants moving into other parties or quitting politics. However, an earthquake-type election is no more than an enabling condition: the defeated party is vulnerable to defection because the scale of its defeat raises doubts about its capacity to operate effectively in the future. Nevertheless, such a defeat does not mean that it cannot recover. This is where the inherent advantage of just having been a major party becomes evident. Of the seventeen occasions in the Canadian provinces in which a party's vote share declined by at least 16 per cent of the total vote, nine did not lead to subsequent party collapse (see Tables 2.2 and 2.3). As noted earlier, large vote swings are relatively common in Canada, so that even when 15 or 20 per cent of the entire voting electorate has withdrawn its support from a party, the 'focal arbiter' advantage associated with being a major party still gives it a slightly better than evens chance of surviving. Those opportunities for recovery would be greater still, of course, when parties have more resources, by comparison with their potential usurpers, with which to rebuild support. Thus, the expectation would be that the federal parties in Canada would more easily withstand the consequences of 'earthquake' elections, and that is exactly what is apparent. At the federal level there were twenty-eight general elections in the twentieth century of which five produced slumps in support for the governing party of at least 16 per cent of the total vote. Yet only one election (1993) saw the subsequent collapse of a major party. (The reductions in percentage support were respectively 27 (1921), 18 (1935), 16 (1962), 16 (1984), and 27 (1993).)

The combination of what might be termed *position* in the party system (Factor 1 above) and *resources* (Factor 2) thus seems to help explain variations in the incidence of party collapse. However, there is a possible objection to drawing this conclusion. It might be argued that merely looking at the scale of electoral defeats ignores a fundamental distinction. Some massive defeats are associated with underlying changes in the bases of electoral support while others are not. A critic of the argument being propounded here might contend that the rebuttal of the 'second answer' (to the question of why parties collapse) at the beginning

TABLE 2.3. *Canadian provincial elections in which one party lost more than 16 per cent of total provincial vote but new or third party did not consolidate its position*

Province	Party	Year	% loss of total vote
Newfoundland	Liberals	1971	17.4
Newfoundland	Liberals	2003	16.6
New Brunswick	Progressive Conservatives	1987	18.4
Quebec	Conservatives	1919	18.1
Quebec	Liberals	1976	20.8
Ontario	Progressive Conservatives	1934	19.0
Ontario	Liberals	1943	20.4
British Columbia	Conservatives	1916	19.1
British Columbia	New Democratic Party	2001	17.9

of this chapter fails to take account of the phenomenon of electoral realignment. Patterns of electoral support do change and, it might be claimed, that is a likely cause of party collapse and is being ignored. It is to this matter that attention must now be turned.

2.3. COLLAPSE, REALIGNMENT, AND THE FAILURE OF PARTY MANAGEMENT

An obvious starting point is the observation that one of the surprising aspects of major party collapse in national two-party systems is how little comparative analysis of it there has been. Obviously, because of its recent collapse it would not be expected that the PC would be included in any such analysis. What is more puzzling is that, despite some obvious superficial similarities between them, the American Whigs and the British Liberals have nearly always been examined without mention of the other. How party leaders, and sub-leaders, attempted to control new political environments in which they found themselves operating (after 1852 and 1916 respectively) has been examined only in isolation, albeit extensively, for each case. Moreover, for both cases there is a significant body of thought that links the particular collapse to one factor: electoral realignment.¹⁴ However, as will now be outlined, not only can this not provide a general explanation for party collapse, it can also be argued that, even in the particular cases, the available evidence does not show that changes in the electorate, or in the interests and issues to which mass electorates responded, were the crucial variable. What is missing from the realignment argument, as it is often presented, is recognition of what realignments really are: that they are 'managed' by political elites rather than being exogenous social variables about which the elites themselves can do little. Indeed, one of the points that should

become clear is that the ability of these elites to manage potential realignment can be contrasted with the problems they face in controlling party collapse and its consequences.

Especially in two-party systems, where party elites have to appeal to more than just a narrow range of interests, parties must provide convincing incentives for initial voter support gained at one election to be translated into long-term support for that party. When a party does not do that support for it may then decline as rapidly as it rose—a fate that overcame the Canadian Progressive Conservatives between 1958 and 1962. A proponent of realignment theory might well argue that this particular example is irrelevant; realignment relates only to those instances of changed electoral behaviour where a precisely defined new interest has either emerged within society or has recently been enfranchised. On this view, the size, coherence, and identity of the group, together with the distinctive ideas around which it is mobilizing, present existing parties with a dilemma: either they must seek to ally themselves fully with the interest, and on terms largely dictated by it, or run the risk that the interest supports some new or minor party as its vehicle. Either way the scope for party management of the political environment is limited.

There are three fundamental weaknesses in this argument. The first is that often, in any party system, the unity and identity of particular social interests is incomplete; there are divisions within interests that elites of different parties can exploit to their own advantage. Secondly, and partly because of this, in two-party systems party elites—whether of existing or of potential parties—normally cannot build a successful electoral strategy on just one interest. The electoral coalition would be too small, and an inability to come close to attaining power would undermine its long-term viability, in the face of competition from parties that do have the potential to form a broader coalition. Finally, voters' loyalty to a party from within an interest hinges on the party actually doing something for them that stimulates future support. That is something that can be achieved through control of government; public policy can be used to benefit voters who then reciprocate by supporting the party that has provided those benefits. In other words, like, for example, democratization, realignment is a process that has to be *consolidated*; this happens after a party has initially, and temporarily, been able to attract voters towards itself at one election—a point that Weatherford has demonstrated well in the case of the New Deal.¹⁵ One problem facing parties that have suffered major electoral defeat is that they are in no position to do that—but nor, for that matter, are previously minor parties that have just secured second place at an election. That is why, as Gienapp correctly observes, the process of (what he calls) party decomposition must be separated from that of electoral realignment.¹⁶ Collapse can occur without any subsequent realignment (as has arguably been the case in many, though not necessarily all, of the instances in the Canadian provinces), just as a realignment can occur without party collapse (as during the New Deal).¹⁷

When it comes about, electoral realignment occurs because of what politicians have done (or not done) through their control of the state, and how that control has impacted on particular groups of voters. Sometimes those voters may have been mobilized earlier by another party, though often, as was the case with many urban dwellers in the New Deal, it is previously unmobilized groups who are at the core of a realignment. What the politicians have done can produce both the collapse of one party and also electoral realignment. But the important point is that a party's collapse is not evidence that realignment has occurred, nor does the absence of party collapse indicate whether or not there has been realignment. This becomes clear when there is close examination of the connection between the two phenomena in the two cases for which it has been alleged that both were present in national politics—the American Whigs and the British Liberals—and discussion commences with the Whigs' demise.

The early 1830s marked the beginning of the age of mass politics in the United States. Since then there have been three main periods when key groups of voters either started to vote differently, or when new voters started to vote differently from those who had participated previously in elections. The most recent change took the longest to develop, and involved the gradual shifting of many white southerners to the Republican ticket in the twenty-five or so years after the mid-1960s.¹⁸ Before that, in the 1930s, Franklin Roosevelt had been able to mobilize previously non-voting urban dwellers into voting Democratic, thereby making his party far more competitive in northern states than it had been in the previous seven decades.¹⁹ The first period, however, was the 1850s when, although some northerners moved into the Democratic party and some moved out of it, the main impact of electoral change was in the South. There the Democrats would come to dominate electorally because by 1857 they were the only party that seemed capable of protecting white southern interests. As with the later instances, and especially with the New Deal, it is important not to exaggerate the extent of the change in the 1850s. The ideology of both the Democrats and their opponents altered little. Gerring, for example, noted of the displacement of the Whigs by the Republicans that 'a fairly consistent view of the political world was carried over from the party of Clay to the party of Lincoln'.²⁰ Moreover, outside the South, there was also considerable continuity in the coalitions of states that the parties aggregated at the national level in their pursuit of majority status.²¹ Typically American electoral realignments have been adjustments to the existing political order, involving just some social groups, rather than a fundamental overturning of that order. More importantly, for the arguments being developed here, on the one occasion in which party collapse also occurred (that is, in the early 1850s) there was not a disproportionately large realignment, compared with the later realignments, accompanying it.

Not only have there been instances of realignment without party collapse in the United States, but in some respects the electoral instability of the years 1852–6 displays similarities with other periods when there was neither an immediate

realignment nor party collapse. In 1892–6, 1910–14, and 1968–72 one or both parties were divided on major issues, making it difficult for them to retain the support of all their normal party coalitions. Although 1968–72 was at the beginning of the long period of what became southern realignment, Nixon's efforts at using federal policy to reshape the Republican party had far less immediate effect in consolidating support for his party than had, for example, Franklin Roosevelt's in the 1930s. (Having voted for Nixon in overwhelming numbers in 1972, many white southerners then abandoned his party in favour of Jimmy Carter four years later.) No serious case has ever been made for an electoral realignment occurring around 1912, and contemporary scholarship now also rejects the long-held belief that there had been such a shift in voter support in the 1890s.²² Nevertheless, of these periods of voter volatility, in many ways it is the crisis of the early 1890s that most closely resembles the conditions leading up to the collapse of the Whigs. There were groups of voters in both parties—in the later era in the primary-producing states of the west and south—who believed their interests were not being well represented by their own party's elites. For their part the parties were now finding it difficult to maintain coalitions that embraced all the components that they had included earlier. Yet for all the turbulence and rancour of that era, neither of the major parties collapsed in the way that the Whigs had. Why not?

Before outlining a hypothesis that might resolve this question (in section 2.4), namely that it is conflict on two fronts that is responsible for party collapse, it is necessary to turn first to the British case. Here too there is a long established body of scholarship arguing that it was changes in the electorate that made one major party unviable and the rise of a new party inevitable. One party in Britain, the conventional wisdom goes, had to collapse because of the enlarged electorate post-1918—an electorate now that would firmly reorientate politics around class division. The very size of the working class would necessitate other parties consolidating in opposition to them. Because of the use of SMP, and other institutional factors, no more than one non-working-class party could survive once that class was fully enfranchised. That it was the Liberals that gave way to Labour had partly to do with their split in 1916, but was more the result of their being the party that was the direct rival for the support of social groups whom the Labour party now sought to mobilize.

Nevertheless, there are serious grounds for doubting that, absent the particular conditions present during 1916–24, the demise of one of the two existing major parties—as opposed to both party and party system reconstruction—was inevitable.²³ One doubt arises from questioning whether, given British class structure, it was going to be easy for a single party to unite the 'working class' behind it, and, in attempting to do so, come even close to creating a majority party. The fact is that, even when Labour became one of the two major parties, and at the very height of its power post-1945, it always had problems in uniting more than two-thirds of the 'working class' in support of it. The difficulty for Labour

was that in Britain there was a high degree of stratification within the groups that comprised manual workers. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the strong tradition of craft-based unions, rather than industry-based ones, exacerbated, rather than ameliorated, this division. There was not a single working class, and for that reason, even in the two decades after 1945, Labour never succeeded in penetrating large sectors of that supposed class, one that contained over 78 per cent of the population in 1921 and 72 per cent in 1951.²⁴ That was a key factor in its being the party of government for so little time in the twentieth century. (In fewer than 30 per cent of the peace-time years between 1918 and 1997 was it in government.) Of course, the growth of trade union membership (by more than 200 per cent) in the first two decades of the twentieth century helped to develop inter-class tensions, and there was always to be a strong link between trade union membership and Labour voting, but it cannot be argued that this increase in membership made the rise of the Labour party, at the expense of a viable Liberal party, inevitable. There are three main arguments against such a claim.

First, both trade unionism itself and its Conservative opponents helped to harden internal divisions in the working class. The more the Conservatives could portray their main opponents as merely a party representing *organized* labour, the more it alienated non-union households from ‘the working class’. This was the strategy that was the key to successful Conservative organization among groups within that class. Here it can be seen how agency could matter in the reshaping of British politics. The Conservatives were able to define the political agenda in this particular way in the inter-war years because they faced such limited competition from the Liberals in mobilizing within the working class after the early 1920s. A strong Liberal party that could attract some working-class votes from both Labour and Conservatives would have prompted different electoral strategies from its two opponents. In the absence of the Liberals as a major party, the dominant strategy for both organized labour and the Conservatives was to emphasize the class-based nature of British politics. That politics had such a strong class dimension to it after 1918 was due partly to the two largest parties having adopted class strategies that were central to their definitions of politics.

Secondly, and arguably more important than this, is that the trade union movement concentrated its efforts exclusively on working through its own party—something that it had not done in the pre-war years—simply because the war had rendered the Liberals such a useless vehicle for them. Both the war and the divisions among the Liberals that resulted from it made it much easier for the organizations that sought to represent working-class interests to come together in support of just one party. Had the pressure for that been inevitable then it would have been apparent in the five or six years before the war, but there was no such development—despite trade union membership increasing in the years between 1900 and 1914.

Thirdly, even the rise in trade union membership did not make Labour a large party in 1918. Trade unionists constituted about 30 per cent of the electorate that year and, together with their families, formed a still greater proportion of the potential electorate. However, many of the 'organized' working class did not swing behind the Labour party when given the opportunity to do so in 1918: only 22.5 per cent of the entire electorate supported Labour.

Nor was this support low because Labour failed to contest many seats. One of the best ways of testing just how unattractive Labour proved to be in 1918 is to examine those contests where they faced both Conservatives (either Coalition Conservatives, with the Lloyd George 'coupon', or those who ran without it) and Liberals (both Coalition Liberals and others). The reason for selecting these seats is that, by definition, Labour had sufficiently strong organizations there to nominate a candidate, but there was not the distorting effect on vote share of Labour having merely one opponent. There were 137 such contests, and a clear majority of these seats were to become core parts of Labour territory within a decade; just under 60 per cent of them would be held by the minority government of 1929, and in the 1929–31 parliament they formed nearly 30 per cent of all Labour seats. The median share of the vote obtained by the party in these constituencies in 1918 was a mere 25.6 per cent. Nor is this low figure mainly the result of including constituencies that were generally unfavourable to Labour, but where nonetheless it had been possible to find a candidate in 1918. The median for the share of the vote taken by the Labour party in those eighty-eight constituencies that they were to win eleven years later was higher, but it was still only 27.7 per cent of the total vote. A good impression of the kinds of constituencies in which Labour was performing this modestly in 1918 can be gleaned by identifying the six constituencies closest to that median: Cardiff East, Coventry, Glasgow (Maryhill), Keighley, Lincoln, and St Pancras North. This was the heart of urban Britain. Whatever the strength of Labour's appeal in those other, heavily unionized constituencies (mostly mining ones) that they had been contesting since earlier in the century, elsewhere in 1918 the party was not confronting an expanded working-class electorate that was waiting to embrace it.

Moreover, compared with the other parties that year, Labour had a considerable 'grass roots' organizational advantage in 1918. It could rely on trade unions to try to mobilize their members and other working-class voters, whilst the Conservative constituency organizations had been moribund during the war and the Liberals' organizations had largely disintegrated. This was an important counterbalance to the impact of the Lloyd George 'coupon'; yet even with it, and even in constituencies that would shortly become central to the expanded party, Labour managed to obtain only just over a quarter of the vote. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that much of that expanded electorate was not 'natural' Labour territory, and that the party would have to work to develop support there. In fact, their capacity to do that was to be aided not just by the problems facing the Liberals, but also by the strategy (already mentioned) of the Conservatives in the 1920s.

Especially after 1922 under Baldwin, they aimed to squeeze the Liberals, by defining British politics as the socialists (and their trade union allies) versus the rest.²⁵ By treating Labour as the only relevant opposition, the Conservatives actually helped Labour in its ambitions to expand its base within the working class. In that sense, the Conservatives, as much as Labour, placed the British working class at the centre of politics, in that the apparent unity that the class came to be thought of as having overrode many of the evident divisions within it. But not all of them, of course. What the Conservatives wanted was the support of those members of the working class who really did not see politics in class terms, and for whom that provided good reasons for voting Conservative—the ununionized, those working in small factories, those living in small towns or villages, those in domestic service, and so on. The Conservatives understood an important political truth better than did most Labour politicians: ‘People undoubtedly saw Britain as a class-based society in the early 20th century—and this no doubt contributed to their political perspective—but they did so unevenly, inconsistently, and in competition with other intellectual and practical considerations.’²⁶ With class at the centre of British politics, the Conservatives believed, correctly, that it would divide the British working class sufficiently as to work to their own advantage.

For purposes here, though, the central point is whether it was inevitable that the expanded electorate of 1918, and subsequently the children of those voters, would come to understand politics in class terms—to the point at which most would vote for the party *of their class*. Faced by a different pattern of organizations and ideas in the years 1918–23, the class ‘unity’ that later seemed to characterize British politics may have developed along other lines, as different parties sought to engage with different sectors and identities within the working class. The long-established hierarchical structure of this class would have provided the opportunity for that to happen, but it would have required a different pattern of elite politics than that evident in 1918 for it to be realized. Like the case of the American Whigs, therefore, the collapse of a major party is not to be explained by reference to changes within the electorate that made the party unviable. That, to paraphrase Pulzer’s later expression, ‘British politics was all about class, and all else was embellishment and detail’ was a product of what politicians did, especially over a ten-year period up to 1925.²⁷ Similarly, as is seen in Chapter 3, that it had been anti-slavery, and not nativism, that was being grafted onto the Jacksonian party system in the 1850s was not pre-ordained by a shift in public attitudes in America, but was the product of complex interactions by political elites trying to operate under changed conditions. This brings discussion directly back to the question for which an answer is being sought: why exactly is it that parties collapse in nation-states, given that such collapses are not attributable simply to turnover in the people who form the mass electorates of a country, or to fundamental changes in their attitudes and values?

2.4. WHY ENTRENCHED MAJOR PARTIES OCCASIONALLY COLLAPSE

Major parties become weakened, and might incur electoral defeats, for a number of reasons, several of which might be present in any particular instance. Some party leaders might be exposed as corrupt; the party might have become divided over ideology or specific policy objectives; a new issue might divide both party elites and mass supporters; personal ambition might have heightened factionalism to the point at which factions were no longer cooperating in the interest of the party itself; failure in government might have reduced a party's popularity among mass electorates to an unusually low level. These are among the more common causes of weakness. Yet parties have means of dealing with the consequence of these problems. For example, corrupt leaders are forced to retire, and new, and seemingly uncorrupt, sub-leaders are promoted. The same process usually occurs for parties that have failed in government. When issues or ideology are the crucial variable, party rebuilding can be based on calculations as to whether a compromise position is feasible or credible, or whether the party would be better served by maintaining an uncompromising position and facing the exit of that position's opponents. Of course, certain party elites might misjudge where the best prospect for recovery lies, but there is considerable evidence to indicate that parties normally seek to effect changes in response to major electoral defeats. The emergence of moderate Republicanism in 1940s America, and the decision by the British Labour leadership after 1983 to take on and defeat the party's left wing were both examples of this process. Adaptation is possible such that either much of the existing party remains loyal, or new sources of support join those who have remained in it. But central to any process of recovery is the cohesion of a sufficiently large element of the party, so that there is a base onto which the party in future years is able to add new elements of support. What is not usually required in responding to party weakness of this kind is party leaders taking non-obvious decisions or a party leader acting as heresthetician; rather it is 'routine' politics that facilitates party recovery.

However, there is one set of circumstances in which an entrenched major party is normally unable to recover: when party elites are faced by more than one source of conflict. This could take the form of more than one party seeking to mobilize parts of its support, or more than one line of division within the party, with these divisions cross-cutting, rather than complementing, each other. A strategy to deal with just one opponent or one line of conflict will still leave the party facing other factors that are weakening it. On the other hand, a strategy that attempts to deal with both or all of them may leave the core, around which rebuilding is being attempted, much too small. Stabilizing the party in preparation for rebuilding a coalition later could now be happening with such a small core that the party no longer enjoys its usual advantage of size in its competition with small or new

parties. Moreover, irrespective of the possible size of the core afterwards, it is quite possible that beforehand there would be different understandings of how strategies designed primarily to deal with one line of division will impact on the other. The less hierarchical an organization is the more this may lead to conflict over substance developing into conflict over strategy as well—even among those who are actually seeking to resolve the issue for the benefit of the organization as a whole, rather than pursuing individual interests. It might be predicted, therefore, that party collapse was likely to be associated with either multiple new opponents or multiple, non-reinforcing, lines of division within the party—at least in cases where parties had been able to entrench their position through previous control of the state. This is precisely what is found in two-party nation-states. Party collapse is rare, but it occurs when the elites are attempting to manage more than one line of division within their party.

Major Party Collapse and Conflict on Two Fronts

This chapter examines in more detail the three cases of major party collapse in nation-states identified in Chapter 2, before turning to discuss briefly whether changes within national polities are increasing the problems for parties in managing their political environments, such that the incidence of major party collapse is likely to increase. The argument developed here is that the forces that could conceivably increase the incidence of major party collapse might instead be producing more complex, and ‘impure’ forms of two-partism. Rather than parties becoming more vulnerable to losing major party status, it might be expected instead that adaptation by parties will make for various kinds of modification of two-party politics.

3.1. THE CANADIAN PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES

The discussion begins with the most recent case of party collapse, that of the Progressive Conservatives (PC) in Canada in the early 1990s. The PC had come to power in 1984 in the aftermath of widespread dissatisfaction with the Liberal government over rerepatriation of the Canadian constitution two years earlier. In particular, the PC brought together two seemingly incompatible elements—Quebeckers who wanted greater autonomy for their province (short of separation), and westerners who not only resisted that but who also wanted the interests of the primary-producing western provinces better protected. The party’s re-election by a smaller margin in 1988 increased its dependence on this unholy alliance; the only two provinces in which it won a majority of seats then were Alberta and Quebec. The collapse in 1993 was an accident waiting to happen, therefore—in the sense that, once both sets of regional interests realized that the governing party could not deliver on a conflicting set of demands, widespread vote defection was likely. Had the beneficiaries of those defections merely been the Liberals and, to a lesser extent, the NDP, 1993 would have resembled any of the other Canadian federal elections in which a

governing party had sustained large losses—except that the governing party's vote loss would probably have been even greater than in most previous elections.

That this did not happen after 1993 was the result of the PC government's policies drawing into politics two new opponents who each concentrated on one of the two main areas of PC electoral strength. That year, for the first time, a Quebec-based party contested a federal election. In the provincial arena there had long been such parties, beginning with the socially conservative Union Nationale in the mid-twentieth century, and then (from the late 1960s) the social-democrat-oriented, and separatist, Parti Québécois. Such parties had not developed major federal wings, leaving that arena to the Liberals and PC. However, once the separatists entered, federal politics was bound to be disrupted. There was room for only one 'non-separatist' party in Quebec, given the likely strength of any separatist vote, so that when the Bloc Québécois became a contender, an unpopular PC government was in danger of losing all its seats from the province. (Ironically, one of the two seats it did retain was in Quebec.) At the same time, PC strength in the five western provinces, and especially in Alberta, was threatened by the growth of a second regional party (Reform). In the west there were often more than two effective ways of protesting against the PC government; in British Columbia, for instance, protest could be effected by voting for Reform or for the NDP. (Those more concerned with preventing radical elements from seizing control of government could always shun the PC by turning to the Liberals.) This proliferation of credible opponents in its heartlands was the reason why the PC vote collapsed as much as it did in 1993.

For the purposes of this analysis the significance of the two new entrants is the longer term effect they had on the PC: their presence precluded a PC recovery strategy that involved an initial concentration on either of its strongholds of the 1980s (Quebec and Alberta). Had it faced either the Bloc Québécois or Reform, but not both, in the long term it could hope in the future to draw on discontent in the regions where it merely had to face the Liberals.¹ It could rebuild by becoming the new voice of protest there, and then use that status to broaden its coalitions elsewhere, especially in Ontario. But, after being in government and faced with new competitors, the party could not attempt to be more radical than the Liberals in both Alberta and Quebec, but less radical than the newcomers, and get away with it. The strategic alternatives facing the party leadership were limited; agency could not be effective in these circumstances. For that reason, the party was unable to 'refloat' in the way that previously defeated parties had done in Canada; it was restricted in its medium-term strategic options. After 1993 its rebuilding was getting nowhere in Quebec, and it was playing second fiddle to Reform in most of the west. Eventually, unable to restore its earlier electoral support, and in the absence of a feasible strategy of electoral alliances, in 2003 it was, in effect, folded into an expanded successor to the Reform party (see Chapter 6). Whilst bargaining did take place,

it was the latter party that had much greater weight in the construction of the deal.

With the PC collapse, the main problem of ‘fighting on two fronts’ was that it reduced the party’s options for reconstruction in the years after its massive electoral defeat. Both a firm pro-Quebec or pro-west strategy would have eliminated the PC in the other region, turning it into a party that could not compete in at least one region of the country. Yet when there is only one line of division to confront that is precisely the kind of option that a party’s leadership can consider in the early stages of rebuilding; having stabilized itself by creating a base in one of its sectors, the party can then move later to draw on discontent elsewhere with the new governing party. For a party facing two lines of division, post-defeat consolidation of this type may be difficult to initiate and, even when successful at first, it may prove difficult for the party to then expand beyond its core support in that sector.

This Canadian example draws attention to one of the two problems that the political leaders of major parties that have experienced a major reduction in their vote can face in devising strategies for party rebuilding. The presence of new (or expanded) external political organizations may make it hard to reconstruct sequentially the old coalition. There is now no ‘path’ to the eventual full reconstruction of that party; the ‘moves’ facing any leader of that party are restricted. However, there is a second problem that may also be present. Coordination of strategic moves by party elites may be rendered difficult by a number of other factors: the different interests of those various elites, poor communication between territorially separated elites, and a need to take quick decisions that preclude the possibility of coordination with others.² These factors make it even less possible for agency to be an intervening variable, and they are clearly evident in the second case of party collapse—in the United States in the 1850s.

3.2. THE WHIGS IN THE UNITED STATES

Slavery and nativism had played a similar role in 1850s America to that played by Quebec nationalism and western regionalism in 1990s Canada, though there are some differences between the two cases affecting the potential for successful party management of the issues. Unlike Canada, the election that prompted the party crisis had not seen an expansion in the number of parties contesting either the presidency or other elections. As in 1848, the (anti-slavery) Free Soil party had run a candidate again, but in 1852 he received less than half the share of the vote that his predecessor had obtained four years earlier; in only three states was the Free Soil performance better in 1852, while in twelve states it was worse,

including the largest one (New York) where it was much worse. Under the kinds of conditions present in federal Canada—a general election every four years, and no provincial parties connected to the federal party—management of the twin threats of nativism and slavery would have been difficult, but not as formidable as it actually was for the Whigs. Their problem was that in a variety of electoral arenas, and with elections being held so frequently, individual Whigs in different localities were quickly faced with a choice of prioritizing one or the other issue. While there were elites and some voters who were concerned about both issues, most either regarded one of the issues as irrelevant, at best, or, at worst, as dangerous to the stability of both the party system and the political system.

Of the two alternatives facing the Whigs on the slavery issue, an anti-slavery stance threatened their entire southern base while a pro-slavery one risked the splintering of various Whig parties in the northern states. Nativism had less impact in the south than in the north, but while a pro-immigrant stance threatened mass exit to a Know-Nothing movement (later called the American party), a pro-nativist one risked the loss of crucial votes to the Democrats in the major cities and hence of the states in which they were located. In one important respect Democrats were already better placed than Whigs to manage this situation: their earlier mobilization of urban Catholic voters had been much greater, so that nativism was much less of a viable alternative for the vast majority of local and state Democratic parties. The party nationally had to be anti-nativist; the Democrats, therefore, had simply to address the issue of how ‘pro slavery’ to be. But their victory in the 1852 election gave the Democrats a further advantage. That election necessitated that the defeated party ‘move first’ in the game of how to manage these cross-cutting social conflicts—a game in which it was advantageous to move after the other party had done so. The Whigs had failed, so its members were faced directly with the problem of how to produce winning alliances. In its response to this move, the previously victorious party could then restrict the subsequent options open to its opponent, thereby frustrating coalition reconstruction by the defeated party. Unlike the Canadian case, both major parties were vulnerable to loss of some parts of their electoral coalition after the election, but in the American case only one party was in danger of collapse.

Normal political strategies could not work in these conditions. In nineteenth-century America the party coalition winning major public office—and especially the presidency—tended to fragment fairly quickly. The defeated party could calculate on rebounding on the back of that fragmentation, and it was a policy advocated by some Whigs after 1852. However, the policy was mistaken in this case, with Holt arguing: ‘The calculated policy of watchful waiting until Democrats ruptured or blundered . . . rested upon a chain of seriously flawed assumptions. Most fundamental was the delusion that time was on the Whigs’ side, that Whigs could passively wait for Democrats to self-destruct while healing their own factional and sectional rifts.’³ The loss in 1852 had put much more pressure

on individual Whigs (than on Democrats) in states facing various elections during 1853, and different strategies were always likely to be used in different places, thereby making a coordinated response to the twin issues even more difficult in the future. While the essentially pro-southern strategy actually adopted by the Democrats (especially subsequently with the Kansas–Nebraska Act in 1854) produced severe intra-party splits, Democratic control of the presidency enabled the party to do what the Whigs could not.⁴ That is, it could survive as a national party despite the loss of votes it incurred because of the Act. It preserved more of an appearance, to a multitude of party elites and activists, that one of its wings would eventually control the process of adjustment, so that major party status would be preserved, even with party division and exit from the party.⁵

A crucial difference between the PC and the Whig collapses, therefore, is that it was the connection between different party arenas in America, as well as the frequency of elections, which made management of the twin cleavages especially difficult. Local and state party elites were having to devise strategies for dealing with these cross-cutting divisions at elections to be held so soon after the 1852 presidential defeat. While it might be thought to be advantaged (by comparison with the PC) in not having already been defeated by new parties at an election, the Whig party had the relative disadvantage of finding that concurrently local and political elites throughout the country were trying to devise new organizational solutions—solutions stemming from the Whigs seemingly no longer being competitive in the short term. The interaction between, on the one hand, there being two emerging social cleavages in the polity, and on the other, the need for politicians so quickly to produce organizational solutions for electoral uncompetitiveness, was lethal.

Here it is possible to begin to see why subsequent American party crises in the periods 1893–6 and 1909–14 (mentioned in Chapter 2) did not produce the same result as that of 1852–6. In all three periods both parties were split by issues that cut across their traditional coalitions; in the 1890s this was a regionally based economic cleavage, whereas two decades later it had to do with the role of the state (and state regulation) in a capitalist economy. Splits produced new forms of political organization—first the Populist party, and later the fusion of various populist groupings with the Democrats (in 1896), and then, in 1912, the creation of a Progressive party as a breakaway from the Republican party. Often parties could not compromise in the short term during these two periods—for example, the Republicans in 1896 could not square support for the ‘silver-producing’ states with their interests in the north-east, and they abandoned the former for that election. Nevertheless, if party management was never easy for the affected parties, it was possible to make ‘on balance’ judgements as to where party interests might lie in the short term and to act accordingly. Compromises could always be made later to draw back in those social groups who seemed to have been abandoned in the short term; moreover, keeping track of the direction that political allies were taking in particular states, and devising some kind of

national strategy in the light of that was possible. That is precisely what was not possible in the 1850s because there were two major divisions cutting across each other, with each threatening to splinter support away from the party. Each had the potential to generate a minor political party—just as both Reform and the Bloc Québécois were to emerge in Canada one hundred and forty years later. Deprived of patronage that would have come its way with victory in 1852, and deprived of a president-as-head-of-party who could coordinate a response to the two threats, the Whigs experienced an unravelling which meant that its accumulated resources could not be used effectively to see off two yet-to-be-formed parties.

In these conditions the ‘focal arbiter’ advantages that established parties should enjoy in fending off newcomers simply could not work as they usually do when party leaders can also direct resources, and change policies, in a coordinated way to shore up a party’s declining position. Of course, the Whigs’ dissembling was slower in the states where they were at their strongest. They started to lose out much more quickly in those parts of the American north where they had been weaker in the early 1850s. By 1854–5 this produced a pronounced regional effect in the competition that was to develop between the three possible rivals to the Democratic party, resulting in the Whig position being undermined much more quickly in some regions than in others, partly because the choices seemingly available to politicians appeared to differ. As Aldrich puts the matter:

In the northeast, the Whig party was stronger in the early 1850s and therefore remained a plausibly viable major party longer. With new immigrants more concentrated in this region, nativism was also a stronger force, and free land was a less immediately consequential concern than in the northwest. As a result the Whig party declined less precipitously in 1854, the Republican party ascended less rapidly, and the American party was a strong (and in 1854–55 stronger) third party. With intersectional alliance possible through the Whig or the American party, and with a northeast–northwest alliance possible through the Republican party, the choice of party affiliation was far more complicated for midlevel ambitious politicians in the northeast than in the northwest...⁶

In short, in their growing competition with both the Republicans and the American party in the north, the Whigs unravelled rapidly from their relatively weakest areas first; individuals could not bring to bear on the party the kind of influence on the choices facing its politicians that might be expected within a major party. A nativist-driven strategy, based on its north-eastern heartland, would have reduced its loss of support in the south as well, leaving it to deal with much reduced support in the north-west. But to do that it had to move quickly, or be faced with the same problem as the PC faced—two new political competitors. However, moving quickly meant some form of national coordination that control of the Presidency and Congress, and the resources accompanying them, could have helped to provide. In its absence the party simply ‘could not punch its weight’

in devising strategies for counteracting its rivals, and that absence of central coordination mattered much more to a party fighting on two fronts than it would have to a party facing a solitary challenge.

3.3. THE BRITISH LIBERALS

The collapse of the British Liberals from 1918 onwards differed from the previous two cases in that there were two lines of fissure within the party several years before it entered the election at which voter support for it would collapse. The first of the 'two fronts' concerned how the Liberals should try to dominate the relationship with their electoral allies, the Labour party. Split as they were between a progressive and a conservative wing, the Liberals faced two distinct dilemmas in managing their relationship with Labour.

One dilemma was how far to push their own policy agenda in the direction of the interests of potential Labour votes, so as to reduce the distinctive appeal of Labour. Its wing that was closest to Labour interests was by no means dominant in the Liberal party, and many Liberals were hostile to trade unionism and the kind of class politics they saw Labour as representing. As with all social coalitions—including the incorporation of ethnic minorities into the Democratic party in the same period—there was always the danger that negotiations would break down from time to time.⁷

The other dilemma was how many seats in the future to cede to Labour as part of a continuing electoral alliance with them. The original (Gladstone–MacDonald) pact drawn up in 1903 had kept Labour confined to being a small parliamentary party. There can be little doubt that, even if the First World War had been avoided, in the longer term Labour would have wanted, and have been able to obtain, a greater share of parliamentary seats than the Gladstone–MacDonald pact had yielded them, either originally or in its renegotiated form in 1910. The growth of labour union density before 1914 was increasing their bargaining power, and this would have enabled them to demand that they have a 'free run' against the Conservatives in more seats. At the same time, though, their position in bargaining with the Liberals remained relatively weak in one key respect: the Liberals did not rely on, and in the short term were unlikely to have to rely on, Labour as the swing vote in the House of Commons. That role was played by the Irish Nationalists, and their presence constrained Labour, even with the latter's growing resource base in industrial Britain; until Labour doubled its number of seats to match that of the Nationalists, it was the latter who were the fulcrum in the party system.⁸

Success in defending their own party's interests depended on the Liberals being in a position to develop strategies for keeping Labour ghettoized in its heartland—of relatively homogeneous working-class communities with high levels of

unionization. The long-term redrawing of the terms of the relationship between the two parties, with Labour eventually being allocated an increased share of the winnable seats, meant that the Liberals had to be in a position from which its elites had a clear view of where their party's interests might lie. It was that position which the war removed from them. Initially it did so by creating a further fissure within the Liberal party between those who were willing to allow the erosion of some civil liberties under war conditions and those who were not. Furthermore, the party's entering into a coalition government with the Conservatives in 1915 would further reduce their flexibility in pursuing policies that would appease Labour, and increase Labour's incentive to strike out on a more independent electoral path than it pursued before 1914. Finally, the government's reaction to the Easter 1916 uprising destroyed moderate, Home Rule oriented, Irish nationalism and replaced it with a nationalist movement committed both to independence and to not working in alliance with British parties. All of this would have produced some change in the British party system, irrespective of other developments, because it would have increased the Liberals' dependence on Labour.

However, it was Lloyd George's 'coup' against Herbert Asquith, the Prime Minister and his party leader, in December 1916 that really opened up a 'second front' for the Liberals, and meant that the party was in no position to continue developing strategies for dealing with the threat that Labour could pose to part of its own electoral base. Although the Asquithian Liberals attempted in 1918 to reach a limited electoral deal with Labour, in which former Liberal ministers would not be opposed by them at the first post-war election, by then Labour had proceeded so far down the road of complete independence during the war that it ruled out of hand deals with either wing of the Liberal party.⁹ Only a united Liberal party would have been in a position to conclude electoral alliances with Labour, and the events of late 1916 precluded that. As two separate parties, the two wings of the Liberal party each polled fewer votes than Labour in both 1918 and 1922, and for that reason the Liberals' electoral collapse can be dated from the earlier election; between them, though, they outpolled Labour in 1918, and came close to doing so even in 1922, when there was no longer a Lloyd George 'coupon' to protect his wing of the party.

As with the PC and American Whig cases, the devastation caused to a party from having to fight on two fronts can be contrasted again with party management of single lines of division in the same country. There have been three other occasions in British politics when a party has faced crises potentially threatening to its major party status: Labour in the early 1930s, Labour again in the early 1980s, and the Conservatives in the late 1990s. Each of these parties was badly split, and each endured large electoral defeats (in 1931, 1983, and 1997). Of course, none of them lost the prestige, as the Asquithian Liberals had done in 1918, of being sufficiently large to be the Official Opposition, but more importantly the divisions could be contained because they were unidimensional. Divisions either between different sections of the party leadership or between political leaders and

sub-elites reflected divisions over sets of issues and policies that were linked to each other. That was not true of the Liberals, 1916–23. While before 1914 Lloyd George had been associated with the social, ‘new Liberal’, wing of the party, what separated him and his own supporters from Asquith and his supporters after 1916 was unconnected with support of, or opposition to, that agenda. The issue of the party’s domestic policy agenda, and which strategy was optimal for keeping the Labour party ‘onside’, but firmly a junior member of an electoral alliance, was irrelevant to the Lloyd George/Asquith rift. In the event that matter was to be resolved by default, with the Liberals ceasing to address it, and with Labour restructuring its own organization in 1918 and preparing for electoral politics in a capacity other than as the Liberals’ junior partner.

As the examples of 1931, 1983, and 1997 demonstrate, major parties in a two-party system normally have the resources to be able to cope with a serious internal division, or the threat (though not in 1931) of a third-party opponent. Senior politicians may exit, and may take some supporters with them, but the advantage of being in a major party is such that exit (or the threat of exit) can usually be contained by the party; it can then adjust its policies and practices to limit further damage. However, when there is more than one source of division, containment becomes far more difficult, and that is when party collapse can, and does, occur. The decline in the party’s share of the vote is likely to be that much greater in these circumstances. Compare the decline experienced by the parties in 1929–31, 1979–83, and 1992–7 with that of the Liberals (both wings) in 1910–18. For the first three cases it was respectively 8, 10, and 11 per cent, whereas for the Liberals it was 18 per cent (or 15 per cent, 1910–22, if allowance is made for the distorting effect of the ‘coupon’). The Liberals’ losses were much bigger, and are closer to the huge vote losses experienced by the Canadian Progressive Conservatives (26 per cent, 1988–93) or the American Whigs in House of Representatives’ elections (33 per cent, 1852–4).

Given the small number of instances of major parties collapsing in two-party systems, it is important to be clear as to the precise nature of the argument presented here. It cannot be demonstrated that ‘fighting on two fronts’ is either a necessary or a sufficient condition for collapse. Certainly it is not a necessary condition. When party control of the state yields them insufficient resources with which to manage the incentives they can offer their adherents, as was seen (in Chapter 2) with party collapse in the Canadian provinces, twin lines of division may be unnecessary for party collapse. Moreover, conceivably, it might be unnecessary for other reasons—because the particular political actors have insufficient information to devise optimal strategies, have poor judgement, are pursuing personal agendas, and so on, all of which could make for weak management of a party’s internal divisions even in the absence of a ‘second front’. As for it being a sufficient condition, although there is a case for arguing that it might be, that cannot be demonstrated conclusively. There could just be circumstances in which a party might be able to recover from dealing with two opponents (or sources of

division). What is being argued here is that it is second lines of division which makes party collapse much more likely at the level of the nation-state, and thus it is not surprising that the three instances of it to date should have arisen in precisely these circumstances. But are these circumstances subject to alteration over time? Have there been changes in other factors that might make it more, or less, easy for a major party to manage its environment in order to protect itself from challenges by minor or new parties following a massive decline in its vote?

3.4. HAS MANAGING A PARTY'S ENVIRONMENT BECOME MORE DIFFICULT?

One obvious respect in which party environments throughout the liberal democratic world are less stable than they were is that voters' ties to parties have become weaker.¹⁰ There are both direct and indirect ways in which this has happened. On the one hand, even when voters do claim to identify with a particular party, many are less likely than their electoral predecessors to vote consistently for that party. On the other hand, to the extent that particular social identities tended to produce orientations to vote for a particular party, there has also been an indirect effect, as social identities have become still more complex. The self-identified Roman Catholic or member of the working class is now even more likely to have other social identities that cross-cut those particular ones, and that makes voting choice subject to greater pressures. Because voters are not as loyal to their parties as they once were, all democracies have experienced a rise in the number of 'earthquake elections' since the early 1990s—elections in which, compared with changes in electoral support in the past, at least one party experiences a massive increase or decrease in its vote share.¹¹ Having fewer loyalist voters makes it more likely that a party will experience a large decline in its vote, following a major internal dispute, a failed period in government, or whatever. Yet, facing a less predictable environment may not make party collapse that much more common. Here the evidence from Canada is revealing.

As noted earlier, Canada is one country in which the attachment of social groups to particular parties was never that strong, and in which voter loyalty to parties was never well developed; throughout its history there have been much greater changes in vote share from one election to another than elsewhere. If weaker voter attachments to parties were really making party management more difficult, it would be expected that extensive evidence of this would have been seen over many decades in Canada—at both federal and provincial levels of politics. However, for the most part, the advantages enjoyed by the major parties have helped them to avoid collapse—even when they have lost 15–20 per cent of the total vote from their vote share at the previous election.

The 1987 PC defeat in New Brunswick is especially interesting in this regard; it is a province that traditionally displayed a stronger form of two-partism than most provinces. That stability was severely tested after 1987. In the wake of major political scandals, the governing PC party lost all its seats to the Liberals, and saw its vote share decline from 47 (in 1982) to 29 per cent of the total. At the following election (1991) a split in the party saw the emergence of a new party (the Confederation of Regions), consisting mainly of former PCers, which took 21 per cent of the vote, slightly more than the PC itself did, and it also won more seats than the PC. Yet four years later, the PC had increased its vote share to 31 per cent, and had driven the new party back into minor party status. By 1999, with a 53 per cent share of the vote, a larger proportion than it obtained in 1982, the PC was back in control of the provincial government, and the earlier two-party regime had been restored. What this case reveals clearly is the inherent advantage older parties may have, even when dealing with internal division and having to see off new political formations. The 'focal arbiter' role is not necessarily lost immediately when a party initially falls into third place after an election. Consequently, although reduced levels of voter loyalty make it more likely that old parties will come under threat, this does not entail party collapse becoming more common than it was. The capacity of established parties to manage internal divisions and external challenges is likely to remain high even as voter loyalty to parties overall declines.

Another argument suggesting that the capacity for environmental management of major parties has declined is that it is now easier for minor or new parties to establish themselves as permanent participants in elections. One reason for this is the introduction of new arenas in which parties contest elections—especially arenas in which proportional electoral formulae are used. Not only do such rules enable minor or new parties to obtain representation in that particular arena, but they can thereby obtain resources enabling them to be more competitive at the national level of politics as well. The British experience can be used to illustrate the point. Beginning in the 1960s the Liberals had a strategy of trying to build up a strong base in local government, a strategy that was aided by the greater politicization of local elections after the local government reform of 1972. In the long term its newly acquired organizational strength helped the party to increase its vote share in national elections as well, partly because it was now able to field candidates in most constituencies. An additional factor favouring third-party consolidation was the advent of elections to the European parliament, especially when proportional formulae were introduced (1999), with the use of such formulae for the new Assemblies in Scotland and Wales being a further contributory factor in those countries. Nor were the Liberals the only party in Britain to benefit from these new arenas of electoral politics; the Nationalist parties in both Scotland and Wales, and, to some extent, the Greens were able to expand the number of seats they contested in general elections, because of the more extensive organizations they now had. For example, by the end of the twentieth century in parliamentary

elections in Scotland, all four of the largest parties contested every seat—a marked contrast with the situation four or five decades earlier.

Undoubtedly, these developments have contributed to Britain having a far less ‘pure’ form of two-partism than it appeared to have in the mid-twentieth century. Nevertheless, once again it can be questioned whether the availability of new arenas for party activity will always have quite the impact on national politics that it might appear to have had in Britain. Non-major parties may become more permanent, but that does not necessarily mean that they will have the capacity to become central players in national elections. Especially in those presidential systems where the electoral rules encourage temporary fusion in the first round of presidential elections, a small party still has no incentive to go it alone in a presidential contest. Thus, in late twentieth-century Costa Rica, at the same time that the separate conservative parties had an incentive to consolidate against a unified opponent for the presidency, the proportional system used in legislative elections still encouraged other parties to enter, and win, at that level. As Yashar notes:

... the largest remainder system is one of the most proportional of electoral methods. Distortions that occur in Costa Rica are minimal compared to those found in other countries. And the threshold for representation in the legislature is remarkably low. Moreover, Costa Rica’s effective district magnitude of eight is sufficiently high so as to allow a large number of parties to win representation.¹²

What has emerged in Costa Rica is, in effect, something resembling both a multi-party system and also a two-party system in the national political arena. One party often did not win an overall majority in the legislature, which is quasi-multi-party in character, while at the same time two-partism was being consolidated in presidential politics. If, to use the language of Ferrara *et al.*, there is ‘contamination’ of one electoral sphere by another, it would not appear to be that great. While those authors provide strong evidence of it for mixed electoral systems within a single institution, it might be expected that it would be much less for wholly separate institutions.¹³

For very different reasons, Canada too provides evidence that the British developments, of party-building in one arena facilitating party-building in others, are by no means universal. Underlying party strategy in Britain has been the perception that the stronger a party is in one arena, the greater its potential strength in another electoral arena. But what if that greater strength in the one actually weakens a party in the other arena? In the Costa Rican case it is merely the impossibility of a minor party using its resources in one arena to mount a more serious challenge in another that can be seen. What is evident in Canada is the conflict of interest a party would face from such strengthening—because of the parallel conflict of interest that there is between provincial and federal levels of government. The Canadian parties have long responded to this by largely separating the two elements of their parties, while new parties have often operated

in just one electoral arena or the other. Only in the NDP, and then only in some provinces, has there been an integration of the parties operating in the provincial and federal arenas. In the case of other parties in Canada, all these two elements actually have in common is a shared name. Thus, for many years, not only has the Quebec Liberal party been legally separate from the federal Liberal party's organization in Quebec, but it has also wanted to emphasize that separation—because of fundamental disagreements on some policies. That the British parties have not yet had to face the same situation is solely due to the reduced conflict between, say, Scottish and European government on the one side, and the UK government on the other; this is because the non-state governments have had relatively limited policy responsibilities that would bring them into direct conflict with the national government. Differences still arise between Scottish Labour and the Labour government in Westminster, for example, but they are on a scale where negotiation *within* the party remains possible, at least for the present. In Canada the only way that parties could prevent themselves from potentially engaging in extensive internal warfare is through separation.

There is a further difference between Britain and Canada regarding the way parties operate in different arenas. Local government in the latter has not been colonized by the parties in the way that it has been in Britain—at least since 1945, and especially since the 1972 local government reforms. Provincial level parties have not sought to expand their resource base—recruiting activists and so on—by engaging directly in local elections. Organized groups contest these elections—but generally the parties have not been drawn in directly. Consequently the argument that the creation of multiple levels of government will necessarily strengthen minor parties, and that that in turn will weaken the position of major parties in a two-party system, seems to be wrong for two reasons. First, having many levels of government may lead instead to greater autonomy for units operating in different electoral arenas, so that organizational strength at one level may be irrelevant for strength at another; Carty's argument against Koole (and others), that parties are better understood as stratarchies, and not hierarchies, is surely correct.¹⁴ Secondly, even if minor parties are strengthened, the rules of the political game may still provide no incentive for them to move beyond contesting the kinds of offices for which they can be competitive. All of which suggests that, in the world of two-party politics, a variety of different developments with respect to the purity of two-party politics may be evident—depending on the particular institutional structures and rules within which given parties are operating. Whilst it can be argued that both reduced voter loyalty and new arenas in which parties can participate may make it more likely that 'impure' forms of two-partism will develop, it is important to recognize one point. A model of there being just two parties that dominate all electoral arenas was one that was not applicable to many supposedly two-party regimes even before the late twentieth century.

However, it is also important to note a rather different feature of two-partism during this era—namely that there has been no observable shift away from the

'pure' two-partism found in the six countries that either became independent after 1960 or redemocratized after then (that is, the four Caribbean states, Malta, and Greece). In the case of some of them (Bahamas, Barbados, and Malta) a small population size might conceivably be a relevant factor. However, this could not account for Greece, Jamaica, and Trinidad, and this raises the question of why 'impurity' in two-party systems should be associated with the older democracies. One argument that might be worth exploring further in the future is whether it takes time in a newly democratized regime for discontent with both parties to lead to the formation of new opposition to the current government. That is, in some respects, and perhaps paradoxically, pure two-partism might be easier to preserve earlier in the life of a democracy than decades later, even though fission and fusion among parties is actually more likely to develop earlier in the life of a democratic regime. This is an argument that is parallel to one that is sometimes made about the move away from bi-polarism in France after the early 1980s. Before the Socialist-dominated government came to power in 1981, the two largest parties of the left, and especially the Socialists, had increasingly acted as the Fifth Republic forum in which opposition to seemingly permanent centre-right governments was concentrated, thereby accentuating bi-polar tendencies in the regime. Out of office the unity of a highly factionalized Socialist party could be more easily contained, whereas in government the party tended to fragment simply because it was now in government.¹⁵ In other words the former opposition parties had had a pronounced focal arbiter role for anti-government protest, but that role depended on the left remaining out of power. The perceived failure of the first government of the left in the Fifth Republic led to opposition to all governments becoming more dispersed in different party groupings;¹⁶ the incentive for cooperation in the second round of presidential and assembly elections remained, of course, so that bi-polarity in a diluted form did so as well. The full strength of the focal arbiter position previously had depended on those parties occupying it not having the opportunity to display their governmental competence. If this argument is correct, it takes time in a regime for frustration with both major parties among a minority of voters to lead them to bear the cost of supporting wholly new parties that, at least in the short term, cannot win power. For that reason there will also be a delay in the formation of a core of activists around whom a third party can form. In other words, the argument would be that the incentive to be on a 'team that can win' weakens over time in two-party systems, resulting in more complex forms of two-partism.

To conclude: that major parties rarely collapse and two-partism, albeit often in an 'impure' form, persists has to do with the interaction of two factors shaping the context in which party elites operate. These are: (i) the rules governing political interaction and the incentives they generate and (ii) the particular organization forms in which political action is coordinated. In an obvious sense both the rules of the game and structures were chosen at some point by particular political actors. However, that they continue is not usually a matter of choice for those operating

under them. When looking for the role played by agency in the dynamics of two-partism it must be recognized that typically politicians have to play within sets of rules and in institutions over which they have relatively limited control, especially in the short term. Thus, a minor party leader hardly ever has the opportunity to displace a major party, nor, for example, can more than a tiny number of American politicians develop successful careers outside the ‘pure’ two-party framework of that country.

The rules facing electoral competitors can change. As has been seen, discontents can sometimes arise within mass electorates that overwhelm particular institutions, thereby altering patterns of incentives facing various actors in the parties. Nevertheless, much of the dynamics of two-party politics involves strategies adopted by, and decisions made by, political elites in response to a given set of rules and incentives when how they might respond is sometimes obvious, but at other times far from obvious. Their evaluations in respect of the latter expose how participants and leaders may have agency; but their responses to the former expose the role that rules and incentives have in shaping behaviour in party systems. As is shown in the next chapter, agency plays little role in determining whether collapsed parties dissolve or not; it is their internal structures and the individual incentives that these generate that matter. Leadership can do little to counteract this. However, agency does come more into play when considering how major parties might seek to expand their coalitions—and that forms the subject of Chapters 5 and 6.

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Party Structures and Party Dissolution

Occasionally a political party collapses, but when it does and has now become a third, or minor, party will it then cease operations because it has little chance of winning? One obvious explanation proceeds as follows. First, in maximizing the value of their vote, voters will cease to vote for small parties that have no chance of winning, and instead will vote for the more preferred of the two main alternatives. Secondly, in not winning, minor parties will be depriving themselves of various resources (including, for example, publicity in the future) needed to be electorally competitive. If their party is not competitive there is no point in its members and activists participating in it; their aims could be better pursued by other means. Thirdly, therefore, these kinds of parties will not persist, and instead will be dissolved, with their participants pursuing their aims through other means. Sustained by electoral systems (either plurality systems, or those reinforced systems that generate ‘artificial’ legislative majorities) that disadvantage their rivals, major parties will preserve their duopoly on the basis of rational behaviour by those who might otherwise vote for, or participate in, minor parties.

Thus, in theory, third and minor parties should not exist in two-party regimes, but in practice they are found in many such systems. Between them these parties can receive anything up to a quarter of the total vote—as in Britain, for example. The centre of interest in this chapter is to explain why, in some circumstances, formerly major parties do dissolve once they are no longer one of the two main parties, whereas in other circumstances they do not. The argument being developed is that the pattern of incentives faced by different actors within a party are crucial in explaining these differences. Because the focus of the book is on party structures—on how structure affects competition and on how agency interacts with structure to shape competitive environments—it is not going to explore in detail other factors that play an important role in explaining the persistence of third and minor parties. However, the discussion begins with a brief outline of two obvious factors that are, nonetheless, relevant here: voters do not always respond to the incentives they face in the manner predicted above, and often, for minor parties, party activity is merely one means of advancing a particular cause or issue.

4.1. VOTING FOR THIRD AND MINOR PARTIES

The evidence on how voters respond to the prospect that their most preferred party is unlikely to win a given type of election, now or in the foreseeable future, is extensive but mixed. In presidential elections in Latin America, it is clear that many voters do respond to the incentive inherent in a single-ballot plurality system by not voting for that party, whereas in the first ballot in two-ballot majoritarian systems, where that incentive is not present, proportionately more voters do vote for their first-choice party irrespective of its size (see section 6.3). Furthermore, in some conditions, such as in high-profile by-elections in Britain, there is evidence that voters may vote strategically against a particular major party, thereby squeezing the vote of non-major parties in that constituency. However, the drive among voters to ‘maximize the value’ of their vote through this kind of behaviour is not always that strong. A good example with which to illustrate the seeming ineffectiveness in preserving two-partism of what Duverger called the ‘psychological effect’—that voters will refrain consistently from voting for those parties that have little chance of winning—operating under SMP is Scotland.¹ Multi-partism emerged there in the second half of the twentieth century, even though there were no new *social* cleavages around which other parties could form and also no major changes in the composition of the electorate, except for generational replacement. The dominance of the two largest parties there should, in theory, have been preserved but it was not.

In 1945 there had been some third- and fourth-party strength in Scotland, but it was relatively small. In only 14 per cent of all Scottish constituencies did the Liberals receive more than 15 per cent of the vote, while the Scottish National Party (SNP) contested only 16 per cent of all constituencies. Labour was nearly always the largest party in Scotland, but with the Conservatives being easily the second party. (Indeed, in the 1955 election the Conservatives actually succeeded in winning just over 50 per cent of both the seats and the total vote there.) Over the next fifty years, with no change in the parliamentary electoral system, and with single party governments involving either Labour or the Conservatives at Westminster, two-partism in Scotland was replaced by multi-partism. In 2005 there were fifty-eight constituencies in all of which the four main parties (Labour, Liberal Democrats, Scottish Nationalists, and Conservatives) each nominated a candidate for the UK general election.² Respectively they received the following share of the total vote in Scotland: 39.4 per cent, 22.9 per cent, 17.7 per cent, and 16.0 per cent. Far from the Conservatives’ position as the second party having been consolidated over time, they were now the fourth party under multi-partism.

Of course, it is the case that the two-party share of the vote was much greater in individual Scottish constituencies—suggesting that, to some extent, voters might have tended to align behind whichever two parties appeared to be the strongest in their constituency. Nationally, the two largest parties won 62 per cent of the vote. In only three constituencies was that vote share less than this, with the median

being 70 per cent; in no constituency, though, did the vote for the two largest parties exceed 79 per cent of the total. In other words, at least 20 per cent of voters, and typically 30 per cent of them, were voting for parties that would finish third or fourth. Another way of examining whether voters do always respond to the 'psychological' effect is to consider the share of the vote won by the second party in relation to the combined vote obtained by the second, third, and fourth parties. This would give an indication of the extent to which voters abandoned likely losers in favour of parties that might win. The median share of this three-party vote in the fifty-eight constituencies was just 46 per cent, and in only four constituencies did it exceed 60 per cent. It might be expected that consolidation behind the second party would be less frequent in those constituencies where one party was likely to win anyway, and would be more evident where the leading party was under the greatest threat. Certainly, in the seats with the largest vote share for the winning party the vote share of the other three parties typically fragmented slightly more; in the eight constituencies where the winner obtained at least 53 per cent of the vote, the second-placed parties got between 38 and 48 per cent of the three-party vote, with a median of 44 per cent.

Nevertheless, and more importantly, there was little evidence that in the most closely contested seats in Scotland voters tended to move strongly away from the third and fourth parties. In the twenty seats where the winning candidate received less than 43 per cent of the total, the share of the three-party vote obtained by the second-placed party ranged from 36 per of that total to 63 per cent, with the median being just 49 per cent. Thus, while there were some constituencies in which the 'psychological' effect probably did have some impact on voting behaviour, in others it did not. Vote consolidation behind the second party seems to have been limited. With the exception of one constituency, which incidentally is formed from the atypical Outer Hebrides, generally no more than one half of non-first-party voters consolidated their votes behind the second-placed party.

The Scottish case might be unusual, but it does illustrate in a dramatic way the point that the 'vote consolidation' incentives facing voters under electoral systems favourable to two-partism cannot be relied upon to drive down the vote that third parties and minor parties receive. In theory, two-partism in Scotland should have been reinforced over time rather than being reversed. It is clear, therefore, that while electoral rules can help to preserve two-party dominance, their effect is not always that strong; by themselves they cannot explain why non-major parties dissolve sometimes, but in other circumstances they do not.

4.2. SINGLE-INTEREST AND SINGLE-ISSUE PARTIES

The second matter to be discussed briefly at the beginning of this chapter is that the persistence or dissolution of parties established *to promote a single interest or*

a single issue may have little to do with the logic of the electoral market. Instead, the decision to found or dissolve such a party is an aspect of an overall strategy for promoting that interest or cause. That a party of this kind has been electorally successful is not a sufficient condition for it remaining as a party: the governing Progressive Party in Manitoba dissolved, and merged into the Liberals, after the farming interests that had created it decided to withdraw from electoral politics in 1928. Conversely, parties that win few or no seats may continue to contest elections for decades as a way of promoting that interest. Of course, some do withdraw from electoral politics. For example, before the 1890s the prohibition parties in America tended to alternate between running their own candidates and seeking to obtain the nomination of Republicans sympathetic to their cause; after that decade they abstained from direct involvement in the electoral arena, concentrating on lobbying and publicity activities.³ The crucial point, though, is that even in two-party systems there are smaller parties that compete regularly for public office, and for whom persistent electoral defeat is neither a necessary nor a sufficient reason for the abandoning of party activity.

For this reason alone, most two-party systems are likely to be somewhat 'impure' versions of two-partism in that there are minor parties that participate in electoral politics as part of a broader political strategy, and irrespective of the prospects for winning elections. This book is not concerned with this source of 'impurity' in two-partism. The focus here is on the question of why, in some cases, parties that had been both electorally oriented and electorally successful, but then cease to be major parties, do dissolve and might dissolve quite rapidly, while in other cases they do not. The argument propounded is that both the institutional rules within which the parties are operating and also the party structures that have been developed to operate within those rules matter. Paradoxically, perhaps, a party that had been much more extensive and effective in linking the ambitions of politicians at different levels is more liable to dissolve than a party that has achieved less penetration of the political system. In the case of the former, few participants have an incentive to remain with the failed party. With the latter, however, there can be incentives to remain in the party that are quite tangential to the original goals of the party itself. This argument is developed by comparing two of the cases of major parties that collapsed, one of which then dissolved (the American Whigs) while the other did not (the British Liberals).

4.3. THE DISSOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN WHIG PARTY

Before explaining why the Whigs dissolved after the 1856 election it is necessary first to extend the discussion outlined in section 3.2 as to why the party had become so weakened that dissolution was even a possible outcome. Many factors

contributed to this weakening of the Whig party between 1852 and 1855, of which four are especially important.

The party lost the presidential election of 1852 by the largest margin any party had suffered since 1836. Although, at 7 per cent of the total vote, that margin was modest by twentieth-century standards, of the sixteen elections between 1840 and 1900 only four would produce larger victories (1856, 1860, 1864, and 1872). As argued earlier, the resources that victory in 1852 would have provided would certainly have made party management easier subsequently; however even a narrow defeat might have made it more possible to deal with intra-party discontent.

A second factor was the emerging, and divisive, issue of nativism. It was a response to the massive increase in immigration from Catholic countries, especially Ireland after 1844 but also from Germany. Hostility to these immigrants was always more likely to be focused on the Whig party than on the Democrats, who in most cities had been closely involved in mobilizing immigrant voters. However, many Whigs both rejected nativism and were frightened of its consequences, thereby creating the potential for greater intra-party conflicts than was evident among Democrats. If Whig parties in various communities could not satisfy nativist sentiments, then there was the possibility of nativist-based movements running their own candidates, thereby fragmenting the Whig vote. Indeed, this is what happened in 1854 with the rise of so-called Know-Nothing candidacies, the movement that by 1856 had turned itself into the American party.

Thirdly, there was the growing tension between North and South over the extension of slavery into the territories. That issue had been kept off the political agenda by the Missouri Compromise of 1820. However, in changed circumstances, with population expansion westwards, a further series of congressional bills, known as the Compromise of 1850, were enacted. Although it drew fairly broad political support at the time, this Compromise had two adverse consequences: it was a source of division within both parties, and it opened the possibility for arguing subsequently that the Missouri Compromise had either been made redundant or superseded. In 1854 this culminated in the passage of the Kansas–Nebraska Act, initiated by the Democrats and whose party it partly split; however, party fission was much more pronounced among Whigs whose northern and southern wings were already coming apart. These splits prompted the formation of new political groupings in the northern states, merging around an anti-slavery position that was shortly to be consolidated into a party that would call itself Republican.

Finally, *how* the Whig party was weakened depended on particular circumstances in localities and states, as well as on regional lines noted in section 3.2 above. In the highly decentralized American polity local conditions shaped what happened, so that at different times and in different states it could appear as if it were the Democrats who were critically affected by the impact of the other three

factors. As Gienapp has noted: ‘because parties competed simultaneously at all level of the federal system, the relative influence of state and local issues compared with national issues is a . . . complicating factor . . . some of the most crucial political developments occurred in state and local contests in years [1851 and 1853] when sectional interests were distinctly dampened’.⁴ It was the interplay between the local issues and the national ones that was to shape the dynamics of how the Whig party came to be in crisis.

In essence, what was happening after the 1852 election was that it became difficult, in the short term at least, to maintain existing electoral alliances, and within the various states different solutions to the problem of creating a short-term majority were being tried out. Especially initially, these solutions varied greatly from one place to another, and Democrats as well as Whigs were affected by this re-forming of alliances. The subsequent complete elimination of the Whigs and the rise of the Republicans are remarkable, not least because there was actually to be so much continuity between politics in the pre-1850 era and politics later in the nineteenth century. The research of both Silbey and Gerring has emphasized this continuity, the former with respect to how politics was conducted and the latter in relation to which ideas divided the major political parties.⁵ Why then did one of the major parties not survive the short-term dislocations to the political environment in which it operated?

The argument propounded here is that, between them, four factors were responsible for the rapid and complete demise of the Whigs. Two of them were rules within which American political competition operated, whilst the other two were organizational responses by the parties to different aspects of the rules of electoral competition. The former two factors were:

- (1) a presidential system using a quasi-plurality voting rule; and
- (2) frequent elections involving many different public offices.

The latter two were:

- (3) efforts by parties to develop electoral ‘coat-tails effects’ from the head of the ticket downwards, in order to get other candidates elected behind a popular candidate for a major office (for all candidates the incentive to develop such effects was that it reduced the cost to themselves of a successful campaign);
- (4) the linking by political parties of the political ambitions of, and rewards available to, politicians at a variety of levels of public office.

Some of these factors were more important than others in helping to account for the dissolution of the Whig party. Arguably, too little attention has been paid in the past to the second and fourth factors. Part of the argument being made here is that, while the first and third factors played a role in creating a bi-polar tendency in American politics, it was the other two factors that prevented bi-polarism taking a multi-party form, and hence brought about the demise of the Whigs. It was the

linked ambitions of many politicians at different levels that prompted a strictly two-party solution, and it was the frequency of elections, in the absence of a nationalizing, presidential, election that produced that result so quickly. These factors will now be discussed in detail.

Presidentialism under quasi-plurality voting

A directly elected chief executive contributes to a bifurcation in politics. That the winner takes all in this kind of contest generates a strong incentive to be on a side that has a serious chance of winning. Of course, by itself this need not produce two-party politics in a polity. Under majority voting procedures parties can retain their separate identity, and, through entering into coalition arrangements with others for the second round of a contest, can still influence the outcome even when they are not one of the two largest parties. However, even under plurality voting for the presidency, multi-partism may continue to exist at other levels of election in the regime, such as in the legislature, especially if a proportional formula is used for those elections—as in the Costa Rican case. Plurality voting in presidential contests, though, does tend to weaken parties other than the largest two because their role can only be that of a ‘spoiler’ in those contests. If an inter-party coalition is not feasible, then there is an incentive for such parties either to be inactive in presidential elections or to dissolve.

However, American presidential election rules do not provide such a strong incentive for non-major parties to remove themselves from the electoral arena as would straightforward plurality rules; the intermediation of the Electoral College (EC) weakens this incentive. When there are strong regionally based parties, there is an incentive to both remain electorally active and to avoid cooperation with other parties, because, in denying an EC majority to a large party, greater influence over the outcome in the House of Representatives can be exercised. This is the forum in which the election has to be resolved in the absence of an EC majority (as happened in 1824), and regionally based third parties can exercise more leverage there than those with a more widespread, national, base. (This strategic consideration was one of the main reasons that there were four major candidacies in the 1860 election.⁶) Nevertheless, in the absence of smaller parties whose voters are concentrated in given states, the rules of an American presidential election operate more like those evident under strict plurality voting; that is, normally there is an incentive to avoid third party candidacies at the presidential level. However, while presidentialism under plurality voting tends to push presidential-level politics towards bi-polarism, it cannot by itself provide a complete account of why politicians have an incentive to organize themselves in just two parties. In particular, it cannot account for the complete dissolution of a formerly major party.

The frequency of elections

Frequent elections for non-presidential offices in the United States are of direct relevance in explaining why the Whig party dissolved because of the link that parties had provided between the various contests for public office since the Jacksonian era. Elected offices with short tenure were not invented by the Jacksonian reformers; annual elections for state legislatures and state governors had long been a feature in the New England states, for example. But the Jacksonians kept terms of office relatively short when they helped to create the so-called 'long ballot', and the long ballot and short terms of office both gave an incentive for parties to link electoral mobilization for different offices and also provided for near-perpetual party activity. The result was that all the activities associated with mobilizing for elections happened at least once a year and in some places more than that. Thus, when the sagging position of the Whigs became evident in 1853, there were a series of elections in one place or another that exposed the problem facing the party. Given the complexity of the political divisions that had created the crisis, and given the decentralization of the parties, what emerged were coalitions and solutions that varied from one place to another, and often they diverged quite radically. But because there were so many elections it became much easier for the battle to be the second party in the party system to be engaged, and won, by one of them, than it would have been if, say, all elections had been held only once every four years and at the same time. It was not possible, given the frequency of elections, for what turned out to be the weaker parties (the Whigs and the American party) to hold out, and claim plausibly both that they could recover later and also that they had more long-term potential than the Republicans had. This cycle of rapidly occurring elections produced a relatively quick result, culminating in the decisive defeat, into third place, of the Whig-American coalition in 1856. For the Whigs (and for the American party too) the game was then over, and, more importantly, could be seen by every politician to be over. There was no point in hanging around. Essentially, after 1856, at least in the North, you could join the Republicans, or make your peace with the Democrats, and that was it; the next election had to be fought, and won, with the best vehicle available.

That these frequently held elections between 1852 and 1856 did not involve the nationalizing impact of a presidential contest meant that there was often a lack of coordination from one locality to another, and from one state to another, in the effort to construct winning electoral coalitions. Relatively poor communication at the time exacerbated the impact of frequent elections on the process of reconstructing electoral alliances. 'Small decision-makers' were taking decisions outside of a structure in which they could coordinate their choices, so that the path taken by the Whig party was one that, *between them*, party elites could not control.⁷ While the third factor, coat-tails effects, did make it more likely that a national two-party solution would emerge from the crisis of the early 1850s, it

is the second factor which meant that a large party could be unprotected from destabilization in the period between presidential elections.

Coat-tails effect

When a presidential election is held at the same time as elections for legislative or for other offices, a popular presidential candidate may be able to pull in support for his or her party's legislative candidates. The recognition of this point by party politicians was one of the key elements in the development of American parties. By the 1830s parties were selecting someone who could win on behalf of their party, and in doing so help the election of the other party candidates.⁸ In nineteenth-century America having a successful presidential candidate at the head of the ticket undoubtedly did much to increase the chances of the party's other candidates winning election too. Consider the four elections between 1836 and 1848 won alternately by the Democrats and then the Whigs; between 56 and 63 per cent of the House seats being contested were won by candidates of the party that won the presidency. As a crude approximation, that means that a successful presidential contest resulted in about one in five House seats moving to the winning party. Certainly this provided a strong incentive for candidates to be linked to presidential candidates who could likely win, but did this further mean that they had to be in his party, rather than, in some looser way, temporarily linked to it? There are two related reasons why, *by itself*, the coat-tails effect cannot account for permanent party consolidation behind a presidential bid, and hence explain the pressure on failing parties to dissolve.

First, most of the other elective offices would have to be contested again in years when there was not a presidential race, and when there could be no presidential coat-tails to protect them. This is what produced much of the diversity in responses by Whig politicians in the sequence of frequent elections after 1852 (discussed in the previous section). House seats were contested every two years, state legislature seats either annually or every two years, and four-year terms for state governors were uncommon; of twenty-four directly elected state governorships in 1844 only two (in Kentucky and Missouri) had four-year terms that coincided with the US presidency. This list could be extended to the multitude of directly elected offices at the local level. Whilst of enormous potential help at four-year intervals, presidential level politics could not by itself sustain local parties, and hence could not provide a decisive advantage for two-partism (either via party merger or the dissolution of third parties).

Secondly, however, even when they could, states did not always choose to hold elections exactly at the same time as presidential contests. This was most noticeable in relation to the Congress, which normally did not meet until the end of odd-numbered years; those states that did elect their House members at the same time as the president were electing representatives, therefore, who would

not take up their seats for a year. Consequently, a number of states—embracing about 40 per cent of all House seats—chose to hold congressional elections in the odd-numbered year itself, that is, months after the presidential election. By that time an unpopular administration in Washington could be a liability for the president's party, as it was in 1849. That year the Whigs won only 28 per cent of House seats while eight years earlier, with another Whig administration embedded in Washington, they had won 68 per cent of such seats. (To the parties the advantage of staggering elections in this kind of way was that it kept the party activists continually active. In an era when political parties were a primary source of recreational activity for many people, parties had no fear that there would be 'burn out' among their activists; rather parties feared the opposite—that, without sufficient to do, activists would lose some of their fervour for their party.)

That there were coat-tails effects in presidential contests meant that there was never likely to emerge a party system in which the campaign for the presidency was divorced from electoral contests at other levels. There was a clear incentive for politicians at other levels to cooperate with ambitious seekers of presidential office itself. However, for those ambitions to be confined solely within parties that connected the presidential level to other levels, an additional factor was necessary.

The Jacksonian system of linked rewards and ambitions

How Andrew Jackson and his followers used political parties marks one of the major breaks in the development of electoral politics in the United States. It made a national system of two-party politics possible, ensuring that an alternative development path, one of state-based parties allied in loose presidential coalitions every four years, was not followed. Instead, Jacksonianism established a set of incentives that linked different levels of public office and provided reasons for the vast majority of politicians at all levels to operate in parties that were genuinely national with respect to their scope. To understand the significance of it and how it operated, it is first necessary to outline what preceded it.

During the first forty years of the post-colonial era in the United States parties were organized more intermittently than they would be later, and social deference still played a central role in political life. There were limits to the 'democratic spirit'.⁹ One consequence of such deference was that it enabled political elites to mobilize supporters behind them, and in the 1790s this helped to make possible what is often referred to as the First Party System in America. After its demise in the early nineteenth century there were numerous political factions operating throughout the country, but the connections between them had weakened. Frustrated by his exclusion from the presidency in 1824, Jackson's supporters set about devising ways of providing such a linkage, a linkage that would better enable politicians at all levels to control their environment. With the relatively rapid demise of the remaining social deference in the country, and the introduction

from 1800 onwards of large numbers of white men who had previously not been enfranchised, Jacksonianism was possible. The key Jacksonian device was simple, and was shortly to be summed up in the phrase 'to the victor the spoils'. A party that won a public office would use control of it to ensure that the rewards of office would be directed to supporters of the party; those rewards took the form primarily of contracts issued by public agencies, but also included jobs on the public payroll and it was the latter that would take hold in popular memory. Two further Jacksonian innovations extended the scope of this system of rewards and linked ambition.

As noted above, the range of elective public offices was greatly increased, especially at the local level, so that the numbers of (nearly exclusively white) men who had political ambitions was similarly increased; tasks that would normally have fallen to non-elected administrators elsewhere became subject to election in the US. The other innovation was to formalize financial contributions to their party by those seeking elective office, those holding it, and those receiving contracts or jobs at the disposal of the party. At all levels of government, party activity became sustainable from election to election because of this system, thereby giving leverage to a party over many of its key participants. The politician ambitious for higher elective office, the firm seeking a contract to clear snow from streets in winter, and the clerk in local government administration were all tied into their party by networks of complex obligations and contributions. From the beginning neither the Jacksonian Democrats, nor the soon-to-be-formed Whigs were centralized parties; the fragmented structure of government they were seeking to colonize meant that they themselves could certainly not have anything other than decentralized structures. However, this did not leave them constantly exposed to the whims of ambitious individuals who put self-interest above party interest; what constituted party interest was usually contested by (shifting) factions, but the interlinking of different careers, ambitions, and rewards through the Jacksonian party model meant that the diverse units of a party were kept from fracturing permanently. Self-interest in politics had normally to be pursued through a party, and through its networks of patronage and contacts, rather than by other means. In other words, individual ambition was channelled in such a way that individual and party ambitions overlapped, even though they rarely coincided completely.

Moreover, it was the very structure of Jackson's Democrats which ensured that opposition to this organization would take the form of a single party, and not multiple parties. That the rather inchoate multi-factional era up to the mid-1820s was replaced by a two-party system was not predetermined by the presidential system established by the Founding Fathers in 1787, nor can it be related to any supposed single line of social cleavage dominating political conflict in the country. Rather Jacksonianism created a reward structure in which the winner really did take everything; winning as many offices as possible maximized party advantage, and that served to link presidential politics to politics at various stages below it.

Thus opposition to the Democrats could take the form only of a party that sought to be as large as they were—a party that was as mobilized in as many towns, counties, and states as possible, and which was not divided into separate parties. A system of allied but separate parties could not have acquired the level of resources needed to take on the Democrats. Size mattered. Without the Jacksonian model the United States might well have developed a complex multi-party system probably based on individual states, in which the various parties entered into coalitions for the purpose of contesting a presidential election or to organize the business of the two chambers of Congress. Jacksonianism, though, meant that, for parties, bigger was better, and once one party went down this route its opponents had to as well. Copying Jacksonianism was the only path to successful opposition to it, and that meant creating similar patterns of interlinking politics.

The result was that, by the second half of the 1830s, Democrats and Whigs were facing each other regularly in electoral contests throughout the country. Only in one or two Deep South states, and notably South Carolina, did the Whigs fail to build an electoral base, so that, even in places where one party tended to win, it was rarely without opposition from the other. There were third parties from time to time, but they differed from the two main parties in that they could not offer the prospect of regular access to the spoils of politics, and their purpose was to promote particular single issues.

It is now possible to see precisely the nature of the crisis facing thousands of politicians throughout the United States when it became evident that, increasingly from the beginning of 1853, the Whig party was no longer providing the kind of interlinkage between politicians that would maximize the chances of their enjoying political spoils (of whatever kind) at all levels of elective public office. Either the Whig party had to be reconstituted, so that it could do that job in the future, or another party had to be the vehicle. By the end of 1854 there were two new contenders for that position: the newly formed Republican party and the Know-Nothing movement (later called the American party). If electoral politics were not reorganized, and reorganized fairly soon, around just one of these three parties then the Democrats would win by default, and those politicians who were not Democrats would have lost the time and resources they had invested in politics. Once it became clear, as it did after the 1856 election, that the Republicans were now in far the strongest position to be the opposition, the political order re-established itself very quickly, and two-party politics resumed in line with the Jacksonian incentive structure.¹⁰

Obviously, there was also an ideological conflict that was being played out here, and who, specifically, ended up in the Democratic camp and who ended up in the opposition camp would have been somewhat different had it been either the Whigs or the Know-Nothing/American party who had been that opposing party after 1856. Yet, for any politician for whom winning in politics mattered, it was much better to have the issue of which party was the largest of the three sorted out quickly, so that effective political competition could resume. Not only was

there no room in the anti-Democratic camp for more than one party, but every election won by the Democrats involved frustrated ambition and left political objectives unfulfilled. While for each person with political ambitions one of the three parties usually represented a better device than the others, for most 'opposition' politicians, it was the need for the recreation of a single opposition party as soon as possible that was the more pressing objective.

In other words, for these politicians it was important that there be a party that could play the focal arbiter role that the Whigs had played until recently. As seen in the previous two chapters, the cause of the threat to that role was the emergence of two new lines of cleavage in the country. What made the threat potent was the ease with which new political formations could get on the ballot and the decentralization of the party, with so many political arenas in which local politicians were seeking organizational vehicles for channelling their own ambitions and the causes they supported.¹¹ The normal advantage that an established party would have had as a focal arbiter counted for much less in these circumstances. Even worse for the Whig party, time now would not help it to retain that role; time would merely make it more possible for alternative parties to lay claim to the role themselves.

The Whigs' problem was that, in utilizing the Jacksonian party model, they had been successful in creating a vehicle through which different individuals' ambitions were linked, but that also made the party vulnerable when there was great uncertainty about its ability to continue to do just that. The high frequency of elections at subnational levels, and relatively poor inter-regional communication, meant that there was little time for any intra-party negotiations, before alternatives to the Whig party started to emerge and develop. It was put under continual pressure, rather than being able to take advantage of breaks in electoral politics in which regrouping was possible. Part of the intensity of the pressure was the result of so many participants at different levels of politics having a stake in electoral success. For a lot of them, of course, politics was a means of advancing personal interests, but that advancement depended on the success of their fellows; being elected as a Whig, or the social connections that came from interacting with other Whigs, would lose most of its value if the Whigs were to become just a minor party. Just playing the game had little value if there was no possibility of the 'team' to which you belonged winning. Consequently, what had been one of the party's great strengths—that its organizations did link the ambitions of so many individuals—reduced its capacity for survival if it appeared no longer likely to win in the foreseeable future. There was simply no role for it. However, this is not necessarily true of parties in other regimes. When turning to the case of the British Liberals, the evidence exposes a much less structured party that did not dissolve following party collapse, but survived and was then able to expand in size again, decades later, under changed circumstances. At various points dissolution was a likely option for the Liberal party, but there remained in it sufficient people whose own interests did not depend on the party being a major party. Moreover, as will

be seen, there was not the pressure of frequent and partisan subnational elections forcing rapid party response in different electoral arenas, as there had been in the earlier American case.

4.4. THE SURVIVAL OF THE BRITISH LIBERAL PARTY

The four factors responsible for the rapid exit of the Whig party from American electoral politics were not present in the British case. There was neither a presidency subject to election under plurality voting rules nor frequent elections for different levels of office. There were not politicians at different levels of office linked to each other either by 'coat-tails effects' or by multiple levels of patronage. Indeed, the one shared feature of the structural framework in which British and American parties operated was the widespread use of SMP.¹² However, while this helped to facilitate two-partism, by itself Duverger's Law was simply insufficient as a factor in driving failing parties or minor parties out of the electoral market.

It is not surprising then that the subsequent fate of the British Liberals, following the party's electoral collapse in 1918, should have been so different from that of the Whigs after 1852. Indeed, by comparison with the speed with which the crisis in the American Whig party was resolved, the one within the British Liberal party appears, with the benefit of hindsight, to have been played out in slow motion. There were several reasons for this, the first of which was that nearly two years elapsed between the initial cause of the crisis and the next significant stage in it. The initial stage was the decision made by David Lloyd George in late 1916 to displace his leader Asquith, by persuading the Conservative party to support himself as Prime Minister. Asquith refused to accept any subordinate position under Lloyd George in this revamped coalition government, and his supporters joined him in opposition to the new war-time government. Lloyd George's betrayal was undoubtedly driven by personal ambition; however, the case for Asquith remaining in office was not strong, given his government's apparent limited success in two years of war. Asquith, of course, did not understand the matter in these terms, and continued to regard the only suitable resolution as Lloyd George 'coming to heel' under Asquith's own leadership of the party. However, whilst the war continued, the consequences of the coup for party politics remained uncertain.

With the unexpectedly sudden ending of military conflict in November 1918—until some months earlier it had been believed that it might last until at least 1920—the next stage of the crisis developed. Here it was the relationship between Asquith and Lloyd George that was the crucial factor. No general election had been held since 1910, and one would have to be called some months after the

Armistice. Had Asquith been both less concerned about his own position and also more aware of Lloyd George's likely electoral appeal in the immediate aftermath of the war, one logically possible outcome was the reuniting of the party under Lloyd George's leadership. However, the latter knew that, given the hostility of Asquith and his supporters towards himself, this was not feasible. Instead, he called the earliest election possible, concluding an electoral deal with the Conservatives, so as to maximize both the impact of his personal popularity as a victorious war leader and also the number of his own Coalition Liberals in the next parliament.¹³ Even so, the Conservatives were the main electoral beneficiaries of the so-called Coupon Election, with their party emerging with 54 per cent of all seats. Nevertheless, with a leadership fearful of Lloyd George's public appeal, the Conservatives would remain in the coalition for nearly four years, again extending the crisis for the Liberals. (During that time Lloyd George did seek to merge formally his Coalition Liberals with the Conservatives, but opposition within his party group prevented this from being carried further.¹⁴)

A third factor preventing a fast resolution to the Liberals' collapse was the relatively slow growth of the Labour party. Despite both its major reorganization in 1918 and the significant growth in trade union membership over the previous decade, the party did not spring into life, 'fully formed' at it were, at the end of the war. As noted in Chapter 2, in 1918 the Labour party was still not that large a party, and it was one that would have been pressed to become the second largest party in the system but for the Liberals' split. It was the fourth largest party elected to Westminster, but became the official Opposition.¹⁵ More important than the increased legitimacy this status conferred on Labour was the time it gained to consolidate its organizational and electoral base in a period of Liberal division. Had it faced two mobilized and united parties between 1918 and 1922 the future of the Labour party might have been different. As it was, it was able to build electoral support in an increasing number of constituencies while there was still a split among the Liberals. Even then it only just got ahead of the older party; this is best seen in the election results of 1923, when for the first time since 1910 the Liberal party had a united set of candidates. Labour outpolled the Liberals by a mere 1 per cent of the total vote—with 31 to 30 per cent of that vote—although they did get 5 per cent more of the seats. Unlike the Republicans in the three years from 1853, when a potential party first emerged and then destroyed its opponent, in the five years from 1918 to 1923 Labour increased its vote share by just 8 per cent of the total. By comparison with the Whigs, the British Liberals were experiencing relatively slow decline, and the speed of their response to it was different, therefore.

The most important factor within the Liberal party accounting for the tardy response to changed circumstances, though, was the fact that there were not, as there had been in 1850s America, large numbers of politicians seeking public office whose very future depended on a quick resolution to a crisis in their party. There is some irony in this, given that the transformation in the party in the

1870s had been generated by the mobilization of politicians at the local level. The Birmingham Caucus had arisen after the 1867 Reform Act, in response to the need for tighter electoral organization in those cities, including Birmingham, for which the Limited Vote (LV) system had then been introduced. Under Joseph Chamberlain, the Birmingham Liberals pioneered the use of electoral organization, ensuring that all three of the city's parliamentary seats fell into the party's hands, and without it the party could have won no more than two. Liberal parties in other cities, especially those with LV, embraced Birmingham's innovations, and by the 1880s the party had much more extensive local organization, capable of mobilizing mass electorates, than it had earlier. Yet having taken the lead in mass party organization in Britain, subsequent Liberal party development was restricted. By common consent, it was the Conservatives who had established the larger and more active constituency associations by the early twentieth century.¹⁶ Even in large cities, including London, Liberal organization varied greatly in its vitality.

Although in some localities—especially urban areas—Liberals contested local government elections as Liberals, in others they acted informally as part of a broader ('progressive') coalition. For example, on the creation of the London County Council (LCC) in 1889, they became part of an alliance that was known simply as the Progressives whilst their opponents—mostly Conservatives—were later to organize as the London Municipal Society.¹⁷ Despite the widespread perception at the time that British politics was becoming increasingly party-dominated, a view that Ostrogorski's work helped in a small way to encourage, in fact the major parties *per se* were by no means monopolizing electoral mobilization at all levels of elective office. Especially in those counties where Conservatives were dominant, Liberal organization was weak and sometimes, even when it existed, local Liberal parties did not put up candidates.¹⁸

Nor did late nineteenth-century local government reorganization in Britain transform elective local authorities into vibrant arenas for party conflict throughout the country—in marked contrast to how parties had colonized local government in 1830s America. The Conservatives, anxious not to intrude on the long-established power relations enjoyed by their own landed elites in rural Britain, tended not to organize formally at the local government level, unless they had to do so in response to mounting competition from other parties.¹⁹ Young's comment on the later period is true of the Conservatives in the early twentieth century: 'Labour partisanship was visible; Conservative partisanship discreet yet highly potent.'²⁰ For the Conservatives, partisan ends could be achieved by other means. Indeed, it was not until local government reform in 1973 that many of the so-called 'shire' counties came to be organized formally by the Conservatives. Until then Conservatives controlled many of those councils as 'Independents' or 'Ratepayer' candidates, most of whom were Conservative in sympathy. However, for the purposes of this discussion there are two important points to be emphasized.

First, in those areas where Liberals performed relatively weakly in parliamentary elections, they also lacked the kind of organization that could make them effective in local government elections. One consequence of this was that in the early twentieth century there were parts of Britain—such as west Lancashire—where: ‘The Liberals made little headway. Labour, by contrast could put down roots more readily . . . once it abandoned its Socialist past, by adopting a political style and interventionist policies, which seemed more in accordance with local conditions.’²¹ Faced with a challenge from Labour nationally, therefore, there were always going to be some localities where it would be difficult to resist a Labour advance. Liberal organizational weakness was such that there were towns where Labour could easily become the main challenger to the Conservatives. In that sense, the Liberals were not, as the American Whigs had come close to being, a truly national party.

In 1840s America, within just a handful of years of a two-party system emerging at the national level, Whigs and Democrats contested nearly all public offices throughout the country. In nearly all states, excluding South Carolina, candidates from the two parties opposed each other in most districts. This is evident at the level of congressional elections. For example, as early as the 1840 and 1841 elections 88 per cent of all districts for which voting records have survived involved contests between Democratic and Whig candidates.²² By contrast the spread of competition in Britain was limited, with parties lacking much of the incentive that there was in the US to encourage candidacies in areas which were unpromising territory for victory.

Secondly, even in areas of Liberal organizational strength—that is, at both parliamentary constituency level and the corresponding municipal ward level—there was an absence of incentive, and opportunity, for local politicians to tie their fortunes directly to the party nationally. Local government was not then, and would not become until the second half of the twentieth century, the acknowledged route for ambitious politicians to a seat in Westminster. Nor were the local and parliamentary levels of politics connected by multiple levels of patronage. Contracting by governments with firms for partisan purposes lacked the explicit legitimacy that the Jacksonians had given it seven decades earlier in the US, and there was similarly no legitimacy for a job system in which local government employees ‘served at the pleasure of the mayor’ (or ‘local council’ as it would have been in Britain). Of course, local Liberal activists wanted their party to do well electorally—and they wanted to reverse its decline when that became evident—but largely that was all that mattered to them. Local Whigs in America had driven the process that would lead eventually to the rise of the Republican party, because so much was at stake in being marooned in a failing party. The number of elected local offices, and the frequency of elections, provided them with an opportunity to act—initially, of course, in very different ways in different localities. But in Britain their counterparts more than sixty years later had neither the incentive nor the opportunity to do this.

The main actors who did have a stake in the future of the Liberal party were MPs, ex-MPs, and other national political elites (including Liberal peers). Especially after 1922, some individuals—such as Christopher Addison and Winston Churchill—did respond, as those with continuing political ambitions had in the US in the early 1850s, by finding a more likely vehicle for success (the Labour and Conservative parties respectively in these particular cases). But certainly in the period before 1922, proportionately there were too few political actors who really counted that could threaten the kind of ‘exit’ strategy from the party that might have provided a substitute for the missing (and ambitious) local politicians of the American parties. And it was the pre-1922 years that were crucial. In that period Coalition Liberal MPs were heavily dependent on Lloyd George, to whom they owed their parliamentary careers after 1918, and while they were in a position to block any moves he might make towards fusion with the Conservatives, they had virtually no influence on him over any putative moves to reunite the Liberal party. The Asquithian Liberals had been reduced to a rump of just thirty-six MPs, and while their leader himself was one of those defeated in 1918, he retained an authority over the non-Lloyd-George elements in the party that prevented the emergence of any source of alternative strategy. The result was a party that drifted towards elimination, in marked contrast to the sustained frenzy to found new political parties, or to reconfigure the Whigs, that characterized early 1850s America.

After the 1924 election, when the Liberal vote share fell by 11 per cent of the total vote while Labour’s rose, it was clear that there were two major parties in Britain, and the Liberals were not one of them. In these circumstances in 1856 the Whigs had gone out of business more or less immediately, but this was not to happen to the Liberals; they never did so, in spite of a series of disasters between 1929 and the late 1950s, each of which, it might be imagined, would have been sufficient for them to cease ‘trading’. Indeed, in these years as defeat and humiliation were increasingly heaped on the party, it came to resemble a cartoon character that, despite being blown up, run over, or whatever, always appears in the next frame of the cartoon merely with a token bandage on some part of its body. The Liberal party persisted as a minor party. Why?

The answer to this question is linked directly to the reason for the relative absence of activity within it to solve the crisis between 1918 and 1924—the incentive structure facing the Liberals did not provide the necessary motivations. First, and increasingly over time, too few of the remaining political actors in the party were driven by ambitions that could be satisfied solely by their party being involved in the rewards of government. Only a relatively small proportion of British MPs ever become government ministers, and, certainly until the late twentieth century, political ambition of this kind was only one reason for becoming an MP. It was an interesting part-time job whose working hours facilitated the conduct of other careers. Thus, there were Liberals, such as Roderick Bowen (an MP from 1945 until the 1960s), who had a successful career as a barrister whilst

at the same time being a Member of Parliament.²³ There were many like him in all the parliamentary parties. Even if it did not help in making such careers possible, being in the House was at least compatible with them and parliament provided an interesting diversion for its members. Of course, in early 1850s America there were many elected politicians for whom activity in the party was a means for advancing personal interests and ambitions. But usually they could be pursued only as part of a successful team—being in the majority mattered much more than it did in a party system in which the various rewards attaching to office were not much linked together through party itself.

Furthermore, given the events of 1929–35, being in the ‘official’ party was not the only means of pursuing personal ambitions whilst remaining Liberal. The Liberal Nationals of the 1930s were the prime example of this. Like the rest of their party they supported the National government on its formation in 1931, when leading members of the party actually joined it. However, while their erstwhile colleagues then left the government in 1932 over the issue of tariff policy, the Liberal Nationals continued to support the Conservative-dominated government right the way through until it was replaced by the wartime coalition of 1940. Liberal National MPs benefited from the absence of Conservative challenges to their seats in this period, and mostly also from the absence of ‘official’ Liberals who hoped for their subsequent return to the fold and who refrained from opposing them. However, the central point is that individual ambitions and goals could incline behaviour in a number of different directions, depending on the context, and sometimes that actually worked against the complete elimination of the party electorally.

Linked to this factor was the continuing failure of party organization to spread quickly across the country. Even after the First World War, British parties were slow to follow the earlier American model and develop into truly national parties. The 1923 election, which resulted in the coming into office of the first (minority) Labour government illustrates this point; in less than two-thirds of mainland British constituencies was Labour fighting the Conservatives. The following year, with class-based politics now undeniably at the heart of British politics, fewer than 80 per cent of contests featured the participation of both Conservative and Labour candidates. It was within these kinds of gaps in national political competition that a party in the position of the Liberals might at least hope to survive nationally after 1923, even though they could not prosper. Indeed, this was to be important for their persistence for two decades or so after the early 1930s, though in the event it perhaps had more to do with contingency than anything else.

To begin with, though, it appeared as if the nationalization of politics was starting to advance more quickly after 1924, and that the Liberals might soon be overwhelmed by it. Between 1924 and 1929 both Conservative and Labour made moves towards nationalizing party competition; the number of seats that the Conservatives did not contest fell from sixty-three to sixteen, while the number of seats where a Labour candidate was absent was reduced from seventy-six

to nineteen. At the 1929 election about 94 per cent of constituencies had both Conservative and Labour candidacies—and the proportion is slightly higher still if two-member seats where, for strategic reasons, a major party presented only one candidate are excluded from the data. From the perspective of 1929 it looked as if the Liberals were in danger of being squeezed completely, should the two larger parties continue to nationalize their operations. Of the fifty-nine seats the Liberals won that year nearly a quarter involved competition where at least one of the major parties was not running a candidate; the party thus seemed highly vulnerable to full political nationalization. Most of their other seats, ones in which both of the major parties had been active, were not safe either. In only one had the Liberal candidate obtained more than 50 per cent of the total vote, and in only 40 per cent of the seats had their vote share been as high as 45 per cent of the total. And 1929 had been a good year for the Liberals. Their proportion of the vote had increased by over 5 per cent, reaching 23.5 per cent of the total. Unless they could sustain a similar electoral surge in an election in four or five years' time, Duverger's 'mechanical' effect of elimination under SMP would surely kick in, and their number of seats would be reduced dramatically. However, such a prediction made in 1929 would have been based on the assumption that the nationalizing tendencies so evident in the later 1920s would continue. They did not. At the time of perhaps their greatest disasters, the Liberals were to be saved by one of the consequences of those disasters. To understand this it is useful to engage in a brief episode of counterfactual history.

Assume that the financial crisis of 1931 was not as severe as it was in reality, and that the minority Labour government struggled on until 1932 or 1933, when an election was called. The government's failure to increase employment in the economy would surely have led to its defeat; but what of the Liberals? The unity they had feigned in rallying behind Lloyd George's expansionist economic programme in the 1929 Liberal manifesto collapsed shortly after that election. The party was now split into three factions: the small number of Lloyd George's personal supporters, the traditional Liberals, and the supporters of Sir John Simon, most of whom would later form the core of the National Liberal party:

The Liberals in the Parliament of 1929 to 1931 presented a sorry spectacle of division and confusion . . . Meanwhile, as the heirs of the dying party argued over the inheritance, several members of the Liberal family, out of disgust, disappointment, or ambition, crept way in disgust . . . The real problem facing the Liberals was that their supposed parliamentary power was based on a threadbare bluff. Their position in the country, not to mention their demoralized internal condition, was such that they dared not take the ultimate step of precipitating another general election. Nor, given their internal divisions, could there be any prospect of their transferring support *en bloc* to the Conservatives.²⁴

By the spring of 1931, and before the formation of the National government, Simon formally resigned the Liberal whip in protest at the party's close

association with the Labour government. Had the crisis in the late summer of that year not led subsequently to the split in the Labour party, following the formation of a National government, and the holding of a 'snap' general election, the prospect of the Liberals surviving much beyond the mid-1930s would have been dim. There were still enough senior members of the party with ambition to be in government—people who had been in parliament before 1918—that merger of a 'rump' party with the Conservatives after a major defeat in 1932 or 1933 was a likely prospect for the Liberals.

Instead, what a combination of the aftermath of 1931 and then the political armistice of the Second World War created was a hiatus in which the political trends of the years 1924–31 were modified or reversed. On the surface, it appears as if the events of 1931 were disastrous for the Liberal party. It split openly, with the large National Liberal faction largely being absorbed over time into the Conservative party. Its parliamentary representation was much reduced, and its share of the vote (absent the National Liberals) collapsed to 6 per cent of the total in 1935, and rose to only 9 per cent in 1945. However, one important consequence of the split in the Labour party, and the coming to power of a National government with large majorities in 1931 and 1935, was that the nationalizing of party competition was reversed. In 1935 the number of constituencies in which either a Conservative or a Labour candidate was not selected was double that of 1929. Into this political equivalent of battlefield shell holes in no man's land some Liberals had crept, and survived.

Liberal dependence after 1929 on the failure of the other two parties to resume a policy of total national competition can be illustrated in the following way. In 1929 about three-quarters of the party's seats had been won in competition against both other parties. In 1935 only just over half of their fifteen seats were won in this way, and by 1945, this had been reduced further to a mere two out of eleven.²⁵ The party had hoped to benefit from the continued survival in parliament of the National Liberals, in the belief that some at least might return to the party fold. With the notable exception of the future leader Clement Davies, and one other MP, National Liberals never did so; indeed, twenty-one went on to contest the 1945 election under the increasingly meaningless National Liberal label, with thirteen of them being elected as, in effect, Conservatives. Why had the two major parties seemingly reversed their earlier strategy, and why were they no longer moving to engage in competition with each other throughout the country? In the 1930s Labour nationally was seeking to consolidate its organizational resources in the areas in which it could win, after the debacle of 1931. The Conservatives, by contrast, were now under much less pressure than they had been in the later 1920s to pursue a nationalizing policy; they would win easily as it was, together with their allies in the small National Labour and National Liberal parties, and thereby control government. In effect, the strategy of driving the Liberals out of politics that Baldwin had pursued in the 1920s was replaced under less competitive conditions for their party by a strategy that, in the event, would enable the Liberal party to survive.

Then, rather than facing a 1940 election in which the party's weakness of 1935 would be exposed once more, the Liberals benefited from a war that further postponed a return to more complete national party competition. With party organization largely in abeyance during the war, they were still not subjected to the full rigours of two major parties competing against each other throughout the country. In 1945 there remained nineteen constituencies that were not contested by one major party or the other, of which the Liberals won nine. Most were constituencies where one of the two major parties had never established a foothold. Consequently, it was not until the beginning of the 1950s, fully twenty years after the party seemed to be on the verge of elimination, and more than thirty since it began to be exposed to the supposed logic of two-party competition, that the party was placed in a political world in which the full rigours of the 'mechanical' effect might apply. And then, as is discussed in Chapter 6, it is at least arguable that it was saved by local political agreements that ran counter to the longer term interests of the Conservatives nationally. By simply 'hanging on' in the political hiatus of the 1930s and 1940s the Liberal party leadership came to have a different approach to the party's future now than might have been evident after a catastrophic defeat in 1932 or 1933. In the early 1950s the few Liberals who held elective office, or who actively sought it, had no realistic hopes of government office or direct influence over the public policy agenda. The generation of former Liberal ministers had gone, and in their place were politicians with different expectations of the rewards obtainable from a parliamentary career. The need to be on the 'winning side' nationally mattered less than to a generation of politicians who had had some aspirations of short-term national influence, and for whom finding a suitable vehicle through which to pursue them might matter. By the 1950s the obvious argument for simply dissolving the party was now not clear cut; after all, the party had survived for more than twenty years since its near-collapse, so that, even with a mere five parliamentary colleagues, the leader Clement Davies decided not to follow a path that would surely have led to eventual party dissolution had he accepted Churchill's offer of a place in his cabinet.

In effect, the different incentives to which Liberal elites were now responsive changed the terms on which any merger might be concluded. To the Conservatives, a party with as few MPs and active constituency organizations as the Liberals now had meant that the 'price' most would have been prepared to pay was small. Even Churchill's offer of a cabinet place was excessive. To the contemporary Liberals, though, much greater, and somewhat different, inducements—including policy concessions—would probably have been necessary. Whether, as is suggested in Chapter 6, Davies might have taken an opposing view in the absence of the local deals in Bolton and Huddersfield, that would have left him with just three colleagues after 1951, is an interesting question. Certainly it could be argued that by not being able to pursue the elimination option ruthlessly because of those deals, the Conservatives opened the way for a more serious third-party challenge in the future. As a strategy, attempting to first eliminate

an opponent, followed then by fusion should that not work, could be successful; reversing this order of proceeding, which in effect is what the Conservatives were doing during the 1950s, made little sense. As it was, for nearly thirty years after 1929, the Liberals teetered on the brink of oblivion—with their demise seemingly more probable after each election. Yet it never happened; and a further thirty years later the party was itself competing in most constituencies across Britain. Unlike the American Whigs, the Liberals had survived as a separate party and then constructed a new role for themselves in the party system.

That the experience of these parties was so different was the direct result of the party structures that had been formed earlier. Those structures affected the behaviour of individuals during and after the period in which the parties collapsed, because of the incentives they provided for different kinds of actors within them. It was not the logic of the electoral market, nor changes in social cleavages, that mattered in determining whether a party would go out of business or not. Paradoxically, as has been argued here, it was the more integrated party that dissolved—though it was both its integrated and its decentralized features that combined to bring this about. The party that had much less deep roots in its political society would survive, partly because it could attract participants for whom electoral success was secondary and partly because of contingency after 1929, when the full rigours of party nationalization in politics were absent.

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The Logic of Party Fusion

Thus far, the role played by individual actors in shaping how parties behave in two-party systems—in avoiding the collapse of a party or in keeping it in business once it is no longer a major party—has been somewhat limited. There have been instances where choices made by politicians have contributed to change in a party system; for example, Stanley Baldwin's electoral strategy in relation to the Liberals in the 1920s pushed that party towards elimination by the early 1930s. However, it might be expected that the influence of these actors would be greater under relatively stable conditions for their party—especially when they are attempting to manage their political environment by preserving, and expanding, an existing coalition of support. That is, when political leaders are in a position to shape the incentives of others, in their party and outside, rather than having to respond to new outside forces or deal with party participants themselves responding to incentives over which the leadership has little control, is when evidence of agency within a party might be more evident. To achieve their party's objectives of winning its leaders must ensure that the party is of sufficient size to defeat its main opponent. The incentive for leaders to maximize the size of the party coalition, how they might go about doing it, and how party structures affect their ability to do so, is the subject of this chapter and the next one.

If a majority (of votes, or legislative seats, or whatever) is required to rule, then a competitive party will be seeking to add to its support in order to acquire or maintain that majority. Whenever necessary, major parties will fuse with minor ones in order to do so. This assumption might appear to be the obvious starting point for a deductive approach to a key aspect of party behaviour—coalition-building—to parallel the Downsian model on the positioning of parties on the ideological spectrum. Indeed, within five years of the publication of *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, William Riker's *The Theory of Political Coalitions* had appeared.¹ Yet in nearly five decades since then the contribution of coalition theory to the study of political institutions has been somewhat restricted, being confined mainly to analysing the construction and behaviour of coalition governments in multi-party parliamentary systems.² It is perhaps significant that two 'overviews' of the contribution of rational-choice analysis, published twenty years apart by leading scholars, and which were aimed at student readerships, did not even mention Riker's book or any other aspect of coalition theory.³ The message received by newcomers to political science as to the significance of coalition

theory could not be clearer. Why then has it proved so difficult to develop a predictive model of how, in a two-party system, major parties will seek to incorporate other parties so as to maximize their chances of winning?

Consider first a one-off game in which there are two parties, between them they have 100 members, both are unitary actors, and each has perfect information about the preferences of the parties. Assume that they need to combine to obtain a payoff p that is unavailable to them should they not combine. There are no competitor parties, so that the game is cooperative, and it is assumed that one party has ninety-eight members and the other just two. It is in their mutual interest to form a coalition, but on what terms? The smaller party might take the view that it is entitled to one half of p because it is one of the two parties needed for obtaining it. At the same time the other party might regard itself as entitled to 98 per cent of p because that is the voting strength it is bringing to the coalition. There is no 'solution' to this in the way that there is in the standard Downsian two-party model, in which parties have an incentive to locate nowhere other than the political centre ground. Instead, the result will be determined by bargaining between the parties, and, if there is a time constraint for forming the coalition of 100, the game can be transformed into a 'chicken' game in which the distribution of p may depend on the relative willingness of the two parties to risk an outcome in which the coalition is not formed. The crucial point is that the outcome cannot be predicted without knowledge of (a) how each of the two parties understands the principles of fair distribution, (b) their respective attitudes to risk, and (c) their relative expertise at bargaining. Despite the incentive facing both parties to form a coalition it might not form.

Once each of the assumptions made so far is removed, predicting the outcome becomes even more difficult. Suppose, in a second scenario, that there is a third party, also with ninety-eight members which can form a coalition with either or both of the first two parties to generate p , and that p can still be obtained with just a hundred votes. One prediction that can be made, following Riker's main conclusion, is that there will not be a coalition of all three parties. One of them is unnecessary for a winning coalition, and its presence would decrease the amount distributed to the other two parties—given the plausible assumption that no party is willing to enter a coalition without receiving some benefit from it. Assuming each party is willing, at the very least, to accept a minimum amount of p as its reward, the process of building a coalition is likely to involve one putative coalition forming, only for the excluded party to offer a better deal to one of the others, and so on. There can be no prediction as to which parties will actually be in the coalition when the time constraint becomes operative.

When the assumptions that each party is no more than a single, unitary actor, and that this is a one-off game, are relaxed two further considerations come into play. Assume that p is distributed to its members by each party in the coalition, and that these members want as much of p for themselves as possible; a merger between the two largest parties is unlikely because there are more members

between whom distribution has to be made. For the smallest party an iterated game may also create a strategic dilemma. It might either be offered a permanent merger with one of the other two parties, or might continue to be involved in bargaining with one or both of them on a round-by-round basis. What guarantees about distribution could it obtain were it to enter into permanent merger, and what would be the means of enforcing a distribution agreement later? These would be its concerns about merger. By contrast, the disadvantage it faces in round-by-round bargaining is that bargaining is never cost-free, and this consideration may be more significant for a small party, thereby making permanent merger more attractive to it. Another consideration, for all parties, is how to weigh short-term benefits as against long-term ones when devising a strategy for any particular round of the game; parties may simply differ in their willingness to defer payoffs.

A further relaxation of the original assumption, of not treating the parties as unitary actors, would be to allow its members to enter and exit a party. They might split from their original party; when doing so some of the original value of p might go directly to a particular member with that distribution not being controlled by their former party itself. In both respects the interests of party and member may no longer coincide, thereby complicating the bargaining process and the ability of any actor to predict what will happen. Obviously, yet a further complication arises if the assumption that there is just one kind of benefit available in the game is dropped but, instead, there are several benefits—which might be valued differently by one party than another, and also by different components of a party.

Finally, when neither parties nor their members have perfect information about any other actor in the game, when there is uncertainty about likely payoffs from different strategies, and also about the probability that any particular strategy would actually be put into effect, decision-making becomes far more complex for all actors. It also makes it even more difficult to determine whether a particular coalition would form, and whether the coalition would be temporary or involve a merger of parties. That party merger is less easy to predict than it would appear initially, given the assumption that parties have a strong incentive to be as large as is needed to win, may be revealed by considering the following hypothetical example of what has hitherto been a two-party system. In the example all the restrictive assumptions (for example, the presence of perfect information) made about coalition-building at the beginning of this chapter are removed.

5.1. THE INCENTIVES FOR TEMPORARY FUSION: A BASIC EXAMPLE

Consider first the simplest kind of example involving, say, an assembly for a large city-state, called Cattaneo. Cattaneo's electoral rules disadvantage minor parties.

Until now there have been just two parties, a Conservative and a Liberal party, which have alternated in power on a regular basis. As a result of changes in aspects of the city's physical environment, some citizens come to believe that environmental protection is not promoted sufficiently by either party, and a new, Green, party, is then formed to contest all seats at the next election. Among their potential backers a clear majority are known to be erstwhile supporters of the Liberals. The two older parties also contain those who are either unconcerned about environmental protection, and also those who are actively opposed to it as a policy priority. Both the former and the latter in the Conservative and Liberal parties outnumber the environmentalists, but there are more potential anti-environment voters for the Conservatives than there are for the Liberals. Voter turnout in Cattaneo varies, but typically there is a significant minority of non-voters in Cattaneo, potentially available for mobilization. How then will each of the parties approach the possibility of coalition with another party at the ensuing election?

The Conservative party

Ceteris paribus, the Conservatives have a stake in the Green party continuing to contest the next election, since proportionately it will draw more votes from the Liberals than from the Conservatives. How much of a stake the Conservative party has in this outcome depends on how close the contest between the Conservatives and Liberals is expected to be. Were the former likely to win a landslide victory in Cattaneo, the Green party's potential for eroding the Liberals' vote still further will have little impact on the outcome. Similarly, if it is the Liberal party that appears to be heading for a landslide, any haemorrhaging of its vote will not greatly improve the Conservatives' chances. In neither of these circumstances, therefore, is it worthwhile for the Conservative party to intervene in any way. However, this is not the case when voter defections to the Greens might affect the result.

One possibility would be for the Conservative party to attempt to join forces with the Green party, but the argument against doing that, of course, is that there is a large anti-environment contingent of potential voters for the Conservatives. Their defection either to the Liberals or to the ranks of the non-voters would make the Conservatives' voting coalition smaller, so that attempting either a temporary alliance or permanent merger between the Conservatives and Greens would make little sense for the former party. Rather Conservative interests would seem best served by keeping the Greens in business as a separate party, so that it acts to drain the Liberals' relative voting strength. Indeed, to the extent that knowledge of such activity can be kept out of the public domain, it is in the Conservative interest to do whatever the party can to ensure that the Green party does contest the election, including filtering resources to it. The disadvantage of doing that directly is that it may incur adverse publicity, and hence threaten to weaken its own voter base. However, successful covert operations to keep the Greens as competitive

as possible would undoubtedly benefit the Conservatives. There are also indirect ways of helping to prevent the Greens considering a merger with the Liberals. For example, the Conservatives developing an explicitly anti-environmental position as a main campaign issue might help keep Green supporters committed to a separate election campaign, forgoing any chance of an electoral deal with the Liberal party. Yet that is a strategy that could backfire on the Conservatives, were its own environment-oriented voters to be more likely to defect from them than were (i) environmental Liberal supporters to defect to the Greens or (ii) anti-environment elements in the Liberals to be persuaded to switch to the Conservatives because of their position on that issue.

Thus, without making more specific assumptions about the relative intensities of preference on the environment issue, it cannot be determined whether or not it would pay the Conservatives to raise that issue as a means of keeping the Greens active as a separate party. What can be stated is that there are circumstances in which they would seem to benefit from that eventuality. Nevertheless, there is a further consideration for the Conservative party when analysing how it is affected either by the presence of a separate environmental party at the election, or, alternatively, by an alliance for this election only between the Liberals and the Greens. Suppose that in the former situation the Greens will have a more pro-environment stance than would a fused Liberal–Green party. As noted, that leads to a decline in the Liberals’ vote share relative to the Conservatives, benefiting the latter. But what if the very success of the Greens in placing the environment at the centre of the campaign has the effect of demobilizing sections of the uninterested-about-the-environment electorate, because the issues they care about do not feature prominently in public debate? If those sections are more numerous in the Conservative party than in the Liberal party, the Liberals’ losses of environmental supporters to the Greens may be more than offset by the non-voting of some of the Conservative party’s potential voters. In those circumstances, the Conservatives would benefit from a Liberal–Green alliance, though, apart from trying to ignore the environment and to focus on those other issues, it would have few means of bringing about that result.

Consequently, whilst the usual presumption would be that parties in situations akin to that of the Conservatives would normally benefit from the presence of parties like the Greens, they might not do so given the relevance of other aspects of their ability to mobilize their own supporters. However, the minimal conclusion, that the Conservatives would normally have little incentive to enter a temporary electoral alliance with, or permanently merge itself with, the Green party would probably hold under most assumptions.

The Liberal party

The main incentive for the Liberals in entering into an electoral alliance with the Greens would be that their combined vote could be greater than that for the Conservatives. There would be no draining of votes from Liberals to Greens, which

would have been to the benefit of the Conservative party, and their combined vote share might be higher than otherwise because of a possible switch by environmentally concerned Conservative supporters to a coalition that included the environment-based Green party. But that consideration is by no means sufficient to bring about this outcome.

For one thing, as pointed out earlier, there is an incentive to create an alliance only when there is the possibility that it may make a difference to the final outcome. Yet even in closely competitive conditions there are factors weighing against the pursuit of an alliance strategy for parties like the Liberals. These are of two kinds: one relates to the overall size of the resulting coalition, and the other to the costs involved in constructing it.

Whether it is a temporary alliance or a permanent merger, a coalition does not necessarily embrace all the previous voters of the two parties. Some will abstain or defect—in this case because the alliance is ‘too green’ (for some Liberals) or ‘not green enough’ (for some Greens). The likelihood that the coalition is absolutely smaller than the sum of its previous two parts does not necessarily preclude alliance; if one of its effects were the demobilizing of Conservatives who are uninterested in the environmental issue then an increase in the relative size of the combined Liberal–Green vote would still provide an incentive for forming the alliance. Estimating possible abstention and defection rates is difficult, partly because there is always an incentive on the part of those contemplating it to exaggerate the likelihood that they will, and because parties normally lack full information about the likely institutional loyalty of supporters of other parties. Public opinion polls provide some evidence, but parties are normally better informed about the problems of managing their own supporters than they are about those of other parties.

Even if a resulting coalition is relatively larger vis-à-vis its opponent than were the two independent parties, the cost of forming the coalition may preclude that happening. In particular, there are those attached to satisfying the demands of candidates and activists. For the Liberals, the problems associated with this can be grouped under two main headings:

1. Coalition-type arrangements might typically involve Liberal candidates being deselected (or those hoping for selection not obtaining it), so that some Green party candidates (or some compromise candidates) can run instead. This reduces the incentives available within the party, creating difficulties of party management.
2. Having Green party leaders, and especially their activists, involved in the selection of candidates may lead to the selection of ‘unelectable’ candidates to the extent that the involvement of Green supporters influences that process. If the Green party, in spite of its relatively small voter base, has a disproportionately large activist base, it may be able to nominate candidates who are strong on the environment issue. If this alienates the anti-environmental and the

indifferent-to-the-environment elements in the Liberal party sufficiently, this could create a losing coalition. Parties like the Liberals will be suspicious of alliances with smaller parties that have large activist bases that could unbalance their own party.

If it could ‘write the script’, which of course it cannot, the Liberal Party would want to have the backing of potential supporters for the Greens without having to give their leaders any nominations for public office, and without having to have their activists involved in the Liberal party except as boosters for it; they would also want to make minimal concessions to the Greens on campaign issues. In those circumstances coalitions would be relatively easy to effect, but if they are present, it is difficult to imagine why, at least in the immediate past, the Green party would ever have come into being at all. Under all other conditions, the compromises that the Liberals would have to make in its dealings with the Green party will come at the price that the latter can extract, and often that may preclude a deal.

The Green party

Typically, it might be imagined, a newer, and smaller, party will have more difficulty in generating the resources needed for running an election campaign than established parties. For that reason forming a party to contest an election may stem from the failure of other means to achieve its ends—whether those be the failure to secure the selection of sympathetic candidates by the two major parties, a failure to get the parties to promote this particular interest in their policy agendas, an inability to secure patronage from the parties, or whatever. Without a coalition it probably cannot achieve its ultimate objectives in the short term—because it cannot win without a partner. Whether the Conservatives or the Liberals win, the Green party secures nothing in the short term except as part of a winning coalition. Were that the only consideration then the Greens would be forced into a deal with the Liberals, assuming that the Liberals believed Green support might be necessary for victory, and the Green party would obtain only the most minimal of concessions for its support. Pure two-partism might not have been restored, but two parties would dominate the system. Why then would third parties ever form? There are three main answers to this.

1. If the cost of running for election is not that great—say, for example, the relevant interest is already organized for other purposes (which would be more likely with, say, religious parties than environmental ones)—then its bargaining position may be much greater than just suggested, because it does not have to bear some of the costs of forming a party. The Liberal party would then be confronted by a party that was able to engage in a game of bargaining on much better terms to secure benefits for itself, because it had relatively little to lose in not reaching an accommodation with the Liberals. The closer the

election between Conservatives and Liberals appears to be, the greater is the third party's bargaining power with respect to the Liberals. The greater the lack of information—about voter intentions, about how risk-averse the Liberals and the third party are—the more likely it is that a deal may elude them. But the central point to be made here is that it is the *existing* organizational resources available to a potential party that can help trigger third-party challenges in two-party systems.

2. Parties like the Greens might emerge as splinters from one of the major parties; as newly independent operations, they may have brought with them some of the organizational resources of the party from which they have exited. Like parties based originally in pressure groups, this too is a way in which the costs of contesting an election might have been reduced. For reasons identified earlier, the other major party may prefer to have it contest the election on its own, rather than seek to incorporate it immediately within its own ranks.
3. For a party that has a relatively low chance of winning on its own, much less weight is going to be attached by it to the winning of the next election than would be attached by major parties that have a better chance of victory. This exposes the problem of looking, as has been the case until now, at decisions about fusion solely in the context of an immediately forthcoming election. However much, in particular circumstances, it is the forthcoming election that drives strategies of fusion or non-fusion, elections are never one-off games for any party—and that becomes especially apparent when looking at smaller parties. Failed negotiations for fusion by the Greens (with the Liberals) might well be the product of its need to protect its interests in the longer term, even at the price of fighting a costly election in the short term; it is on this long-term aspect of alliance-making that attention must be focused.

5.2. TEMPORARY FUSION AND PERMANENT MERGER OVER TIME

With any game, iteration changes the strategies that are open to a player because the structure of payoffs is different. With the Prisoner's Dilemma Game (PDG), for example, a single game involving rational players will always lead to the players defecting rather than cooperating. In multi-game versions of PDG it is worthwhile for the player to 'explore' the possibility that the opponent(s) might cooperate—even though this necessitates that they risk losses in the short run should their own cooperative play not produce a similar response by their opponents in the games immediately following the use of this strategy.⁴ Similarly, given that elections are not 'one-off' events, parties must choose short-term strategies in the knowledge

of possible longer term consequences, and this affects how they approach the possibility of fusion.

In particular, of course, there is now the option of permanently merging with another party, rather than simply entering into a temporary electoral alliance with it. Because the latter provides for the periodic renegotiating and cessation of a coalition, it gives both sides the opportunity to respond flexibly to changed conditions. It also enables the respective parties to respond clearly to demands from their supporters, rather than have them negotiated through the channels of the merged party. Merger, by contrast, may have three main advantages for both parties depending on the circumstances. First, it may make it easier to acquire resources with which to compete against the major party opponent. This could be because size matters in the acquisition of those resources, or because it removes an incentive for either party to free-ride in obtaining them, by relying on the other to do so. Another advantage is that it can make it easier to present a coherent and continuing public image for their coalition that does not have to change as the bargaining outcomes vary. Furthermore, internalizing discussions about policy, patronage distribution or whatever may reduce the costs of negotiation by comparison with formal party-to-party bargaining. Yet, even when the costs of merger are acceptable to both parties at the time, there can be significant problems arising from it. Especially for the junior partner there is the risk that, over time, the particular interests it represents will cease to count for as much as they did in an independent party. They are swamped by their larger partner. Another danger is that internalizing disputes may result in intra-party factionalism that is itself costly and which actually makes it more difficult to present a united front in the electoral arena than short-term alliances—because the disputes have been ongoing.

However, an iterated electoral game also affects strategy because it provides alternative possibilities as to when to try to take the benefit. Will a short-term, and successful, alliance, for example, make it less likely that higher benefits can be obtained in subsequent elections? Are the costs of a greater defeat now worth sustaining in the interests of long-term party-building—if that is the trade-off that appears to be available? Moreover, and quite obviously, sequence matters; what has happened in one round of an electoral game has consequences for subsequent ones; for example, an agreement to enter into a coalition that is broken in some respects may shape bargaining in subsequent rounds because of reduced trust between the parties, and so on.

How then might the three parties in our example respond to potential coalition formation in circumstances when they are looking beyond a single election?

The Conservative party

As noted in section 5.1, before a one-off election the Conservative party normally has no incentive to cooperate with the Green party, except to try to keep it in

business as an independent party. Over an extended period this is likely to remain the optimal strategy for the Conservatives but there are significant ways in which that might be revised. The worst long-term outcome for them is one in which:

- (1) the Greens first attract environment-interested voters from the Conservatives; then
- (2) enter into recurring electoral alliances with the Liberals, that result in only a small number of anti-environment voters switching from the Liberal party to the Conservatives;
- (3) this arrangement then becomes permanent with what Duverger called ‘total fusion’ between Liberals and Greens.

This would leave the Conservatives with a relatively smaller coalition than they had earlier, despite having seemingly benefited from the emergence of an environment issue that stood to divide their opposition. Now, of course, whether some version of this outcome does ensue depends on the kind of issue that is involved. Where it is likely to persist as a source of intense social division between its adherents and its opponents, even short-term deals between the Liberals and the third party might be difficult to achieve. Moreover, even when an electoral alliance has been forged, conflict between members of the Liberal party and the third party might undermine their electoral effort. But when there are significant social interests cross-cutting those of the new issue, or when that issue is likely to weaken in the medium term, skilful management by the Liberals of their relationship with the third party might produce the result outlined above. Even if the Conservative party is not faced with allied opposition parties at election t , by $t + 1$ it could find itself facing a larger opponent, with former Conservative voters being socialized into the third party, and later into a fused party embracing the Liberals and the third party.

Were that to happen in the case of the environment issue, the Conservatives might do better to prise away from the Liberals their anti-environmental voters by themselves adopting an explicit anti-environment stance at election t . By helping to push the Liberals and Greens closer to each other at an earlier stage, the Conservatives might at least reduce their net long-term losses—if they can keep within their fold the former Liberal-voting anti-environmental Cattaneo citizens. Clearly what is at issue here is the ability of parties to detach voters from their former voting habits, and through socialization make them loyal voters to their own party. Whether there is an opportunity for such a realignment of voters is likely to depend on the strength of the voters’ previous ties to their former party, and the resources available to their new party to socialize them into an environment in which their changed voting behaviour becomes habitual. Consequently, it is only in some circumstances that a party such as the Conservatives is likely to benefit from a strategy that facilitates fusion between Liberals and Greens but, faced with the prospect of its main opponent also ultimately being able to

absorb former Conservative voters into its own ranks, it might be a strategy to be contemplated.

In the absence of this kind of exercise in damage-limitation by the Conservatives, the party is best served by the continuing prominence of the environment as an electoral issue, or rather as an issue that is promoted directly via the electoral arena. Dividing Liberal support tends to help the Conservatives.⁵

The Liberal party

For the Liberals the main consequence of there being an unlimited number of rounds of the electoral game is that there might well be an incompatibility between its optimal long-term goal and optimal short-term strategy. Whether there is depends on potential relative defection rates in the three parties from an alliance between the Liberals and Greens. Assume this does work to the joint benefit of Liberals and Greens. As noted above, in the long term the Liberals would want to be able to absorb all Green voters into a permanent coalition with themselves, because this would increase their size relative to the Conservatives. That coalition could take the form of permanent merger or a continuing agreement between two formally independent parties.⁶ (The particular context will determine which of the two alternatives is better. For example, a unified party might make it easier to promote a coherent image to voters; on the other hand, were the larger party to have always been weak in specific localities, having its ally operating under its own name there might help increase their combined vote.) However, the Liberals would not want to make the concessions—on candidacies, policies, or whatever—to the Greens when it did not have to, and a permanent deal might mean having to ‘pay for’ Green cooperation even when the environmental issue was less salient to voters. The Liberals want the flexibility to cut the best deal at the time. That might mean ignoring the Greens at times when the Liberal party was sure of victory or certain of defeat. Having to deal with the Green party only on an election-by-election basis would reduce its costs, leaving it only at the mercy of the Greens’ bargaining strength at particular times.

The Liberal party might best be thought of as a kind of scavenger, therefore; it would willingly incorporate at low cost to itself the ‘carcass’ of the Green party, were that available, because, say, the environment had now become relatively less important as an interest to those Cattaneo citizens previously concerned with it. That is, permanent merger on good terms for the Liberals is something that can be aimed at by them only indirectly—by policies that indirectly weaken the issue as a source of social distinctiveness or division. Then, when there is little distinctive about the identity of the third party, permanent merger becomes a good deal for them. In the absence of that, the Liberal party must choose between the flexibility that comes with short-term alliances and a permanent agreement, with which there is a danger that the Greens may be able to extract concessions that over time overvalue their contribution to the alliance.

There is a further complication in the management of party interests over time: even when there is a distinct *party* interest in a long-term agreement, the party actors who can act on that interest are really a sequence of individual actors who have their own interests. Although a party *per se* may be faced with an endless round of games, the particular politicians and activists who constitute the party have only a limited number of plays each. Death, defeat, and retirement end all political careers—and there are only relatively few elections in any political career. It matters to the individual politician that he or she is excluded now from positions in government, from a candidacy, and so on because an electoral alliance has been entered into by the party. Who really cares if there is a larger Liberal party in twenty years' time, if you are unlikely to be around to benefit from it? Of course, by no means all politicians will see the choice in these terms, but to the extent that some of them do, coalition agreements for the Liberals will be driven more by shorter term considerations than if the party really were a unitary actor.

The Green party

Longer term considerations for the Green party necessitate their weighing the consequences of electoral alliances. Depending on the Greens' size and on the type of structure the Liberals have, permanent merger could make it more likely that, within the merged party, the environment issue may be ignored or downplayed. Continuing, but negotiable, short-term alliances may avoid this, providing that the party does not become associated either with the causes of electoral failure (that are the product of the Liberals' actions) or with unpopular policies that are subsequently enacted when an election has been won. However, not having an alliance precludes the possibility of direct influence at all, which is why some form of coalition is attractive for the Greens. As with the Liberals, the Green party wants flexibility so that it is (*a*) part of a winning coalition, but (*b*) retains a distinctive identity, and yet (*c*) can exit from association with the Liberals when that becomes disadvantageous. Like the Liberal party, therefore, the Greens would want to be in a position to review their alliance depending on the circumstances. Nevertheless, unlike the Liberal party, their smaller size may make them more vulnerable to the consequences of electoral failure, should they lack the resources to withstand that, and so they may have more incentive to enter some kind of agreement.

Here is the key source of weakness for the Greens. Whilst periodic opportunistic alliances may provide a boost for the party, continuing coalition arrangements may rob the party of its independent base. Once again the limited time-span of individual politicians is relevant. Being 'forced out' of office, because for the party it makes sense to end an alliance at election t , is likely to play less well with senior incumbents for whom election $t + 1$ may be too late for them to achieve their ambitions. They are the politicians who are most likely to persist with a coalition, even though it will weaken the party in the long term. Thus the

'carcass' of the Green party may end up being available to the Liberals, because of the relative weakness of those who might put the interests of the party, qua party, first. For that reason, activists and members in parties like the Greens have good reason for being suspicious of continuing electoral arrangements, even on a supposedly election-by-election basis, because they could weaken the capacity of the party both to act independently and to exercise its bargaining strength in relation to the Liberals. This suggests that, when successful, the drive to coalition stems not from straightforward incentives facing parties like the Liberals to take over a third party, but more from the difficulties (less entrenched) third parties will have in pursuing their optimal strategies.

5.3. COALITIONS IN DIFFERENT PARTY ARENAS

So far it has been assumed that the parties are operating at just one level, that of a city-state, and for one kind of office. This assumption must now be changed. Suppose Cattaneo is merely one city within a nation-state, Hinchley. For this purpose it does not matter whether Hinchley is a federal state or merely has some lesser powers devolved to local governments, but that it has different levels of public office, and possibly different kinds of elected public offices within those levels, is significant. Its significance lies in the different incentives that may operate at the different levels. Even in the case of parties that were completely centralized and in which there was no autonomy for their regional or local units, conflicting incentives might be present. For example, selective temporary alliances might increase the prospects for winning public office at one level, but have the effect of lowering the distinctive appeal of the party and reducing activism in it elsewhere. But the advantage enjoyed by centralized parties is that, unlike more decentralized ones, they can more easily make 'on balance' judgements as to where the greatest advantage lies and enact a policy on coalition on that basis.

Rarely in nation-states, though, are parties wholly centralized, and, to the extent that local or regional units have autonomy in concluding electoral alliances at their own levels, the coherence of a party's long-term electoral strategy may be reduced. This is most obvious in cases where there are distinctive regional variations in support for the various parties. Suppose that the Liberal party in Cattaneo would normally require an electoral pact or alliance with the Greens in order to win offices there, and it concludes such a deal based on a pro-environment policy agenda. While this drives the anti-environmental supporters within the Liberal party to the Conservatives, the Liberal/Green alliance still has sufficient votes for its candidates to win in Cattaneo. However, in the distant city of Steeple the situation is very different. There the Conservative party contains more supporters who are concerned with the environment than do the Liberals and it is the

Conservatives who conclude a winning electoral pact with the Greens based on a more pro-environment agenda than that of the Liberals. The consequence of this localized decision-making might be to make it difficult for all the parties to present a coherent policy agenda at the national level. National strategy might be reduced to little more than trying to obfuscate the evident inconsistencies. Whether the differing bases of voter support for a party will have adverse consequences for it depends on the extent to which its voter mobilization is geared towards a relatively tight image or 'brand'. The less specific the set of principles with which it is identified the less tension this will provoke within the party. When, as in this example, a new issue (environmentalism) modifies party competition, the Liberals' ability to coordinate varying local responses would be reduced the more specific the ideology the party has been promoting in the past.

However, it is not merely regional variations in patterns of voter support that might create difficulties, nor is it just in relation to policies that national parties could struggle to develop coherence in the politics of alliances. Whatever the policy basis of a coalition, any local decision to fuse temporarily with another party may undermine national policy. Suppose that nationally the Liberal party has decided that in the long term it can drive the Greens under by opposing them, even at the risk of sometimes losing offices to the Conservatives; once the Green party has become a 'carcass', then it can be taken over on Liberal terms. However, the Cattaneo unit of the Liberals, aware of the benefits that local victory can bring, enters into an agreement with the local Green unit that it will not contest some districts of Cattaneo in which there are many pro-environment voters while in return the Greens do not put up candidates in other parts of Cattaneo. The immediate benefit of this to the Liberal party in Cattaneo is evident, but by sustaining the Green party locally it could also adversely affect the long-term strategy of the Liberal party nationally to weaken the Green party to a point at which it can no longer function as an independent party. Local electoral pacts, irrespective of their impact on policy coherence, could help sustain parties that might otherwise be eliminated or induced to fuse on poor terms. Conversely, nationally organized pacts may have adverse effects on parties at lower levels, if their effects are to alienate, or at least de-radicalize, those members whose participation in the party has been prompted by the prospect of supporting either particular leaders who are no longer candidates or particular causes that are now being de-emphasized. Whether pacts do have these consequences depends on the extent to which organizational resources at one level of politics are usable at other levels.

There is a further, and important, complication that the operation of a party in different arenas of a polity can create. This concerns the officeholding ambitions of politicians. If Hinchley is a polity in which politics is a career, and officeholders typically seek to 'progress' from one level of office to a higher one, then being in a party that will facilitate such progression is a precondition for success; that

in turn can provide an incentive for merger or a permanent coalition. Suppose the Green party in the small city of Chadwick is a major party in that city, competing on equal terms with the Conservatives, and with the Liberals locally being just a minor party. The Greens' officeholders may be unable to advance their careers further because the next level of office involves an electorate that is much larger than Chadwick's, and also an electorate in which, as in most of the country, the Green party is only a minor party. Those officeholders have a strong incentive to promote something more than mere temporary alliances with the Liberals because it is only through such means that they can advance. Of course, ideological and other considerations might prevent fusion in the particular case, but when parties are a vehicle that provide 'structured career ladders' from local to national levels there is a clear incentive to fuse that is absent in 'one-level' polities.

5.4. INCREASING THE SIZE OF A PARTY

Size matters for a party in a two-party system in a way that is more direct than in multi-party systems, but, as seen so far, that does not mean that for a major party decreasing one element of the competition it faces, via the mechanism of some form of fusion with smaller parties, is either desirable or achievable. Even in the least complex of situations, and with perfect information about preferences, the interests of other actors may preclude the formation of a coalition that is larger than the party's original base of support. How strong the drive is to increase the size of major parties depends on a variety of factors, many beyond the immediate control of the parties themselves. The particular structure of the polity in which they are operating is one of the main factors determining how much coalition formation involving other parties will be a central concern for party leaders. Nevertheless, for a party much hinges on decisions made about alliance strategy, and those decisions are made by party leaders; the choices they make really can make a difference both to the fortunes of their party and how the party system operates. It is here that the significance of leadership becomes evident. In Samuels's words, 'leaders can stretch constraints and . . . this process requires determination and skill as well as opportunity'.⁷ Their ability to do this can involve a range of skills—exercising judgement in taking non-obvious decisions, bargaining to secure favourable terms for their party in any alliance, 'packaging' agreements that will prevent revolt within their own party's ranks, structuring alternatives in such a way that support for an agreement is maximized, and so on. One of the particular skills needed in relation to the taking of non-obvious decisions is estimating how much a coalition can be expanded without the risk that adding additional members leads to even greater defection among existing members. Knowing how far an individual or a faction can be 'pushed' without an

exit from the party following fusion is not a matter of responding to incentives, nor is it generated automatically from within a party structure; it is a matter of agency. It is the interaction between structures, incentives, and agency that matters, and this becomes the centre of attention in Chapter 6.

Leadership is a factor that may not be present and, even if there are individuals available who are capable of exercising it, they may be operating in conditions in which there are no opportunities for them to do so. However, as in other areas of politics, the dynamics of two-partism *can* be shaped by agency. Furthermore, it may be possible to identify conditions in which agency might have effected change—had it been available. In a political science profession that has become increasingly obsessed by the need to replicate findings beyond the single case study, leadership has become a more marginal area of research—abandoned, though not completely, to biographers and psychologists. Yet is the ability of leaders to take non-obvious decisions that pushes political processes in directions that they might not otherwise have gone.

How Major Parties Form Electoral Coalitions with Other Parties

The central theme outlined in the previous chapter was that, while in two-party systems major parties do have an incentive to increase their overall electoral support to a size at which they can control government, forming coalitions with other parties may be a complex process. For that reason, coalition formation is often difficult for party elites to effect, and may not happen at all. This chapter turns from hypothetical examples to real-world cases of both failed and successful instances of party fusion, and, as in the last chapter, the focus is on coalitions for the purpose of contesting elections, and not on post-election coalitions arranged for controlling government. The argument developed here is that, in principle, there appear to be four main types of fusion but that the third of them, long-term agreements between a major and a minor party, is incompatible with the institutional arrangements that support two-partism. In practice, therefore, only three forms of coalition arrangement are found in persisting two-party systems. First, it is necessary to explain the circumstances in which there is an incentive for a major party to use each of these forms. These four types are:

- (a) temporary coalitions;
- (b) ‘unbargained’ party mergers;
- (c) permanent coalitions without party merger;
- (d) ‘bargained’ party mergers.

In fact, types (b) and (d) are really the extreme ends of a single spectrum, rather than constituting wholly separate forms of coalition—ranging from permanent alliances that required extensive and costly bargaining to those that required virtually none. Each of the four will now be examined in turn.

6.1. TEMPORARY COALITIONS

Relative to longer term arrangements, temporary electoral alliances have the great advantage of offering flexibility to a party when circumstances change. Such a coalition can be abandoned if it is no longer necessary to one of the parties, its

terms can be renegotiated in advance of subsequent elections should one member become relatively stronger, and, in some circumstances, it does not compromise a party's identity in the way that merger with another party would. Consequently, a temporary coalition will often be a more attractive alternative than merger for any party possessing an electoral base that is likely to remain viable—that is, one that has a core of voters who will continue to vote for it even if, say, its present public officeholders die or retire. While short-term alliances might be renewed over a sequence of elections, they remain 'temporary' in the sense that the parties retain their independence throughout and have no commitment to extending the arrangement beyond the one election.

Nevertheless, there are also disadvantages with temporary coalitions, by comparison with merger, and, additionally, there are conditions in which they cannot operate. First, if regular inter-party negotiations are always too time-consuming, the parties involved may come to regard the disadvantages of permanent merger as ones worth absorbing. Furthermore, a short-term alliance may make it less likely that, individually, any of the affected parties will have the incentive to develop the kind of organization needed to make the alliance fully effective against its main opponent. Such an organization is a public good for which provision each party in the coalition seeks to minimize its own contribution relative to those of other parties. This was one of the main reasons that the parties that eventually merged to form the PUSC in Costa Rica abandoned their long-standing policy of having only a temporary coalition for each presidential contest. Finally, an alliance is impossible if the party nationally is unable to enforce agreements on local units, but, conversely, is less likely if those local units lack the autonomy to enact favourable agreements at their own level, and can do so only at the initiation of the national level. Alliance between a major and a minor party is most likely to occur when the electoral system 'punishes' parties that are in competition for the same groups of voters, as, for example, SMP does by comparison with either proportional systems or AV. However, there are several other conditions the presence of which increase the incentive to forge temporary alliances:

- (a) When electoral rules make it relatively easy for candidates to be 'shared' between parties, or for previously nominated candidates to be withdrawn from the ballot following an inter-party deal.
- (b) When the core vote of the two major parties is sufficiently similar in size that elections are highly competitive, and there is thus a strong incentive to prevent the entry of parties that might draw away potential voters, or, if that tactic fails, to cooperate with them.
- (c) When lower levels of the parties have considerable freedom of action on local matters, so that deals can be initiated (though not necessarily finalized) should local electoral conditions be favourable to them, but when national parties can still impose nationally negotiated alliances on local units.

- (d) When parties are less worried about maintaining a specific identity associated with particular public policies of a kind necessary for long-term party-building at the national level of politics.
- (e) When the outcome of successful short-term fusion does not involve a shared responsibility for governing with the other partner in the electoral coalition. (Such responsibility reduces the flexibility of a party with respect to its partner.)

All of the first four of these five conditions were present in the United States after the Civil War, and during that period short-term electoral alliances, to which the name ‘fusion’ was given then, were common. Much of the era of ‘fusion’ occurred before the adoption of the official ballot (first introduced in Massachusetts in 1888) when conditions for it were almost ideal. With the earlier, private, ballots, ‘fusion’ was often theoretically possible until just before polling day, although in practice it usually required agreement earlier in the campaign than this, in order to establish the attractiveness of the strategy among supporters. With the party printing and distributing its own ballots, it was impossible to prevent the same candidate appearing on the ballot of more than one party. Once ballots became public documents state law could be used to prohibit this, and a number of states moved to do just that in the years after 1896.¹

Although in the late nineteenth century party competition at the state level in the United States was not as evenly balanced as has often been suggested by political scientists, the ‘minor’ party in a two-party system often had more chance of winning particular elections than would be usual when two parties are not of the same potential size.² The reason for this was that, frequently, winning party coalitions collapsed shortly after assuming office—partly because there was never sufficient patronage available for distribution, and hence there was dissatisfaction amongst those who thought they had some claim on it. Thus, even in states like Michigan that leaned heavily to the Republicans in presidential elections, victory by the Democrats in congressional, gubernatorial, and other elections might be possible in non-presidential election years. That made ‘fusion’ an attractive option if a competitor minor party was clearly determined to enter the fray and siphon votes mainly from your party. Equally, it made sense to try to keep in the race parties that might siphon votes away from your main opponent. At different times and in different states both the Democrats and the Republicans secretly paid money to Prohibitionists and Greenbacks respectively to keep them in business during a campaign.³

Given the highly de-centralized structure of American parties, ‘fusion’ was mainly put into effect at the local or state level, though famously it was once utilized in a presidential election when the People’s Party endorsed the Democratic candidate William Jennings Bryan. However, as in many earlier instances of its use, ‘fusion’ in 1896 did not extend across all offices, and, for example, the

People's Party nominated a different vice-presidential candidate that year to the one selected by the Democrats.

The parties with which the Democrats and Republicans were 'fusing' in the late nineteenth century were much less institutionalized than themselves. Virtually all of them, like the Greenbacks and Prohibitionists, were organized around particular interests and causes, and they engaged in electoral politics to promote those issues. This posed two problems for the major parties in managing their political environment. First, having advocates of the issues active in their own party could be as harmful as having them put forward a separate slate of candidates. For example, in 1889 Prohibitionists in Iowa succeeded in nominating an unelectable Republican slate, thereby consigning the party to a rare defeat in the state. Secondly, being too closely associated with minority issues or causes could hurt the image of the major parties in the long term, which was one reason why, at the national level, 'fusion' was rarely contemplated: it threatened disruption to a party's broadly based coalition. Thus, few Democrats or Republicans were to have any interest in 'fusing' with the Socialists in early twentieth-century America. The more that American presidential contests became genuinely national elections, with parties attempting to promote the same image throughout the country, the less viable 'fusion' would become. Even parties at the state level became much more wary in the twentieth century of threatening their long-term public image by being seen to court openly issue-based parties. 'Fusion' was an important feature of nineteenth-century politics that would become insignificant during the early part of the next century.

'Fusion' was well suited to an era in which governments did little, and when relatively little was expected of them—except by those core supporters of major parties who had hopes of patronage and by supporters of minor parties who anticipated some response to the specific concerns around which that party had mobilized. Moreover, given the fragmentation of governmental structures, both horizontally and vertically, in the United States, there was less possibility that successful 'fusions' would then lead on to a party being responsible for the actions of its partner in government. Consequently, the longer term consequences for a party of entering into 'fusion' were likely to be less significant than they would become later—when electorates did cast votes on the apparent performance of those 'in government'.

This last point is significant in explaining change in the approaches of major parties in Britain to temporary alliances. After the mid-twentieth century no instances of such coalitions are found. Parties no longer wanted to be seen 'fraternizing with an enemy', and coalitions are an especially strong form of fraternization, because it will both weaken their own claims to be offering a distinctive policy agenda and leave them tarnished by the failures (including failures in government) of that party. The complete nationalizing of the mass media has also reduced the attraction of entering coalition deals at the local level, because they have ceased to have a purely local import.

Earlier, the best known British example of a short-term electoral alliance involved the presence of conditions (b), (d) and most especially (e). It took place in circumstances that were to minimize the adverse consequences from governing which might otherwise affect the allied parties, and was first negotiated in 1903 between Ramsay MacDonald of the (then) Labour Representation Committee (LRC) and the Liberal Parliamentary Whip, Herbert Gladstone. As in the American cases it was an agreement between a much larger party and a smaller party that appealed to a particular interest and whose supporters might otherwise vote for the major party in the pact. There were, though, four specific background conditions favourable to the pact:

- (i) the relatively weak performance of the Liberals at general elections since the party split over Irish Home Rule in 1886;
- (ii) the absence of resources available to the LRC in most constituencies that would have made electoral contestation possible there;
- (iii) the weakness of the Liberals in some types of working-class constituencies (such as the north-west coalfields) where ‘the Liberals *encouraged* Labour expansion’;⁴ and
- (iv) the establishment earlier, in places such as London, of ‘Progressive alliances’, involving Liberal and Labour supporters, to contest municipal elections.

The Gladstone–MacDonald pact was in operation for the election of 1906, was renegotiated for the elections of 1910, but was not renewed thereafter. Whether it would have been in force in the election due in 1915—had the First World War not commenced—is another matter. An inter-party agreement had yet to be finalized, although the conclusion of the most comprehensive study of this suggests that it would have been.⁵ As with the earlier American cases, it was an example of a limited agreement, one that did not extend across all constituencies—Labour and Liberals each gave the other a free run against the Conservatives in a total of about 9 per cent of British constituencies, where the division of the vote might produce a Conservative victory. For both parties, the conditions proved to be ideal for this kind of arrangement, in that after each of the three elections the Liberals were not dependent on Labour in being sustained as the party in government. After 1906 the Liberal party had an overall parliamentary majority, while after the two elections of 1910 it was the Irish Nationalist party, and not Labour, holding the balance of power. This helped to reduce the effectiveness of claims by its critics that the Liberal government was at the mercy of organized labour. For its part, Labour won more seats than it would have otherwise, and was largely free to support the government on policies of which it approved and to oppose it on others. In other words, one of the main potential disincentives to allying temporarily was absent here.

Other instances of British alliances that were limited with respect to the number of seats involved included the Conservatives’ non-contestation of seats previously

held by Liberal Unionists after 1886 and their similar treatment of National Labour and Liberal National seats after 1931. The last such deals in Britain, however, occurred after 1945, and, although only a few seats were included, arguably they helped to change the shape of British competition in the decades following. They were local agreements negotiated in the early 1950s, and they demonstrate that the absence of central control over local electoral alliances may work against the interests of a party nationally, and can actually hamper merger in circumstances in which merger would provide more advantages to the major party than the benefits resulting from local agreements. To understand their significance it is necessary to return to an earlier discussion, and provide a brief account of the background to these alliances.

Following its withdrawal from the Coalition government in 1922, the policy of the Conservative party under Stanley Baldwin had been to squeeze the Liberal party, and its vote, by focusing on Labour as being the only significant opposition. Party strategy was based on the assumption that most of the Liberal vote could eventually be transferred to the Conservatives, after the marginalization of the party. Even though that strategy was abandoned in the 1930s, by 1951 the Liberals had been reduced to six MPs, with just one of them having faced both Labour and Conservative opponents. Moreover, two of these seats had been won only because of the new local alliances with the Conservatives. First in Huddersfield, before the 1950 general election, and then in Bolton, before the 1951 election, the two parties agreed a locally negotiated pact; each town had two constituencies, and the Conservatives did not contest one seat while the Liberals did not contest the other. Without the pacts the Liberals would have won neither seat, and when the agreement ended before the 1964 election, an otherwise good election year for the party, the result was the loss of both of them.

The significance of the two successful pacts is that, arguably, they helped prevent the dissolution of the Liberal party as a political organization, and certainly as an independent one; because they remained an independent party during those years it was possible for them later (after 1958) to take advantage of electoral revolts against the two major parties, and then subsequently (from the late 1960s) to rebuild the party as one with a strong orientation to local political organizing. That future trajectory might not have happened if the party had had only four MPs rather than six after 1951; it would simply not have been viable as a parliamentary party, with no seats in England and with the party taking second place in just eleven constituencies throughout the country. The pressure on the Liberals to conclude some kind of national merger with the Conservatives would have been immense. As it was, Winston Churchill still did offer a coalition-in-government between the two parties, with the Liberal leader, Clement Davies, set to become a cabinet member, but Davies rejected it.⁶ With a mere four MPs merger might have been the more likely outcome, with Davies attempting to secure the best terms that he could. By entering into government with the Conservatives, almost certainly the Liberals would then have lost their separate identity with voters,

because of their association with Conservative public policy, and they would have been unable to detach themselves from the Conservatives to run independently at future elections. The two local deals made that outcome, which would have been highly beneficial to the Conservatives, less likely. With the benefit of hindsight it might seem odd, therefore, that the Conservatives did not put pressure on the Bolton and Huddersfield parties to reject any local deals that might increase Liberal representation, and hence that party's chances of survival.

Why had the Conservatives, having abandoned their original strategy of the 1920s, moved to embrace a form of fusion? Three factors were relevant in this switch. First, both as an ex-Liberal minister himself and someone who had never regarded party loyalty highly, Churchill had an entirely different attitude to the Liberals than previous Conservative leaders. He had a sentimental attachment to the party and to some individuals in it, as well as a strong desire to try to govern from the centre. Consequently, he was more willing to engage in positive action to incorporate the Liberals into the Conservative party, rather than merely wait for the consequences of continuing party decline on the part of the Liberals to work to the Conservatives' advantage.⁷ Secondly, the closeness of the election in 1950, which was narrowly won by Labour, focused attention on maximizing the number of seats a party could win. Short-term considerations carried more weight than they had done. One manifestation of this, for example, was that Churchill, in particular, appeared willing to consider introducing electoral reform (to secure Liberal support) as well as concluding local agreements in order to boost the total number of Conservative seats.⁸ In the event the only result of these discussions was the pact at Bolton. Thirdly, and arguably most significantly, power within the Conservative party was divided between the centre and the constituencies in a way that facilitated some local initiative. The Huddersfield agreement had come about because of the incentive facing local Conservatives to obtain the benefits of actually winning one seat in the town. Even if the party nationally had retained a policy of 'driving the Liberals down' it might have been difficult to achieve this without public conflict between the two levels of the party.

Both the Gladstone–MacDonald pact and the Bolton/Huddersfield pacts could be renewed at subsequent elections because in neither case were the different images and policy agendas of the two parties blurred by their being seen to share responsibility for governing. When a major and minor party enter a coalition government, or when the minor party provides a continuing legislative majority for the major party, the distinctiveness of the parties is eroded and both are liable to be held responsible for unpopular public policies. In these circumstances the efficacy of a temporary alliance may be much reduced at subsequent elections. To preserve their majority the allied parties may be faced with either having to convert the alliance into a permanent, and largely 'unbargained' one (see below), or with having to turn to other means of trying to preserve party independence without losing office. A good example of the latter occurred in British Columbia in 1952. At both the 1945 and 1949 elections the larger Liberal party had an

electoral pact with the smaller Conservative party to prevent the social democratic Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) from winning office. The growing unpopularity of the coalition led it to abandon its temporary alliance strategy in favour of electoral reform. By adopting the AV system each of the parties hoped to retain their own core support but also obtain the second preferences of voters for the other party who, it was believed, would not willingly vote for the CCF. The parties separately might then do better than in an alliance but not as badly as they would either in an alliance or separately under the existing SMP system. Ironically, in the event the unpopularity of the government was such that the hitherto small Social Credit party received second choice votes from CCF, Liberal, and Conservative voters to emerge as the largest party after the 1952 election, in which the Liberals and Conservatives finished third and fourth respectively.

Central to temporary alliances are judgements party elites make as to the likelihood of net gains being made to the party's vote, the likely cost (in terms of offices or policies) that an allied party would extract from them, and the long-term consequences of alliance that fails to deliver victory. These last costs can be high. After its fusion with the Democrats in 1896 the People's Party disappeared as a political organization even though the activity of the interests that had supported the party continued.⁹ Similarly judgement well exercised—as it was by the leadership groups that negotiated and approved the Gladstone–MacDonald pact—can generate benefits for one or both parties. They were not 'obvious' decisions, and other individuals in a party's leadership might have taken different views, with different consequences both for the parties concerned and for the party systems.

6.2. 'UNBARGAINED' PARTY MERGERS

With 'unbargained' mergers agency is relatively unimportant. This second type of alliance occurs in circumstances in which either the smaller party, or sometimes both the major and the minor party, is sufficiently weak that an enduring alliance of some kind is essential for party survival. Holding out for better terms from the prospective partner, or for some change in political fortune, is not a plausible stance to take. Little bargaining is necessary to bring about an alliance, and in extreme cases merger occurs with limited publicity. There are two main variations of this kind of merger.

The first can occur in any democratic system and involves either parties that have become sufficiently weak electorally that they are in no position to bargain effectively before absorption into a larger one, or smaller parties that have become so similar to a major party in term of their electoral appeal that they too are in a

weak bargaining position. The case of the absorption of the Non Partisan League into the North Dakota Democratic Party in 1956 is one example of the former. A more interesting case is that of the Liberal Unionists in Britain, because it is an example that exhibits aspects of both variants of non-bargained fusion. Formed as the result of a Liberal split over Irish policy in 1886, Liberal Unionism then entered into a defensive electoral alliance with the Conservatives in the election of that year, and gradually, as governing allies of the Conservatives, they lost their distinctive electoral identity. Although formal separation of the two parties remained until 1912, by then merger of the two parties had effectively taken place, with the Liberal Unionists never establishing an electoral organization capable of competing on its own. Unlike many of his colleagues, the leading unionist Joseph Chamberlain had delayed joining a Conservative-led government until 1895. At the time of the split with the Liberals, Chamberlain's intention had not been to leave the Liberal party permanently; rather, he had envisaged that he would return to the party, replacing William Gladstone as its leader and with the policy of Irish Home Rule then being shelved. For Chamberlain and his personal followers the relationship with the Conservatives in the early years was more that of a temporary alliance. However, Gladstone's refusal to comply with Chamberlain's vision forced the latter into increasing cooperation with the Conservatives. Subsequently, the Liberal Unionists could develop no distinctive agenda to warrant maintaining a separate party, and having their leaders in a Conservative-led government undermined the party's ability to compete in elections outside of an alliance with the Conservatives. With some of the defectors having joined the Conservatives in government shortly after the split with the Liberals, the independence of Liberal Unionism was never properly established, and could never be after 1895.

The second form of non-bargained fusion, which this Liberal Unionist case partly exhibits, can occur just in parliamentary systems, and it arises from the consequences of agreeing to cooperate initially with another party in governing. Temporary fusion over competing in elections arises only subsequently; but the crucial characteristic is that, in governing, at least one of the parties loses its ability to compete in the electoral market as effectively as before—because of its current direct association with the agenda of a previously rival party. Governing in coalition leads to the distinctive aspects of a party's policies or identity becoming obscured, and that in turn reduces its ability to compete independently. Merger becomes the only available alternative to continual electoral failure; this was the most likely electoral scenario for the British Liberals had a Churchill–Davies deal been concluded in 1951.

A clear example of this type of merger, and its corrosive effects on party independence, was that between the Progress Party and the United Party in New Zealand. The latter, earlier threatened with collapsing into third-party status, had recovered its position in the 1928 election, after which it formed a minority government with the backing of the Labour party. The impact of the developing

world economic depression increased tensions between United and Labour, and in March 1931 the Labour party proposed a no-confidence motion in parliament, which then failed because of the opposition Reform party's support for the government. This was the start of a five-year process that eventually produced a largely 'unbargained' merger between United and Reform. With economic conditions becoming worse, there was some pressure within both Progress and United, and also from the business sector, for some form of fusion between the two non-socialist parties. Yet agreement about cooperation could not be reached until September 1931; at the time arguments about the 'national interest' were being advanced, involving a coalition government including all three parties, but this was against the interests of all bar Labour. As Bassett has argued:

All three party leaders were so obviously playing for political advantage. Labour desired fusion at all costs. Forbes [the United leader] wanted to hang on to office, come what may... Coates [the Reform leader] seemed to have everything to win if he could hold out until an election. At many points he could have brought this about by accepting the advice of colleagues and agreeing to a No Confidence motion in Forbes's government. However, Coates feared an adverse reaction to such a move, and besides he felt constrained by the assurances he had given so often about putting the interests of country before party.¹⁰

Coates's failure to bring down the government meant that his only alternative was to sustain it, and the proximity of the election (a few weeks away) meant that the formation of a coalition government between Reform and United would also entail some form of electoral agreement between the governing parties: 'Arrangements were made for sitting members not to be opposed by candidates from the other of the two parties at the 1931 election and for procedures to choose Coalition candidates to contest seats held by Labour... [United] put up fewer candidates at the 1931 election than Reform and returned fewer members.'¹¹ Once in government together, the United and Reform parties would find that their electoral fates were now tied to each other. Perhaps if the economy had recovered strongly, Reform might have been able to contemplate leaving the coalition, and seeking a parliamentary majority on its own. However, with economic conditions continuing to worsen, Labour, as the only party not in government, would benefit from voter discontent. The only chance of avoiding a heavy defeat for either of the coalition partners was to contest the 1935 election as they had in 1931 with an electoral alliance—they did that, but this time Labour won easily. Although the path to 'total' fusion was not entirely straightforward, so that it is not the most extreme form of 'unbargained merger', the defeat meant that there were few alternatives open to either coalition party and the inter-party bargaining was relatively limited. In May 1935, at a conference of United and Reform MPs and supporters, it was agreed that the parties should work together, though it was decided not to set up a common organization. That did not gain acceptance until the following February.¹²

Another case in which being in government weakened the identity of a minor party to the point at which merger became uncontroversial is that of the Liberal Nationals in Britain, and the peculiarities of this case are best explained by comparison with another party formed at the same time in Britain, National Labour.

For both parties a temporary, non-electoral, alliance (with the Conservative party) began in 1931, and for the same reason as in the New Zealand case—pressures from outside the party system to form a coalition government in order, supposedly, to further effective control over the consequences of the Great Depression. The National Labour case is more straightforward than that of the National Liberals. As a result of the worsening economic crisis that August the minority Labour government was set to resign on the issue of reducing unemployment benefit. However, instead of doing so, Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald suddenly agreed to form a National government with the other parties. While some members of the outgoing cabinet agreed to support him, the Labour party itself disavowed the policy and most of its MPs did so as well. Those who joined MacDonald were subsequently expelled from the Labour party, and sat as National Labour MPs. The survival of these MPs in the House of Commons depended on the electoral pact agreed by the parties in the new government, which was put into effect for the 1931 election and which continued thereafter for all the parties in the government. The party lacked not only organization but also the capacity to attract members and candidates, so that it lasted only so long as the defectors remained in parliament.¹³ It was dissolved formally in 1945, and was never incorporated into the Conservative party.

The Liberal Nationals, by contrast, did eventually fuse with the Conservatives, continuing to benefit from that alliance as recognized partners of the Conservative party.¹⁴ Unlike National Labour, therefore, a temporary coalition turned into a permanent one (in 1947), a merger requiring little bargaining to put into effect. The main difference between the Liberal National case and that of the New Zealand merger is that in the latter instance the eventual outcome can be explained entirely in terms of the electoral consequences for a party of entering into coalition government. In New Zealand attempts at bargained merger had been made earlier, but they had failed. However, the British Liberals had been split badly in the two years before the party entered the National government, and it is plausible to argue that some breaking away from the party by the group that became the Liberal Nationals would have happened, absent a National government. Nevertheless, it was the formation of that government that meant the Liberal Nationals came to be dependent on the Conservatives for their electoral survival, and which led also to their losing any distinctive identity that might have made it possible for them to survive as an independent party. It was coalition government that made them unviable as a separate party in the long term, just as Reform and United were made unviable as separate parties by coalition government in New Zealand.

6.3. PERMANENT PARTY COALITIONS WITHOUT PARTY MERGER

Instances of parties agreeing to coalitions that are intended to last from one election to another are theoretically possible, and are evident in other kinds of party system. Unlike ‘unbargained mergers’, negotiating an agreement will not be straightforward. However, these alliances are unlikely to be present in conditions that are essentially those of two-partism. For a major party to prefer a permanent alliance over a temporary coalition, it has to be receiving benefits that outweigh the advantages of flexibility associated with a one-off arrangement. If the partner party is very small, it is unclear that there would be any such advantages to the major party; there will be occasions when it will not need its partner, and will not wish to be encumbered by it. On the other hand, if the minor party is a somewhat larger one, such that its votes typically provide its partner with electoral victories, then the system is one that is actually a two-and-a-half rather than a two-party system.

Permanent alliances typically occur under electoral systems that are unfavourable to two-partism. For decades in Australia there have been coalitions in both some states and at the federal level between the Liberal party and the National (formerly Country) party. The use of the AV electoral system makes such alliances much easier to form than the SMP usually found in two-party systems.¹⁵ The parties do not have to strike a bargain as to which constituencies will be contested by which party: each party can contest every seat without detriment to the other and without having to ‘stand down’ any of its candidates. This removes an important element of inter-party bargaining. All the parties have to do is inform their own voters that they should use their second preference vote in support of the candidate of their party’s ally. Negotiations are still necessary though on other aspects of conflict of interest—the possible division of government portfolios between the parties in the event of victory, ensuring that the two parties’ stated policy programmes are sufficiently compatible with each other, and so on. Although such an alliance is not supposed to be temporary, it could be ended through unilateral action by one party, should the partner prove to be a serious electoral liability. Nevertheless, the disadvantages of leaving an alliance for short-term benefit are normally likely to be outweighed by the longer-term advantage with respect to securing second preference votes. Consequently, cessation of an alliance may be predicted to be infrequent. Furthermore, in parliamentary systems it might be expected that electoral allies would form a coalition in government, so that especially when they are in government their electoral fates are likely to be linked—thereby providing a further disincentive for disengaging from the alliance.

The long-term stability of the Liberal–National coalition in Australia is underpinned by two factors, therefore. The electoral system makes alliance-building

easier because it eliminates some aspects of pre-agreement bargaining; in part, this means that there is little incentive for the parties to merge permanently. Their retention of a party identity then enables each party to respond to defeat after it has been in government, even large defeats, without having to contemplate merger as a means of rebuilding support. Of course, as in the British Columbia example, in some circumstances AV might make it easier than SMP would for a fourth party to supplant an unpopular alliance. But the point being made here is that, as far as the stability of an alliance is concerned, AV is far more conducive to it than SMP. With SMP short-term alliances are possible, but when they are not feasible, or are costly, the only likely alternative strategy is merger, and not permanent alliance. However, merger is itself problematic. On the one hand, ‘unbargained’ merger comes about because of party weakness on the part of one or both allies; this was what happened in the cases of the New Zealand parties and the Liberal Nationals (discussed in section 6.2). On the other hand, as will be argued in section 6.4, when bargaining is needed to produce party merger it may actually be difficult to produce a successful outcome.

6.4. ‘BARGAINED’ PARTY MERGERS

The fourth type of coalition between parties is permanent, and it requires extensive negotiations to create a larger (major) party than the constituent parts from which it is formed. Because there will almost certainly be costs as well as benefits to both parties from merger, resulting in part from conflict of interest, and because also there will likely be conflicts of interest *within* each party in relation to the internal distribution of these costs and benefits, bargaining will be complex. Given that the parties concerned are still viable as independent actors, disagreements about the required compromise will arise—with respect to candidacies for public office, party ideology, and so on. In this regard they differ from the ‘unbargained’ permanent mergers discussed earlier and, unlike temporary alliances, mergers can less easily be undone. That is one reason why, within the world of two-party systems, they are relatively uncommon. Attempts at merger that get beyond the realm of speculation and wishful thinking are usually difficult to negotiate, because any resulting increase in party size does not necessarily benefit all key actors in the parties, and in some cases the merged party is not always larger than the aggregation of the components from which it is formed.

Bargaining will be easiest, and mergers more likely to result, under two sets of conditions. The first is when the resources available to the parties, or potentially available to them, are relatively small. For example, in the Canadian provinces there are a number of instances of hitherto major parties joining with another

grouping to create a new party. This is what happened with the Progressive Conservatives in Quebec in the 1930s when they became one of the bases of the new Union Nationale. As was argued in Chapter 2, the resources available to these provincial parties is usually smaller than to parties in nation-states, so that there are fewer stakeholders to contest the sharing of resources with other parties, or with those contributing to form a new party. Another set of conditions favourable to inter-party bargaining is when those parties attempting it are relatively new ones that have enjoyed limited electoral success. This minimizes the number of potential veto players who have a stake in the persistence of unmerged parties because of a long-term role in, and the development of personal ambitions via, these parties.

A classic example of this last set of factors at work was the formation of the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) in Trinidad and Tobago in 1986. Since independence in 1961 every general election in the country had been won by the same party, the People's National Movement (PNM). In 1981 a new party founded by a senior ex-PNM member had obtained the second largest number of votes but won no seats; in doing so it had forced into third place the United Labour Front (itself founded only in 1966) though the latter had won parliamentary seats then and was the official opposition. These two parties together with a small party that had support only on Tobago and yet another, even smaller, party were to constitute the NAR. The combination of both being new and not having been in government meant that the distributional considerations that might otherwise have made bargaining difficult were relatively unimportant in this merger. Equally, though, having formed, the NAR then disintegrated fairly quickly. It won the 1986 general election, but had split by 1988, with one of its successor parties, the United National Congress, going on to become the second party in Trinidad's current two-party system. Fission and fusion of this kind among parties is more common in any type of party system where the parties have not fully institutionalized, and having access to the resources that come with control of government is one of the key factors in institutionalization. That is why, in the early decades of democratic politics, merger and party fragmentation are more likely than later on. This is as true of two-party systems as of other types of competitive system. Our main concern here, though, is with circumstances in which parties, and the actors in them, do have something to lose from possible merger, and also from a subsequent split in the merged party.

In the remainder of this section the discussion centres on four attempts at merger in party systems where the major parties were more established than they had been in Trinidad in the mid-1980s. They range from a case in which there were too many possible costs resulting from merger to one where, in some sense, merger was an obvious solution. Two conclusions will become evident. One is that, even when there are strong incentives to merge, it can still take a long time before it happens. The other conclusion is the crucial role that can be played by specific actors within a party either in blocking merger, or in acting as

entrepreneurs who help to facilitate it—because they can see how such a merger helps their own interests in the party. The four examples discussed are: (a) the failed Liberal–Reform merger in New Zealand in the 1920s, (b) the controversial formation of the Conservative Party of Canada in 2003, (c) the merger in Minnesota of the Farmer–Labor Party and the Democratic Party in 1944, and (d) the creation of the Partido Unidad Social Cristiana in Costa Rica in 1983.

New Zealand, 1920s

The wholly unsuccessful case occurred in New Zealand in the mid-1920s. Although the Liberal party (later called the United party) and the Reform party did merge, in 1935, this was the ‘unbargained’ merger discussed in section 6.2. The proposal to create a ‘bargained’ merger a decade earlier came to nothing because the distributional effects of a merger would have clearly disadvantaged key elements in the parties, especially in the Reform party. Consequently, there was little basis for inter-party bargaining, and the Liberal initiative was not pursued.

In 1925 the Liberal leader Thomas Wilford initiated discussions with the Reform party about the possibility of fusing the two parties. In some respects the case for the Liberals doing this was clear cut. The party had been out of government since 1912, and had not come close to winning any of the three general elections since then. In the meantime the Labour party had moved from being a third party that took less than 10 per cent of the vote to one that took just under 24 per cent of the total vote in the 1919 and 1922 elections. Despite this, though, the Liberals remained the second largest party, both with respect to votes and parliamentary seats won. However, the longer term concern for Wilford was that the Liberals would become the third party in the system if politics became polarized. On the death of the long-serving Reform leader, William Massey, and faced with what he saw as the growing challenge from a more radical party on the left, Wilford made his move.

Given both that his party was still the second largest and also that there were policy differences between Liberals and Reform, merger was not a matter on which Liberals would unite. Moreover, even if it were palatable to most Liberals, the Reform party would presumably have to make a significant number of concessions to them in any bargaining process. But why should they? Like the ‘Conservative party’ in the hypothetical examples discussed in Chapter 5, hitherto Reform had benefited from a divided opposition. Merger with a party as large as the Liberals would result in parliamentary candidacies and cabinet posts being divided between two parties, rather than being the monopoly of just one. While a party that faced the prospect of long-term exclusion from office might have been tempted to negotiate, there was no incentive for Reform to do so, and they did not. Indeed in the general election that followed shortly afterwards, Reform retained

power, and with a much increased number of seats. They did not need a coalition with the Liberals.

At the 1928 general election, the prospects for a bargained merger diminished further. The Liberals, having renamed themselves the United Party, were now associated with a radical public spending programme. The party had not actually agreed to it, but it was constantly highlighted by its opponents, following the United leader's announcement of the programme, and the party rebounded at the election. Its vote share increased to nearly 30 per cent of the total which, although still less than Reform's, was sufficient to give it the same number of parliamentary seats. With the parliamentary backing of Labour it was United that formed the next government. While merger would still have increased their (combined) chances of being in government, at the expense of Labour, the problems of dividing the spoils—both those of public office and policies—were now much greater. Permanent fusion appealed to no one, and was not pursued.¹⁶

The contrast between Wilford and the earlier leader of the Liberal Party, Richard Seddon, is striking. Nagel's analysis of Seddon's extended period as Prime Minister, and his use of various heresthetic devices to keep a party coalition together in spite of forces tending to fragment it, indicates how leadership may be used to keep a party in power.¹⁷ However, what made that possible was Seddon having won an election in the first place. Wilford could not engineer a merger with Reform because of his party's relatively weak situation. Gordon Coates might have been in a position to have initiated a merger with the Liberals in 1926—using the issue of growing Labour strength to build a new coalition drawn from Liberals and Reform to replace the one that had kept Massey in power for so long. To do so would have involved utilizing precisely the skills Seddon had in organizing politics so that policies were framed such that potential conflict over them was converted into support for him. In 1926 that would have meant devising ways of proposing party merger by which the inherent conflict of interest involved in a Liberal–Reform fusion would be minimized (within both Liberal and Reform parties), so that Coates was left with a new majority capable of defeating Labour over the course of several elections. However, Coates was the kind of cautious politician that Seddon was not, and it was events, rather than leadership, that would determine the merger between the two parties the following decade.

Canada, 2003

The conditions in which the merger producing the Conservative Party of Canada in 2003 occurred were more favourable than those evident in New Zealand eight decades earlier. Nevertheless, although a 'bargained' merger did result in Canada, there were major splits in one of the participating parties in the process. Moreover, its medium-term effects—with respect to creating enhanced two-partism at the electoral level of politics—can scarcely be said to have been dramatic. It illuminates a point made earlier that a merged party might, certainly initially, be less

than the sum of the two parties composing it. Between 1940 and 1988 the median share of the vote taken jointly by the two largest parties at general elections was 76.9 per cent, with these two parties receiving 78 per cent (in 1984) and 74.9 per cent (in 1988) in the two elections immediately preceding the 'earthquake election' of 1993. After the formation of the Conservative Party of Canada the two largest parties took a mere 66.3 per cent (in 2004) and 66.5 per cent (in 2006)—which was actually even less than, between them, the Liberals and the parties that merged in 2003 had taken in 1993 (76 per cent), 1997 (76 per cent), or 2000 (79 per cent). Why then did merger happen at all?

The key to understanding this case is relatively simple. The Canadian parties had insufficient control over local constituencies to be able to impose nationally agreed electoral alliances. Such alliances would have been an attractive alternative to merger, because of the flexibility they would have provided for parties with electoral strengths in different regions of the country, but the non-viability of this alternative meant that the parties were faced with a choice just between the status quo and merger.

The origins of the merger lay in the collapse of the Progressive Conservative Party (PC) in 1993, which was discussed in Chapter 3, and which left a previously majority government with just two parliamentary seats and a 16 per cent share of the total vote (compared with 42 per cent in 1988). As noted earlier, large electoral swings have been frequent in Canada, and previously major parties had recovered from them, but this vote collapse coincided with the emergence of two new parties: the conservative Reform party, based largely in the western provinces and which took 19 per cent of the vote in 1993, and the Bloc Québécois. Faced with two new opponents in the different parts of its erstwhile heartland, it was much more difficult for the PC to recapture their earlier vote in the way that Canadian parties had rebounded earlier. Although their vote share rose slightly in 1997 (to 19 per cent), it fell dramatically again in 2000 (to 12 per cent). Obviously, the case for some form of link between the two conservative parties was reinforced by their distinctive regional bases. (This was a factor that would have made an electoral alliance especially attractive, had it been available as a strategy to them.) In the small Atlantic provinces the PC vote remained close to major party strength, while the Reform vote there was tiny.¹⁸ In the western provinces the Reform vote was much larger than the PC's, while in the large provinces of Ontario and Quebec the balance between the parties was more even. Except in these last two provinces, coalition of some form might seem not only to have obvious advantages, but to lack one obvious disadvantage normally associated with party alliances; at the regional level the parties were not similarly sized and hence prone to disagreement on the terms of merger. However, this was far from being a merger that was uncontroversial.

Although it had embraced a broad range of conservative ideas in recent years, there remained within the PC a strong moderate wing that was unconvinced either by the more radical neo-conservative ideas of the Reform party (now called

the Conservative Alliance) or of the appeal of those ideas to many traditional PC voters. Reform's policies and ideas were much closer to those of modern American Republicanism than theirs were. The fear was that the relatively weak bargaining position of the PC in any merger discussions would lead to the creation of a party that was simply too conservative to challenge the Liberals. The decline of the PC's vote again in 2000, and the fact that Reform's voting strength was more concentrated geographically than the PC's, so that they could elect more MPs than the PC, meant that it was their politicians who would likely set the main terms for a fused party. However, this was a fear more evident among the PC's political elite than among party activists; in December 2003 more than 90 per cent of delegates to a series of regional conventions were to vote in favour of the proposed merger. Yet earlier that year one of the contenders for the PC leadership (David Orchard) had dropped out of the contest having obtained a written agreement from the subsequent leader (Peter MacKay) excluding the possibility of any merger. That agreement was the key element in what turned out to be a later, and unsuccessful, effort to block the merger in the courts. Moreover, merger produced an exit of ex-PC politicians. Four MPs decided not to join the new party, as did the party's retiring president. In addition, a former Conservative Alliance MP left the party for the Liberals, and three Senators decided to continue sitting as PC members, rather than join the new party's caucus.

That merger will not necessarily result in a political party which is at least as large as its former components is well revealed by this case. Certainly, the new party was able to form a minority government in 2006—the first time a non-Liberal government had been in office since 1993. But its vote share since merger suggested that minority government status might be the most that it could achieve—unlike the old PC. In 2006 it obtained 36.3 per cent of the vote while in the 2004 election it had reached 29.6 per cent; by contrast, the combined vote of the two conservative parties in the three preceding elections had been slightly larger overall—37.7 per cent in 2000, 38 per cent in 1997, and even 35 per cent in the disastrous PC year of 1993. The merger suited the Conservative Alliance much better than it did their partners. They consolidated their new position as the second largest party in Canadian federal politics at relatively little cost, gaining a base outside the western provinces for the first time. Their longer term problem was whether the compromises required of a minority government would undermine their ability to mobilize neo-conservative voters in the west in the future.

As in the New Zealand case, party merger would impose costs on at least one party—in this case mainly on the PC and mainly in relation to the kind of policy agenda a merged party was likely to pursue in the future. The weaker party (PC) was in no position to shape the terms of merger, though in this case while merger split the party most of its members entered the newly fused party. Given the clear advantages to the Conservative Alliance in acquiring a political base in the eastern part of the country, it was Peter MacKay rather than the leaders of the Alliance who were in a position to make a difference. The earlier deal

with Orchard had thrown the leadership of the PC to MacKay, when it would likely have fallen to a third candidate, but MacKay's subsequent abandoning of that deal and of the so-called 'Red Tories' in the party, enabled a new party alignment to be constructed. Agency mattered here to the eventual outcome, with MacKay's strategy making possible an outcome that might not otherwise have been possible. However, whether the initially smaller coalition that has resulted from the merger does work to the benefit of the Conservatives in the longer term remains a disputable matter.

Minnesota, 1943–1944

A rather more successful case of bargained merger than that of the CP, and one in which agency was certainly crucial, was the formation of the Democratic Farmer-Labor party (DFL) in Minnesota. It was a merger of the Democrats and the Farmer-Labor parties in the state, and it came into effect in the spring of 1944. Even then the main electoral benefits for the merged party were not to be evident for a decade afterwards, although, unlike the Canadian case, the merged party was larger than its predecessors. Furthermore, in spite of circumstances that might initially have seemed far more favourable to merger than in either the New Zealand or the Canadian cases, it was still not that easy to forge the alliance, with Sundquist claiming that it involved 'negotiations that were said to require 250 meetings'.¹⁹ Indeed, had negotiations been delayed, merger might never have occurred, and its conclusion depended heavily on the commitment of one actor who could see how benefits could accrue to himself. Finally, it is a case that exposes the need for permanent merger to be seen to be providing more tangible benefits than could looser, coalitional, arrangements, if it is to be concluded at all.

Minnesota had leaned heavily to the Republicans in the so-called Gilded Age, and it leant more heavily still to that party after the national political upheavals of the first half of the 1890s. Party-building was made yet more difficult for the Democrats after 1913 when the state introduced non-partisan elections not just for municipal and other local elections, a reform evident in many western states in the Progressive era, but also, uniquely at the time, for the state legislature. One effect of this reform was to weaken the role played by party in channelling individual political ambition upwards from the local to the national level of politics.²⁰ Despite the relative autonomy candidates tended to enjoy vis-à-vis their parties in the United States, by comparison with other countries, in the early twentieth century the role of party was still crucial.²¹ This was because it was only through the party connection that individuals could develop their own careers. Formally non-partisan electoral rules did not mean that party activists and leaders were absent from these elections—far from it. However, it tended to make for much looser links between parties and candidates at lower levels of office; that in turn both affected the strength of party organization and also reduced the incentives for lower level officeholders to contribute to party-building. This latter was especially

problematic for a party in the situation that the Minnesota Democrats were in, being uncompetitive in the relatively few partisan offices that there were.

Into this gap between the dominant Republicans and the weak Democrats had come the Farmer-Labor party in the second decade of the twentieth century. The party originated in the Nonpartisan League formed initially in North Dakota in 1915. By the early 1920s it switched from being an electoral pressure group to running candidates under the label of the Farmer-Labor party. Its first victories were in 1922, but its greatest success came with the onset of the Great Depression, and it controlled the state governorship in 1930–8. The death of Governor Floyd B. Olson in 1936 began a period of decline for the party, which exposed both deep ideological divisions within Farmer-Labor and the limitations of its loose organizational structure. By 1938 they were facing a Republican party with a moderate gubernatorial candidate whose agenda was geared to attracting centrist voter support from Farmer-Labor. The result was electoral defeat that year for Farmer-Labor. As Gieske observes:

For Minnesota Farmer-Laborism the 1938 election was no mere setback but a disaster of yet undetermined dimension. Almost immediately it led to a severe cut in association membership, the ending of state employee 'contributions', and the stopping of recruitment efforts. Two general attitudes emerged. The left-wing Farmer Laborites, the movement's socialists of one kind or another, argued that the party should continue and resist merger with or absorption by the Democratic party. By contrast, increasing numbers of right-wingers and moderates now tended to explore ways of uniting with Democrats or of defecting to the Republican party.²²

For the Farmer-Labor left wing, and even after the New Deal had transformed the Democratic party's agenda nationally, the Democrats were too right wing. After all, as events in the 1940s were to reveal, it was a political left that contained Communists; it was not just social democrats and liberals who were in Farmer-Labor.²³

Nor was the Democratic party's conservatism on policy the only obstacle on the Farmer-Labor side to merger. The small Democratic party was also seen as too Catholic and too Irish—in fact, the classic image of early twentieth-century Democratic parties—in a state in which those of northern European, and especially Scandinavian, origin were the dominant voting groups. Despite this, Gieske has argued that, over the next few years, internal divisions in the Farmer-Labor party declined, and this made it far more likely that the party as a whole would now accept merger. The German invasion of the Soviet Union weakened one ideological barrier to union, and the military progress in 1942 by both Russia and the western Allies against the common Nazi enemy weakened it still further. This leads Gieske to argue that: 'By 1943 the important political question in Minnesota was less whether Farmer-Laborism would merge and more a matter of which Farmer-Labor faction would be in a position to negotiate with Democrats and receive some of the spoils of party and office'.²⁴ He goes on to

claim that by 1943–4 merger was bound to happen ‘because of an accumulation of events, defections and inducements to unify which were increasingly evident over the previous two years and which actually went back to 1938’.²⁵

The objection to the Gieske argument is that it leaves completely out of account the Democrats and the incentives they faced; unless a bargained merger was the best option for them, it would not occur. Bargains, like tangos, require two partners. Of course, for the Democrats there were some factors making cooperation with Farmer-Labor in the 1940s less problematic than it might otherwise have been in the 1920s. At the presidential level the New Deal had helped to shift Minnesota from being a heavily Republican state to being a competitive one; this was not surprising, given that the form of governmental interventionism evident in the New Deal was merely a milder version of the interventionism that had proved electorally successful for Farmer-Labor in the early 1930s. Moreover, given the relative absence of partisan public offices in the state, and also Farmer-Labor’s recent lack of success for those offices that were partisan, the kind of bargaining that might have proved difficult in other states would be less so in Minnesota. There were fewer potential ‘veto players’ of that kind there. These considerations provided good reasons for pursuing a policy of electoral cooperation with Farmer-Labor, on an election-by-election basis, but there were a number of factors that worked against any bargained merger as the preferred Democratic option.

One argument against this form of merger is that, if the loosely structured Farmer-Labor party were in long-term decline, the Democrats might eventually be able to absorb it on entirely their own terms. That is, the Democrats might have been able to enjoy later the kind of unbargained merger that was to occur in the subsequent decade with the Non-Partisan League in North Dakota; the ‘carcass’ of Farmer-Labor would fall into their hands eventually. In the meantime Democrats could benefit from short-term alliances when those would prove fruitful. Even though Minnesota was a state that had so-called anti-fusion laws, all these did was prevent the same candidate from appearing on the ballot more than once—that is, as the candidate of two different parties. It did not prevent, and could not prevent, pre-election agreements at the sub-presidential level in which one party agreed not to support the nomination of a candidate using its party label—to allow a free-run against the Republicans by the other one. Such agreements were possible, and would have given the Democrats considerable flexibility in party-building from such a low base of support. Furthermore, the Democrats did not have to think about a long-term agreement at the presidential level; as a party active in only one state, Farmer-Labor had never wasted its resources in running a presidential candidate of its own, and so was not a competitor there.

A second argument is that the Democrats would not have had to deal with the problem of incorporating into its own structures a left-wing faction that was as radical as Farmer-Labor’s was. Indeed, this is an important reason for believing that had attempts at merger been delayed until 1946–7, it would never have

happened in that form. By then anti-communism was a major issue nationally, and the Democrats could not have afforded to be seen attempting to get into bed with a party that contained Communists. As it was, after the formation of the DFL there was a major conflict within it to remove those suspected of being Communists.

Thirdly, although merger might improve indirectly the prospects for the Democrats nationally, through creating a larger organization in the state, there was no evidence, given voter support for moderate Republicanism in Minnesota, that much additional electoral success would ensue immediately. Indeed, the DFL was not to win the governorship until a decade after merger. Had the prospects for immediate success been much better, then the consequent benefits—such as party-building—could have made a bargained merger a relatively more attractive option. However, if the gains from merger were to be essentially long-term, as they proved to be given the Republican electoral strategy in Minnesota, then the Democratic party nationally had every reason for being cautious in how it approached cooperation with Farmer-Labor.

While there might be some advantages from merger to the Democratic party nationally, in that organizational expansion would help indirectly to keep the state competitive in presidential elections, that result might be achieved by other means. For the national party to come under pressure to agree to merger, therefore, there had to be particular advantages to Democrats in the state. Here the role played by non-partisan elections worked against it. There was not a set of Democratic officeholders—even at the level of the state legislature—whose political career ambitions were being frustrated by the Democrats being an uncompetitive third party in Minnesota. Rather like Republicans in the South in the same era, Democrats in Minnesota benefited from federal patronage when their party controlled the White House, and this kept the party minimally in business, but there was no large group in the party who had any particular incentive to build up a party structure that could be more effective in elections within the state. Ambitious candidates would have been the main force for that elsewhere in the United States, and would have likely acted as agents for any possible mergers, but in Minnesota they were largely absent.

That is why, in the event and contrary to Gieske's claim that merger was inevitable, one individual (Hubert Humphrey) was to play such a crucial role in its realization. Humphrey had been a political unknown, but from a strong Democratic family, so that having a political career as a moderate Republican was a less attractive option for him than it might have been for others. In 1942 he declined to run for a congressional seat because he knew that, with a Farmer-Labor candidate also in the field, he could not win.²⁶ However, in the spring of 1943 he ran a strong (non-partisan) campaign, with broad liberal backing, against the incumbent mayor of Minneapolis—and came close to winning. Here was a Democrat who understood the medium-term advantage of merger for building his own political career. It would enhance his chances of a successful candidacy for partisan public office, and in the long term he would not then be in danger of

becoming an incumbent at the mercy of Farmer-Labor's continuing approval; in a temporary party coalition withdrawal of support was always possible. Consequently, Humphrey went to Washington to lobby for national party support for merger. Family connections gave him access that others in his situation might not have had. By the late summer Farmer-Labor was engaged in discussions with Minnesota Democrats as a result of this, and by the autumn negotiations began. They were concluded successfully in the spring of 1944. As suggested earlier, if Humphrey had been spurred into action just two or three years later by a failed mayoral campaign, it is probable that the Democrats nationally could not have taken a chance on merger because of pending controversy over Communist influence in the party. The formation of the DFL was not a bargained merger that was 'destined' to happen, and it might well have not done so.

Costa Rica, 1983

Thus far the three cases discussed have exposed a number of factors that rendered merger controversial as a solution to the problems facing the respective parties. In New Zealand a possible merger foundered on the strength of the incentives not to bargain facing both parties nationally, and especially those confronting the governing Reform party. In Canada merger occurred but was highly controversial among some elite groups in the PC, who believed it would not advance the interests of their party; merger might well not have happened had an electoral alliance been a viable alternative or if MacKay had not decided to renege on his earlier intra-party deal. In Minnesota merger was feasible because it was in the interests of a particular type of Democratic politician, and because of the timing of the negotiations; in other circumstances negotiations over merger would probably have failed. All three cases expose the point that the distribution of political benefits matters, and that distributional factors—who is going to get what out of merger—complicate any drive to expand the base of a party. However, the Costa Rican case is different. Here, in the long term at least, there were a number of institutional factors limiting distributional conflicts, and favouring merger—which eventually did ensue. However, 'eventually' is an important qualification; even in conditions when there were strong incentives to merge, it took decades for this to come about. The role of agency in hindering the move towards merger is important. Consideration is given first to factors favouring merger over temporary coalitional arrangements.

Like the US, Costa Rica's presidential system uses a plurality voting formula rather than a majority formula.²⁷ The latter provides an incentive for short-term alliances between parties, which come into effect in any second round of balloting, but one consequence of that is greater fragmentation of the party vote in the first round of balloting. A plurality formula normally facilitates a greater concentration of the vote (compared with first-round contests under majority rules), because in a genuinely national election of this kind voters may be more likely to appreciate

the value of voting for a candidate who has a chance of winning. Costa Rica is one of four Latin American regimes in which the two leading parties regularly obtain at least 85 per cent of the popular vote—all of them employing some variety of plurality voting formula.²⁸ The country's presidential election rules, therefore, had always encouraged some form of coalescing among the parties in the direction of two-partism.

Secondly, from early on in the democratic era in Costa Rica, the conservative groupings had faced a larger, more cohesive, and better organized opponent, the Partido Liberacion Nacional (PLN), and with this type of competitor there was an additional incentive for conservatives to cooperate in presidential elections. Formed in 1951, the PLN contained the victorious side from the six-week civil war of 1948. Even though it did not win every presidential election, 'in the absence of a unified opposition, this party controlled the local political arena for almost thirty years (from the elections of 1953 to those in 1982)'.²⁹ To stand any chance of winning the presidential contests against the PLN, the conservatives had to agree in advance to electoral alliances, and these coalitions were a regular feature of elections before the founding of the PUSC in 1983. Indeed, the alliances had produced victory in three of the eight contests before merger (1958, 1966, and 1978).

Thirdly, the personalistic style of organization characteristic of the various conservative groupings in the pre-1983 era made it more difficult for them to translate presidential victories into simultaneous control of the Assembly as well. The use of proportional representation for Assembly elections meant that, to obtain any 'presidential coat-tails', a successful presidential campaign had to be complemented by strong organization at the local level. Otherwise potential voting strength in the Assembly would not be maximized. The more structured PLN was in a much better position than the conservatives to do this, and, in fact, it was not until their next presidential victory in 1990 that the conservatives first won a majority in the Assembly.

Fourthly, in Costa Rica controlling the Assembly is necessary for pursuing policy objectives, and the successes achieved by the conservatives in presidential elections pre-1983 generated only partial control over the policy agenda. The reason for this is similar to the need in the United States for a party to control both the Presidency and Congress: the relative weakness of the country's presidency. As Carey notes:

[the] rules endow Costa Rican presidents with some strengths in influencing partisan policy struggles, but in comparative perspective, the formal powers of Costa Rican presidents to control the actions of politicians within their parties and decisions in the Legislative Assembly are strictly limited. In short, Costa Rican institutions provide for a legislature that is largely independent of the president in debating and deciding on national policy.³⁰

Reinforcing this relative weakness of the presidential powers in Costa Rica was the structure of incentives facing politicians at the subpresidential level. Not only

can a serving president not seek re-election, but nor can members of the assembly; the latter's political futures are not linked to a serving president, but to their party's (or alliance's) candidate for the next presidential election.

When victorious, it was that candidate with whom the hopes of a member of the assembly lay in securing the kind of executive appointment that would help continue his or her political career. The effect of this was to disadvantage more loosely structured parties, because a serving president might have few links to his putative successors, and hence less chance of exercising leverage over those members of the assembly seeking to hitch his or her futures to theirs. Of course, even in a well-structured party, a president's leverage might not be that great if the administration were seen as failing. For example, a presidential candidate from the PLN can be nearly as critical of a serving PLN president as the PUSC opponent, because that will distance him or her from the administration. As Wilson notes, 'The party can announce, convincingly, that a new government from the same party will be significantly different.'³¹ Moreover, 'once elected, deputies do not need to exhibit high levels of party loyalty'.³² Nevertheless, Costa Rican presidents are not confronted by a highly fragmented legislature.³³ Party organization matters in running the country; tighter organizational structure does generally provide for greater opportunities for a president in influencing the assembly than do looser structures, and that was a major weakness for the conservatives before merger.

Unlike the three previous cases, in which the pressures for merger were either counterbalanced by other incentives that the relevant political actors faced, or were present in only particular conditions, here was a case in which merger seemed an obvious solution. The constituent parties had already entered electoral alliances with each other regularly and there were clear benefits to be enjoyed from continuing cooperation, but on a basis that would facilitate the construction of a more cohesive party organization. Why then did it take thirty years for merger to come about? First, there were personal rivalries that emanated from before the Civil War. The Costan Rican right was an alliance of two previously bitter opponents: 'the two parties (PRN and PUN) that had run against one another in the 1948 elections that sparked the civil war joined political forces following the founding of the PLN'.³⁴ Then again, the personalistic nature of these conservative parties and groupings meant that the pursuit of long-term party interests, which can at least play some role in highly structured parties, would usually be subsumed to the more immediate interests of the particular political leaders. The relative lack of institutionalization precluded the taking of decisions that were rational from the perspective of the institution itself. This was not so much a case of there being conflicting incentives—as in the other cases examined—as the absence of strong pressure to act. Over time the disadvantages and costs of not institutionalizing became increasingly apparent to politicians on the right. When that did occur, the merged party (PUSC) began to institutionalize: 'In contrast to previous electoral alliances, the PUSC has demonstrated the potential to become

a permanent, nationally organized party. It seems to have engaged in serious party outreach . . .³⁵ The result was what Yashar describes as a ‘more clearly defined two-party system’.³⁶ But despite the electoral incentives to do this, it had taken the relevant political actors a long time to bring this about.

Here is a case in which the interaction of agency and structure is evident in explaining why an ‘obvious’ solution collectively for the parties of the right failed to materialize over a long period. The pursuit of self-interest by successive leaders led to the perpetuation of an organizational form that was dysfunctional for the party as a whole, but which satisfied the immediate interests of those leaders. The electoral rules made it possible to solve the short-term problem of cooperation in presidential contests without embracing the need for tighter party structure in order to counter the PLN. There was no equivalent in Costa Rica to a Seddon or a Humphrey who could propel all of the parties towards formal union. Each person who might potentially do this could be blocked by one of the other party leaders of the right. Seddon had realigned politics because as Prime Minister he had access to resources that enabled him to overcome opposition. Humphrey could be effective because there were no ‘barons’ to check him, even though the bargaining required was complex. In Costa Rica, the balance of power on the right prevented the kind of agency seen in these other two cases.

6.5. WHY COALITIONS WITH OTHER PARTIES ARE DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE

The imperative of the need ‘to win’ in a two-party system should provide a strong incentive for a major party to ally with, or permanently take over, any third or minor parties. This is what might be expected to be at the very heart of party management of a competitive environment. However, the evidence shows that in many two-party regimes fusion has not occurred, and that smaller parties survived for decades; a list of them would include the Liberals (now Liberal Democrats) in Britain, Social Credit in New Zealand, the New Democrats and Social Credit nationally in Canada, and in the Canadian provinces a number of other parties in addition. It has been seen in this chapter and the previous one that the process of forming some kind of coalition can be complex, and difficult to achieve. Of the four types of alliance, one (permanent coalitions without party merger) is not appropriate to the institutional arrangements in which two-party systems typically operate. A second type (‘unbargained’ merger) does occur, but in circumstances in which one or both of the parties has been sufficiently weakened that there are few viable alternatives to merger. As a type of coalition, therefore, this is not especially interesting in explaining how major parties might try to increase their

size, although, in practice, a number of cases of mergers in the past have been ones in which the need for bargaining was limited. Temporary electoral coalitions offer considerable advantages to the participants with respect to flexibility, but require a relationship between central and local party units that is not present in all parties. Moreover, the growing nationalization of politics makes it less possible for parties to conclude one kind of electoral alliance in one locality but adopt a different electoral strategy in another. Finally, 'bargained' merger does occur, but even in favourable circumstances it may take years to implement.

There appears to be a paradox here. 'Winning' is so important in two-party systems, and yet one obvious strategy for seemingly increasing the chances of electoral victory, namely some kind of coalition with smaller parties, is not that common. Why not?

The factors inhibiting the formation of coalitions can be grouped into six main categories. The first is the value of the coalition to each of the parties, for which there is no standard basis of measurement. Has a small party that makes a winning coalition possible contributed just as much as its larger partner, or should the benefits it receives be proportional to the share of the vote (or legislative seats) that it adds to those of its partner? This is a matter on which, even with perfect information, those negotiating a deal may fail to agree, and they may fail thereby to create the coalition. Business firms operating under similar conditions during a prospective takeover do not face this problem. What the smaller firm adds by way of profit, or market share, or propensity to innovate by way of new products can be established; its owners cannot claim to be the equal of the larger one because there is no equivalent to 'winning'. The merged firm in a duopoly does not, by virtue of being larger than an unmerged rival, deprive it of profit, reduce its market share to zero, and so on. The winner-take-all feature of two-party competition makes it more difficult for those negotiating an alliance to agree on the value each party brings to it, and that inhibits the formation of alliances. 'Winning' also makes it unlikely that a coalition will form if the major party in the prospective alliance is likely to win without it. This too has no counterpart with business firms, for whom merely being bigger than its rival at any given time is an improbable objective.

A second set of factors have to do with imperfect information, the trade-off between the short and the long term, uncertainty, risk, and the fact that individual actors may not always behave rationally. Some form of coalition arrangement now might increase the chances of immediate victory, but leave a party less able to set the terms of an agreement in the future—for example, if the two parties have formed a government that becomes unpopular and then loses heavily. A hitherto temporary alliance might become permanent, or, within an already merged party, the defeat may weaken relatively the position of those originating from one of the parties. Another consideration is that lack of information may make it unclear how easy it would be to structure and manage a fused party of some kind, especially if the two partners have had very different kinds of structure previously. Uncertainty

about future developments and their impact on the prospective partners is one kind of problem facing them. But another is that those representing different parties in negotiations may have different attitudes to risk, and this too could inhibit the construction of a successful deal. In general, though, and unlike the first set of factors, this second set comprises ones that do have counterparts in the economic world. Not all mergers work to the benefit of those merging, making for a larger and more profitable business—a classic example being the problems that followed the much heralded merger between Time-Warner and AOL.

The third set of factors has to do with the connection between what different voters are offered, whereas in economic markets there are rarely such links. When Ford (and later Tata) took over ownership of Jaguar cars this did not affect the quality of cars a primarily mass car manufacturer could offer in a specialist car market, nor did the latter detract from the firm's ability to sell cars cheaply in its mass market. The two aspects of the business could be separated. However, in incorporating a smaller party, a major party is either going to make no concessions to the voters for the latter, or might make concessions that alienate some of its own supporters. Parties in a temporary electoral alliance and merged parties may end up obtaining fewer votes in total than they might have been able to achieve in the absence of any alliance. This link between the 'product' being offered to different sets of 'customers' is not something that inhibits business mergers: the snob value of owning a Ferrari would not be diminished by ownership of the firm being acquired by Hyundai. For merged parties, however, it may be difficult to reassure all voters for the previously independent parties that their interests will be just as well catered for under the new arrangements.

Fourthly, in various ways, the behaviour of others actors, especially the second major party, affects possible interactions between a major party and a minor one. Resources to keep a minor party in business on its own, and to siphon votes from its main rival, may be provided as a way of preventing cooperation between the two (the Greenback and Prohibition parties being examples cited earlier). Again, a major party moving to the political centre-ground may weaken the incentive for two other parties to cooperate (a Republican strategy that complicated the incentives for a coalition between the Democrats and Farmer-Labor in Minnesota). Conditions in which inter-party cooperation might occur are not static, and actors outside the two parties for whom it is an option can alter the prospects for it occurring.

The fifth set of factors has to do with the point that parties are rarely unitary actors, and decisive action cannot usually be taken by just one group within the party; the distribution within the parties of benefits and costs from a putative alliance greatly complicates negotiations over alliances. Of course, firms too have to worry about the reaction of institutional shareholders and trade unions to a merger, but in general the more unitary character of business means that

distributional aspects of mergers weigh less than they do with parties. Of course, not all distributional factors work against mergers. As was seen in the case of the DFL, merger may provide potential individual benefits that result in specific political actors attempting to drive a merger forward. But in many cases, a merged party may mean fewer career opportunities or a dilution of party ideology for those in the major party and that may prompt opposition to the deal. Furthermore, to the extent that it is the interests of individual actors in the party, rather than that of the party qua unitary actor, that influence coalition decisions then shorter term considerations may be given greater weight; careers in politics are bound by time.

Finally, those who could exercise leadership may be checked by others in their pursuit of a coalition, or those who occupy leadership positions may lack the skills, vision, or desire to increase the size of their party—even in a situation where a different person might be able to achieve fusion with another party. However, while agency does not always make the difference in whether parties combine with each other to increase their electoral competitiveness, it can do so, and how the party system operates can thereby be changed. There is a role for human agency.

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Concluding Remarks

Large parties in two-party systems shape electoral competition in the arenas in which they operate, though it can be their very presence, or the particular form that their structure has, rather than anything that their leadership is attempting to do, which is the crucial factor. This was evident in the discussion of party collapse and elimination in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. Having become established as one of the two largest parties in a system itself offers a party a high level of protection from being supplanted by a minor or new party. Even in the Canadian provinces, where conditions are less favourable to party management than in nation-states, party collapse occurs on average only about once every ninety years. Furthermore, in about half of all cases of catastrophic election defeats, that is, with at least 16 per cent of the entire electorate abandoning its support for a party, that party can then recover. The party's role as a focal arbiter helps it to avoid collapse. Levels of survival are greater still in nation-states where there are more resources available to parties that help generate loyalty even after massive temporary withdrawals of electoral support. The one set of circumstances that does make the management of competition far more difficult is when a party is fighting on two fronts—facing two new challengers to different parts of its electoral base, two new lines of social division that cross-cut its electoral support, or two sources of division within the party elite. In these conditions it may be impossible to devise strategies for dealing with the crises that do not, at the same time, offer opportunities for serious challenges by new or minor parties. Controlling its own destiny may then be unavailable to a party.

In managing conflict of such a severe kind that collapse is possible, the significance of the type of structure that a party has lies in two factors: complexity and required speed of response. The more layers of politics that a party embraces, the more difficult responding to crises becomes. Of course, being enmeshed in multiple layers of politics has obvious advantages for a party—for example, in obtaining resources and in candidate recruitment—but at the same time different interests residing at different levels of a party can complicate crisis management. There is a clear advantage in having quasi-autonomous or autonomous parties operating at these other levels, even at the price of formalizing intergovernmental negotiations. Moreover, highly integrated parties, operating at various levels of politics, may be forced to act more quickly—and possibly, therefore, with less information—in order to shore up their positions at subnational levels in the face

of forthcoming elections, and so on. This too can provide an incentive for long-term movement towards less integration, so that core activities can be managed more effectively under crisis. If this means less 'pure' forms of two-partism, then it can be argued that such forms have important advantages for major parties. That is why, at least in some of the longer established democracies 'purer' forms of two-partism are so rare. However, as has been seen, the trajectory of American parties has been very different. There, integration between the various levels of electoral politics has been maintained in one respect, with parties still providing a career ladder between all levels. Nevertheless, the preservation of a more 'pure' form of two-partism in the US was accompanied in the twentieth century by the complete dismantling of the instruments—multiple levels of patronage—that had provided originally for the strong linkage between the different levels.

Party structure also affects the likelihood of parties that have experienced collapse subsequently dissolving. The more the party had previously linked its participants to itself in their pursuit of their own interests, the more likely it is that it will experience exit to the point at which it is no longer viable. Paradoxically, therefore, the most highly developed parties, with a large number of participants whose own interests are directly linked to party success, are the most vulnerable: when it is evident that it cannot be a vehicle for the interests of its erstwhile participants it will be abandoned. The party that replaces it—as when the Republicans replaced the Whigs—may well resemble the antecedent party in a number of key respects, simply because so many adherents of the former party have now transferred to it. By contrast, parties may survive—and hence might have a future opportunity to revive—when those remaining in them are seeking benefits that do not depend on their party being a winning party. In addition, the behaviour of other actors shapes the possibility for survival. In the case of the British Liberals after 1929 the reversal of the trend towards completely nationalized party competition was a factor in its being able to retain parliamentary representation for over two decades. This, together with the presence of incentives in the party other than that of being on a 'winning team', meant that the Liberals were able to survive until, under changed conditions, they could emerge as a stronger, and locally based, third party.

If size means that managing potential collapse is a relatively easy task for a party, except when it is fighting on two fronts, attempting to expand the size of the party through alliances or mergers with other parties is feasible, but often cannot be realized in practice. How valuable an alliance is to each of the two potential partners may differ, preventing agreement on terms; attitudes to risk and perceptions of likely consequences may vary; optimal forms of agreement may be precluded by a party's lack of control over all of its own operations; deals may prompt exit from some party voters or members; and the distributional consequences of a deal may provoke opposition from within certain sectors of a party. Consequently actors both from the outside political environment and

from within the party itself can prevent mergers, and can do so in circumstances otherwise advantageous to some form of fused party. Consequently, even when there are strong incentives to be on a 'winning team', increasing the size of a team, so that it is more likely to win in the future, may be difficult or emerge only slowly—even when there are relatively few disadvantages to it. Here again, party structure matters—though in rather different ways than with the management of party collapse, and in ways that can conflict.

With more decentralized party structures there are fewer potential veto players to block temporary coalitions (or even permanent mergers) at the lower levels. This makes it easier for a party to pursue short-term electoral gain. However, local deals now may be inconsistent with longer term national strategies for the party. Furthermore, for fusion to occur there have to be some beneficiaries within a party and they have to be operating at a level at which they can make a difference; if those benefits are essentially medium to long term then, in a more decentralized party, the potential beneficiaries might be operating at too low a level in the party to be able to push through a deal. But leadership in this respect does not necessarily come from the formal apex of the party. This was one of the interesting aspects of the creation of the DFL in Minnesota. With a more centralized party the indirect opportunities merger presented for the national party might conceivably have been acted on by Democrats at that level; as it was, merger was largely the result of a lower level actor being willing to invest resources in promoting merger when others could have taken a different view about its value.

Nevertheless, for agency to bring about change in the size and scope of a party coalition, the relevant actors must be in positions in which they can act, have an incentive to do so, and have the skills necessary for exercising judgement. When there is potential opposition to coalition expansion an agent can act only if he or she is in a position to neutralize that opposition. Coates might have been able to do that in New Zealand in the 1920s, Wilford certainly could not. Typically the incentive to seek expansion is the likely extension of the party's tenure of in public office—as Nagel demonstrated in the case of the earlier New Zealand leader, Seddon, and as was the case with Franklin Roosevelt's reconstruction of the Democratic electoral coalition during the New Deal. Agents may not act, though, because they do not see that an existing majority coalition is vulnerable, and this is one aspect of judgement that is required for them to contemplate taking non-obvious decisions. Non-obvious decisions taken by agents in other parties also affect what happens to a particular party, and to the party system. In the 1920s Stanley Baldwin could have decided to continue treating the Liberals as the party's main opponents, its traditional mode of competition, in order to attract its weaker identifiers away from the Liberals. After all, his ultimate aim was to obtain those votes. Or he could have dealt with the Liberals and Labour as equally being his party's main opponents. Instead, by defining politics as being about the 'class-based party' versus the 'non-class-based party' he came close

to achieving his aim in relation to Liberal voters by largely ignoring them as an electoral threat. His actions furthered the demise of the Liberals, once he had abandoned his policy of reviving tariff reform as a core Conservative policy, following the debacle of the 1923 election; tackling the Liberals head-on had merely served to revive their electoral fortunes that year. The more effective means of removing the Liberals, and generating parliamentary majorities for the Conservatives, was to define politics in such a way as to make the Liberals irrelevant.

Fusing with other parties seems, at first, to be an obvious way in which its leaders can attempt to expand a party's basis of support, and there are instances, such as Hubert Humphrey's, of success in that process. But a number of the successful attempts at heresthetics by party leaders seeking to broaden their party's coalition, already mentioned, including those of Baldwin, Seddon, and Roosevelt, have involved other means.¹ Nor is this surprising, given the analysis presented in Chapter 5: formal bargaining, with just one objective in view, makes it more difficult for the leader to play different sources of opposition off against each other, thereby facilitating the move towards a non-obvious solution. Moreover, often leadership in pursuit of political majorities does not work, even when there is a leader in a position to attempt it. Lloyd George, for example, failed to create a centrist party after his personal triumph at the 1918 general election. Consequently, there is a striking similarity between the arguments I have presented here and the conclusions I reached in *The Democratic Party Heads North, 1877–1962*. Both books have addressed the issue of how coalitions are formed, and the role that both party structures and the choices made by individual politicians play in shaping which coalitions are formed, and when. In the earlier book I was concerned exclusively with the construction of electoral coalitions, whilst here I have focused more on formal alliances and the merging of parties. However, a principal theme common to both works is just how difficult in practice it is for politicians to construct coalitions—and hence to shape the environment in which they must operate. At the end of the *The Democratic Party Heads North* I said:

The constraints on the [Democratic] party, many of them internal to the party were mainly those associated with *aggregating* different interests, rather than with its having insufficient interests with which to construct a national majority. In a heterogeneous society, coalition building within the context of a two-party system is not easy, and it should not be surprising that it should fail frequently and change in fundamental ways only slowly.²

Much of what I said there is relevant here. Acting in ways to create a majority for a party is not something that is, in some sense, automatic—determined by the pattern of particular political forces in the environment in which the party is operating. A party's leaders are not the equivalent of the subway drivers mentioned

at the beginning of Chapter 1: actors simply waiting for an emergency before they need to act, whilst most of what they do is circumscribed by factors beyond their control. Rather, what they have to do to make the party as competitive as possible involves complex interactions with those in and outside the party. They are indeed agents, not automatic responses to external stimuli, but they are agents for whom action is often so complex that little may happen—and, when it does, frequently it does so only slowly.

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Notes

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Mosei Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties* (New York: Macmillan, 1902); Roberto Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York: Free Press, 1915).
2. See e.g. Otto Kirchheimer, 'The Transformation of the Western European Party System', in Joseph LaPalombara and Myron Weiner (eds.), *Political Parties and Political Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966); Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair, 'Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy', *Party Politics*, 1 (1995), 5–28; Ruud Koole, 'Cadre, Catch-all or Cartel? A Rejoinder', *Party Politics*, 2 (1996), 507–23.
3. By some authors, however, the term 'one-party system' has been given a different, and quite comprehensible, meaning: it is a *political* system that contains only one party.
4. For example, Donald J. Ratcliffe argues that, despite the high level of partisanship in the Ohio electorate in 1802–4 this was not party system because one party, the Federalists, did not provide an effective opposition: *Party Spirit in a Frontier Republic: Democratic Politics in Ohio, 1793–1821* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 85.
5. The exclusion from any categorization of parties of those 'parties' that are not active in elections does not seem to me to be warranted. For that reason this is one aspect of Sartori's famous analysis of party systems that is unconvincing: Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems*, reissued edn. (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2005), 56–7.
6. The distinction between the 'electoral party system' and the 'legislative or parliamentary party system' is made e.g. by Luciano Bardi and Peter Mair, 'The Parameters of Party Systems', *Party Politics*, 14 (2008), 158.
7. For instance, Oregon has five separately directly elected state officials in addition to the state governor.
8. George Tsebelis, 'Decision Making in Political Systems: Veto Players in Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, Multicameralism and Multipartism', *British Journal of Political Science*, 25 (1995), 289–325.
9. However, this is not to deny that there are some differences in party behaviour when there are only two parties and when a small third party is present; the presence of such a party can alter the behaviour of the major parties in the electoral market, so that where they position themselves is different than it would be were there just two parties; this point is argued in James Adams and Samuel Merrill III, 'Why Small, Centrist Parties Motivate Policy Divergence by Major Parties', *American Political Science Review*, 100 (2006), 403–17.
10. Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty Six Countries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).
11. The list of two-party systems (both parliamentary (9) and presidential (2)) differs only slightly from one what could be derived from Lijphart's approach to two-partism, so

that, for the purposes of the analysis here, not much actually hinges on the particular definition of two-partism being deployed. For example, were we to define two-partism as involving the mean number of 'effective parliamentary parties' being in the range 1.5 to 2.5, and with the highest number of such parties never being above 3.00, there would be only two differences between the two lists. Costa Rica, with its single-party government, but more complex party system in the Assembly, would fail to make the Lijphart-derived list, whilst Australia (with its multi-party conservative governments) would. In Australia the rise of a third party movement (later called the National party) resulted in a switch to the use of the Alternative Vote in 1918; this system meant that permanent merger between the movement and the Liberal party did not have to be attempted, whilst at the same time ensuring that the Labour party could not benefit from any loss of votes, mainly those of farmers, from the Liberals to the movement. The National party was able to preserve its independence, and could continue to contest any seat that it chose to—without risk of contributing to a Labour party victory. The National party is not a 'wing' of the Liberal party, but an entirely separate organization.

12. Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties* (London: Methuen, 1954), 223.
13. The other mechanism is the fusion of one party with another.
14. Duverger, *Political Parties*, 223.
15. *Ibid.*
16. On the nationalizing of politics see especially Daniele Caramani, *The Nationalization of Politics: The Formation of National Electorates and Party Systems in Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
17. Giovanni Sartori, *Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Enquiry into Structures, Incentives and Outcome* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1994), 37–8; emphasis in original.
18. Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*.
19. Bahamas, Barbados, Canada, Greece, Jamaica, Malta, New Zealand (pre-1996), Trinidad, and the United Kingdom. For the purposes of this discussion it is New Zealand before the introduction of the Additional Member electoral system that is being considered here.
20. To date the ruling party in Botswana has always won at least 67% of all seats and 52% of the total vote.
21. Greece is one of a small number of established democracies in which the electoral formula has been changed frequently; the latest version of its reinforced system, discussed here, has been used since 2004.
22. On the growing autonomy of candidates, see e.g. Martin P. Wattenberg, *The Rise of Candidate-Centered Politics: Presidential Elections of the 1980s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), and Alan Ware, *The Breakdown of Democratic Party Organization, 1940–1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), ch. 6.
23. However, one political scientist, Scott James, has argued recently, and convincingly, that the use of party discipline in the distribution of patronage emerged only after 1876; in the pre-Civil War period, he argues, patronage was used to distribute rewards within a party, on rotational basis, rather than to enhance a party's organizational efficiency by rewarding those who had performed party service. Nevertheless, although James can demonstrate that removal from public office clearly followed a different pattern

in the later era, in both eras the availability of patronage provided an incentive to be in a major party; patronage was not available to those outside a major party. For the purposes of the argument being developed here that is the crucial point. Scott C. James, 'Patronage Regimes and American Party Development from "The Age of Jackson" to the Progressive Era', *British Journal of Political Science*, 36 (2006), 39–60.

24. For an extended discussion of some of the points made here, see Alan Ware, *The American Direct Primary* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
25. I am not ignoring the presence of third parties in the US, but their key characteristic has been either their lack of permanence or their very small electoral support. Before the demise of the Whigs the most successful national campaign had been that of the Free Soil party which obtained more than 10% of the vote nationally, and more than 25% of the vote in four (northern) states. After the Civil War the most successful effort nationally was from the People's Party in 1892, which won 8.5% of the national vote and carried five states. A number of other parties had an impact on particular states: the candidate of the Workingman's Party in California obtained more than a quarter of the vote in the gubernatorial election of 1879, the Greenback party similarly had an impact in states like Michigan, while the Prohibitionists from time to time also disrupted the electoral duopoly. These parties had a number of features in common. (1) Most important, they were unable to sustain the kind of permanent organization that the major parties could. (In this respect they were also quite different from the post-1929 British Liberals.) Consequently, when their electoral fortunes dipped they were likely to go out of business. (2) They represented specific interests or causes that the activists who created them believed were being advanced insufficiently by either of the major parties. As an issue waned, or as one party moved towards the position of those activists, so the utility of a third-party effort declined. (3) They tended to draw the major parties into interacting with them. Whichever of the major parties was most threatened by electoral defections to a particular third party would try to find means of persuading it from organizing for an election campaign, and if that failed they might seek temporary fusion (see Ch. 6). The opposing major party had every reason to keep that third party in business, and would sometimes secretly fund it in order to do just that. (4) Generally these campaigns were more successful in the western states where party organizations had developed more recently and where they did not have the kind of autonomy vis-à-vis organized interests that their counterparts in the east had. In the first half of the 20th cent. there were two significant national third-party campaigns (in 1912 and 1924), but the conditions favouring local disruption of the American duopoly had now eroded. After the 1920s there were not new kinds of local and state-level interventions similar to those waged by the Greenbacks or the Prohibitionists half a century earlier. Increasingly, any third-party efforts were attempts to affect the outcomes of elections only to offices at the highest levels, and by the second half of the 20th cent. rarely involved expanding this kind of 'politics of protest' to other offices. One of the main reasons for the decline of parties of Greenback or People's Party type, parties that moved in and out of electoral politics, is that the peculiarly easy conditions for contesting an election then—the use of a party ballot, rather than an official ballot, for instance—were removed in the early 1890s.
26. John Gerring, 'Minor Parties in Plurality Voting Systems', *Party Politics*, 11(2005), 99.

27. I am grateful to Alan Renwick for drawing my attention to how Gary Cox had discussed the use of Schelling's concept in relation to political parties; see Gary W. Cox, *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 256. Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960).
28. Roger B. Myerson and Robert J. Weber, 'A Theory of Voting Equilibria', *American Political Science Review*, 87 (1993), 112.
29. Open discussion of a split in the Labour party was evident in late Sept. 1980, while the new party was launched six months later; Ivor Crewe and Anthony King, *SDP: The Birth, Life and Death of the Social Democratic Party* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 50.
30. Obviously, team versions of golf, such as is practised in the Ryder Cup, are not relevant in this discussion.
31. One example of a political scientist of an earlier generation making this assumption was Gabriel A. Almond, 'Comparative Political Systems', *Journal of Politics*, 18 (1956), 391–409.
32. See especially Peter Mair, 'Party Organizations: From Civil Society to the State', in Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair (eds.), *How Parties Organize: Change and Adaptation in Party Organizations in Western Democracies* (London: Sage, 1994), 1–22, and R. Kenneth Carty, 'Parties as Franchise Systems: The Stratarchical Organizational Imperative', *Party Politics*, 10 (2004), 5–24.
33. As Harmel and Janda point out, 'party change does not "just happen". In fact, decisions to change a party's organization, issue positions or strategy face a wall of resistance common to large organizations.' Robert Harmel and Kenneth Janda, 'An Integrated Theory of Party Goals and Party Change', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 6 (1994), 261.
34. Martín Sánchez Jankowski, *Islands in the Street: Gangs and American Urban Society* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1991), ch. 3.
35. Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).
36. See William H. Riker, *The Art of Political Manipulation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), and Iain McLean, 'Review Article: William H. Riker and the Invention of Heresthetic(s)', *British Journal of Political Science*, 32 (2002), 535–58.
37. But see Richard J. Samuels, *Machiavelli's Children: Leaders and their Legacies in Italy and Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).
38. See Jack H. Nagel, 'Populism, Heresthetics and Political Stability: Richard Seddon and the Art of Majority Rule', *British Journal of Political Science*, 32 (1993), 156; see also Andrew J. Taylor, 'Stanley Baldwin, Heresthetics and the Realignment of British Politics', *British Journal of Political Science*, 35 (2005), 429–64.
39. One study that does seek to study leadership in a theoretical framework is Andrew Sabl, *Ruling Passions: Public Offices and Democratic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). For a general study of leadership see Robert Elgie, *Political Leadership in Liberal Democracies* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993). One study that draws on political psychology and has been influential in other fields of politics is James David Barber, *Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House* (Englefield Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992).

Chapter 2: Why Major Parties Collapse

1. Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).
2. This is as true of parties that are attempting to shape public preferences as of those that are simply trying to aggregate them. Probably, the evidence needed to convince leaders that these preferences cannot be shaped in the way they intend may take longer to acquire than in preference-aggregating parties, but no party seeking public office persists with attempts to preference-shape that are failing. On preference-shaping as an alternative to the Downsian framework see Patrick Dunleavy, *Democracy, Bureaucracy and Public Choice* (London: Pearson, 1991). The idea of preference-shaping is closely linked to the phenomenon E. E. Schattschneider had earlier called ‘the definition of the alternatives’, see *The Semisovereign People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1960) and Alan Ware, *The Logic of Party Democracy* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 74–5. To the extent that defining the alternatives is a strategy of political leaders it is an aspect of Riker’s notion of heresthetics.
3. See Alan Ware, *The Democratic Party Heads North, 1877–1962* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ch. 7.
4. On the night of the 1997 British general election the political scientist Anthony King extended the range of these metaphors on BBC television by describing the pending result as akin to an asteroid hitting the earth.
5. David R. Mayhew, ‘Electoral Realignments’, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 3 (2000), 449–74, and his *Electoral Realignments: A Critique of an American Genre* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002).
6. Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 12.
7. C. E. S. Franks, *The Parliament of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 72.
8. Franks has argued that ‘only 20 per cent of Canadian MPs at most can reasonably feel assured they, and their party, will hold their seat in the next election, whereas nearly 80 per cent of British and US members can have this confidence’; *ibid.* 76.
9. However, when, under corporatist arrangements, these groups themselves have direct access to policy-makers the *incentive* to mobilize electorally may be reduced because the ‘potential benefits of running for political office’ are lower, compared with non-corporatist systems; Margit Tavits, ‘Party System Change: Testing a Model of New Party Entry’, *Party Politics*, 12 (2006), 115.
10. It is likely that one of the reasons for the absence of party collapse in the Atlantic provinces is linked to the smaller size of their legislatures. Four of the five smallest legislatures are in this region, and typically one-third of their members end up in a provincial cabinet compared with just one-fifth in the larger provinces. This reduces the problem, to be discussed shortly, of the limited resources available to provincial party leaders in generating an incentive for parliamentarians to remain in their party. On the movement of provincial parliamentarians into cabinets see Christopher Dunn, ‘Comparative Provincial Politics: A Review’, in Keith Brownsey and Michael Howlett (eds.), *The Provincial State in Canada: Politics in the Provinces and Territories* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2001), 452.

11. Gordon T. Stewart, *The Origins of Canadian Politics: A Comparative Approach* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986), 65–90, and Franks, *Parliament of Canada*, 22 and 72.
12. Ronald L. Watts, 'The American Constitution in Comparative Perspective: A Comparison of Federalism in the United States and Canada', *Journal of American History*, 74 (1987), 782.
13. While the smaller size of the provincial parliaments does reduce the number of potential 'claimants' facing a party leader this does not compensate for his or her much smaller 'reward base'. All provincial parliaments are less than half the size of the federal parliament, with eight of the ten being less than one-third of the size; Christopher Dunn, 'Premiers and Cabinets', in Dunn (ed.), *Provinces: Canadian Provincial Politics* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1996), 174.
14. On the United States, see e.g. Paul Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System, 1853–1892: Parties, Voters and Political Cultures* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1979) and Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1970), and Walter Dean Burnham and William N. Chambers (eds.), *The American Party Systems*, 2nd edn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). Among the works of major scholarship on these lines relating to the collapse of the Liberals and the rise of Labour is that of H. C. G. Matthew, R. I. McKibbin, and J. A. Kay, 'The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party', *English Historical Review*, 91 (1976), 723–52. See also Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910–24* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).
15. M. Stephen Weatherford, 'After the Critical Election: Presidential Leadership, Competition and the Consolidation of the New Deal Realignment', *British Journal of Political Science*, 32 (2002), 221–58.
16. William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852–1856* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 38.
17. Arguably the collapse of the Union Nationale in Quebec, and the rise of the Parti Québécois, has a realignment element to it.
18. See esp. Byron E. Shafer and Richard Johnson, *The End of Southern Exceptionalism: Class, Race and Partisan Change in the Postwar South* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006); they argue that it was economic change as much as race that drove electoral change in southern politics.
19. See Ware, *Democratic Party Heads North*, esp. ch. 5.
20. John Gerring, *Party Ideologies in America, 1828–1996* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 57.
21. Ware, *Democratic Party Heads North*, 12–13.
22. See Larry M. Bartels, 'Electoral Continuity and Change, 1868–1996', *Electoral Studies*, 17 (1998), 301–26, and Mayhew, *Electoral Realignments*.
23. In addition to some shift in the orientation of the Liberal party, together with the presence of a larger Labour party, this would probably have involved electoral reform.
24. These data refer to those in working-class occupations.
25. See esp. A. J. Taylor, 'Stanley Baldwin, Heresthetics and the Realignment of British Politics'. *British Journal of Political Science*, 35 (2005), 429–64.
26. Matthew Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party between the Wars* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 6.

27. Writing in the 1960s, what Peter G. J. Pulzer actually said was ‘Class is the basis of British politics; all else is embellishment and detail’: *Political Representation and Elections: Parties and Voting in Great Britain* (New York: Praeger, 1967), 98.

Chapter 3: Major Party Collapse and Conflict on Two Fronts

1. The NDP were not a significant force in either Alberta or Quebec.
2. On the quite separate issue of strategic coordination in electoral systems, but one that nonetheless helps to stimulate ideas about other forms of party coordination, see Gary W. Cox, *Making Votes Count* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
3. Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 767.
4. John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism and Politics in the Antebellum Republic*, ii (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 255.
5. The deepening of the Democratic split after 1856 was on strictly sectional lines, with the separation of the northern wing from the southern one, so that the party never faced the particular kind of problems in managing intra-party relations and party strategy that the Whigs had faced in 1853–5.
6. John H. Aldrich, *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 146–7.
7. On the Democratic party’s problem in the early 20th cent. see Alan Ware, *The Democratic Party Heads North* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. ch. 6.
8. In the two elections of 1910 Labour returned respectively 40 and 42 members, while the Irish Nationalists returned 82 and 84.
9. See e.g. Bernard Wasserstein, *Herbert Samuel: A Political Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 232–3.
10. As Dalton makes the point, ‘What is stunning about partisan dealignment is the commonality of trends across a wide variety of advanced industrial democracies.’ Russell J. Dalton, ‘The Decline of Party Identifications’, in Russell J. Dalton and Martin P. Wattenberg (eds.), *Parties without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 36.
11. In the first five years of that decade eight established democracies had elections in which there were massive shifts in support, by comparison with earlier elections in those countries; see Alan Ware, ‘The Party Systems of the Established Liberal Democracies in the 1990s: Is this a Decade of Transformation?’, *Government and Opposition*, 30 (1995), 312–13.
12. Deborah J. Yashar, ‘Civil War and Social Welfare: The Origins of Costa Rica’s Competitive Party System’, in Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully (eds.), *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 94.
13. They argue that, ‘Given that elections in the two components of mixed electoral systems are held simultaneously, it is reasonable to expect party strategies to be shaped by features of both tiers... It is quite natural to expect relevant actors to make, in each tier, decisions that are to some extent shaped by the entire electoral system. This interaction is what we mean by “contamination”... While much of the existing

- scholarship assumes that political actors compartmentalize the SMD and PR segments of the election, we find strong evidence for contamination.’ Federico Ferrara, Erik S. Herron, and Misa Nishikava, *Mixed Electoral Systems: Contamination and its Consequences* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 8–9.
14. R. Kenneth Carty, ‘Parties as Franchise Systems: The Stratarchical Organizational Imperative’, *Party Politics*, 10 (2004), 7–9.
 15. On this role played by factionalism in the Socialist party see Howard Machin, ‘Changing Patterns of Party Competition’, in Peter A. Hall, Jack Hayward, and Howard Machin (eds.), *Developments in French Politics* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), 37–8. Support for the Communists still came from their traditional core vote.
 16. At first, this failure to keep their voting coalitions together was manifested in voting abstentions, with the result that between 1981 and 1984 only 40% of voters voted consistently for parties of the right or the left, compared with 59% who did so between 1973 and 1978. Martin Schain, ‘Immigration and Changes in the French Party System’, *European Journal of Political Research*, 16 (1988), 610.

Chapter 4: Party Structures and Party Dissolution

1. Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties* (London: Methuen, 1954), 224–5; the ‘psychological effect’ and the ‘mechanical effect’ were the two means by which he believed two-partyism would be preserved under SMP.
2. In the final, fifty-ninth, constituency, that of the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Labour incumbent was unopposed by the major parties.
3. Of course, other interests and issue movements have moved in the opposite direction, by creating electoral wings that subsequently converted themselves into election-oriented parties—the British Labour party and the West German Greens are both examples of this.
4. Michael Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852–1856* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 38; see also Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the Whig Party* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
5. Joel H. Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838–1893* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991); John Gerring, *Party Ideologies in America, 1828–1996* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
6. That election did not end up in the House, of course, because Abraham Lincoln won a sufficiently large number of EC votes in the northern states as to produce a majority in the EC.
7. On small decision-making see e.g. Fred Hirsh, *Social Limits to Growth* (New York and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977).
8. For most of the 19th cent. the most attractive presidential candidates for a party were either leading politicians from large and competitive states or well-known ex-military personnel who would both attract support from potential voters and dilute factional disputes within the party.
9. ‘As in the colonial era, the general population continued to accept the social elites as the natural leaders of the community. Accorded, as before, an uncoerced deference from below, they were generally the men elected to office...’; Silbey, *American*

Political Nation, 14. The change from a hierarchical, and largely non-partisan system, of politics to a participatory system was not one of linear progress in the 1830s, though; see Ronald P. Formisano, 'Deferential-Participant Politics: The Early Republic's Political Culture', *American Political Science Review*, 68 (1974), 473–87.

10. See John H. Aldrich, *Why Parties?* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), esp. pp. 140–96.
11. On the significance of access to the ballot in hastening the Whig's demise see Holt, *Rise and Fall*, 772. There was still at this time a gap between the dominant republican ideology, which deplored political ambition, and the practice of politics in which individuals 'hustled' for position. On the rise of overt 'hustling' by candidates within their parties during the later part of the 19th cent., see John F. Reynolds, *The Demise of the Convention System, 1880–1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ch. 3.
12. SMP was far from being used universally at the state level in the US, though. Until the reapportionment revolution in the 1960s multi-member districts were still common; on this earlier use of systems other than SMP, see Maurice Klain, 'A New Look at the Constituencies: The Need for a Recount and a Reappraisal', *American Political Science Review*, 49 (1955), 1105–19.
13. For an interesting analysis of Lloyd George's failed attempt during this period to reconstruct the British political universe, see Gary W. Cox, *Making Votes Count* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), ch. 14.
14. Mervyn Jones, *A Radical Life: The Biography of Megan Lloyd George* (London: Hutchison, 1991), 45–6.
15. The Conservatives and Coalition Liberals were in government, while Sinn Fein did not take their seats.
16. Martin Pugh, 'Popular Conservatism in Britain: Continuity and Change, 1880–1987', *Journal of British Studies*, 27 (1988), 257.
17. See e.g. Ken Young, *Local Politics and the Rise of Party: The London Municipal Society and the Conservative Intervention in Local Elections, 1894–1963* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1975).
18. There were considerable variations overall from one general election to another in the number of uncontested constituencies between 1885 and 1910, indicating the relatively weak penetration of parties in the British political system, ranging from 10 in the January 1910 election to 165 in 1900. Eleven months after the first election in 1910, and in a contest that would produce an almost identical result, the number of uncontested constituencies rose again, to 95: parties could maximize their fielding of candidates only when a contest was likely to have a high profile nationally, because they were deficient in organizational resources in many parts of the country. On the end of uncontested elections, see Daniele Caramani, 'The End of Silent Elections: The Birth of Electoral Competition', *Party Politics*, 9 (2003), 411–43.
19. On how the leaders at the 'centre' tended to manage the British state by granting elites in the 'periphery' considerable autonomy see the work of the late Jim Bulpitt, and especially *Territory and Power in the United Kingdom: An Interpretation* (Manchester: MUP, 1983; republ., with a new Introduction by Peter John, Colchester: ECPR Press, 2008).
20. Young, *Local Politics*, 31.

21. Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 160.
22. This accounts for 90% of all congressional seats, while in the remaining 10% of seats it is unclear whether Democrats and Whigs did oppose each other at this round of congressional elections.
23. In fact, his legal career was such that Bowen was frequently absent from parliament; Peter Barberis, *Liberal Lion, Jo Grimond: A Political Life* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 133.
24. Wasserstein, *Herbert Samuel*, 306.
25. These data exclude university seats; the Welsh universities' seat was one of the party's twelve seats in the post-1945 Parliament.

Chapter 5: The Logic of Party Fusion

1. Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957); William H. Riker, *The Theory of Political Coalitions* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962).
2. However, the literature on this particular topic is large, and growing, esp. in its more recent applications to local government. The more important works on government formation include Abram de Swaan, *Coalition Theories and Cabinet Formation: A Study of Formal Theories of Coalition Formation applied to Nine European Parliaments* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1973); Michael Laver and Norman Schofield, *Multiparty Government: The Politics of Coalition in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Colin Mellors and Bert Pinjenburg (eds.), *Political Parties and Coalitions in European Local Government* (London: Routledge, 1989); Craig Volden and Clifford J. Carubba, 'The Formation of Oversized Coalitions in Parliamentary Democracies', *American Journal of Political Science*, 48 (2004), 521–37; Marc Debus, 'Office and Policy Payoffs in Coalition Governments', *Party Politics*, 14 (2008), 515–38.
3. Brian Barry, *Sociologists, Economists and Democracy* (London: Macmillan, 1970), and Patrick Dunleavy, *Democracy, Bureaucracy and Public Choice* (London: Pearson, 1991).
4. Computer experiments with multi-game PDGs do not seem to yield a uniquely best strategy, but what is clear is that continual defection is not optimal; see Andrew M. Colman, *Game Theory and its Applications*, 2nd edn. (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 144–9.
5. However, there is another outcome that could prevent the possibility of the Conservatives making a long-term net loss of voters to the Liberals, and that would be if environment-oriented citizens decided to pursue that interest through lobbying and other means, rather than either by organizing their own party (the Greens) or by operating as an interest group (or faction) through the likely more sympathetic party (the Liberals). While this is an outcome that more clearly has some advantages for the Liberals—by removing a potential electoral competitor—it also has the potential advantage for the Conservative party (and the corresponding disadvantage for the Liberals) of facilitating the gradual absorption of most environment-oriented Cattaneo citizens within the Liberal party; that becomes an advantage for the Conservatives should the activists originally from the Greens now make party management within the

Liberal party more difficult. Whether the Conservatives would want to pursue policies that would make it more likely that the environment would be removed directly from the electoral arena in this way would depend on how likely it thought the weakening of the environment as an explicitly electoral issue was; if it does not weaken, then any Liberal/Green alliance within the Liberal organization becomes more unstable, to the Conservatives' advantage.

6. One real-world model for the latter arrangement would be the election coalition between the Liberal and National parties in Australia.
7. Richard J. Samuels, *Machiavelli's Children* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 15.

Chapter 6: How Major Parties Form Electoral Coalitions with Other Parties

1. See Peter H. Argersinger, 'A Place on the Ballot: Fusion Politics and Antifusion Laws', *American Historical Review*, 85 (1980), 287–306.
2. See Alan Ware, *The Democratic Party Heads North, 1877–1962* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ch. 3.
3. Argersinger, 'A Place on the Ballot', 290, and R. D. Marcus, *Grand Old Party: Political Structure in the Gilded Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 89 and 148.
4. Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 200.
5. *Ibid.*, ch. 11.
6. Alun Wyburn-Powell, *Clement Davies: Liberal Leader* (London: Politico's, 2003), 207. Peter Hennessy argues that Davies was talked out of the agreement by his colleagues, *Having it So Good: Britain in the Fifties* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 191.
7. In the 1951 election campaign Churchill actually went so far as to share a public platform with his old friend and Liberal Violet Bonham-Carter (Asquith's daughter) who was the Liberal candidate involved in a straight fight with Labour at Colne Valley. Indeed behind the scenes, Churchill appears to have been active in preventing the Conservatives from selecting a candidate; Roy Jenkins cites Churchill writing to his wife, 'I have fixed it up all right for Violet in Colne Valley, but the voting of the Conservative Association (secret) was very close: 33–26.' *Churchill: A Biography* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2001), 839.
8. There is some disagreement as to what exactly Churchill might have wanted his party to offer. Wyburn-Powell claims that it was the introduction of the Alternative Vote, *Clement Davies*, 191–4; Hennessy argues that it was proportional representation, but only for urban constituencies, *Having it So Good*, 190.
9. On this last point see Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers and the American State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
10. Michael Bassett, *Coates of Kaipara* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1995), 170.
11. R. S. Milne, *Political Parties in New Zealand* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 46.
12. Bassett, *Coates of Kaipara*, 221 and 241.
13. Both the Conservative party and the Liberal Nationals did look after some of their National Labour allies, in spite of the latter's evident electoral weakness. MacDonald's son, Malcolm, himself a member of the government, lost his seat in the 1935 election,

but was propelled via a by-election into the seat at Ross and Cromarty that the Liberal Nationals had held in 1935. The incumbent was given a peerage, and neither the National Liberals nor the Conservatives chose an official candidate to oppose MacDonald.

14. Moreover, at the 1935 election they also benefited from the absence of opposition from Liberals, who were still hopeful that their party might be reunited, and who did not oppose their former colleagues.
15. There would also be no incentive to form such an alliance with a ‘reinforced’ electoral system where the largest party always had its seats topped up so as to give it a majority.
16. Labour’s support of the minority United government was no more than a short-term arrangement about governing; it was not seen as the basis for a subsequent electoral coalition between them.
17. Jack H. Nagel, ‘Populism, Heresthetics and Political Stability’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 32 (1993), 137–74.
18. The Reform party ran under the name of the Conservative Alliance in 2000.
19. James L. Sundquist, *The Dynamics of the Party System* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1973), 228.
20. Subsequently, Nebraska abolished its upper chamber and at the same time made elections to its only legislative chamber non-partisan.
21. On the replacement of the convention system of candidate selection by direct primaries and the impact this had on the role played by candidates see Alan Ware, *The American Direct Primary* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and John F. Reynolds, *The Demise of the American Convention System, 1880–1911* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
22. Millard L. Gieske, *Minnesota Farmer-Laborism: The Third Party Alternative* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 276.
23. John Earl Haynes, *Dubious Alliance: The Making of Minnesota’s DFL Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
24. Gieske, *Minnesota Farmer-Laborism*, 319.
25. *Ibid.* 325.
26. Carl Solberg, *Hubert Humphrey* (New York and London: Norton, 1984), 94.
27. In fact, the US does not employ a pure plurality voting system because it utilizes an Electoral College in which votes are allocated to states; it is possible, therefore, as in 1888 and 2000, that the candidate who obtains a plurality may still lose in the Electoral College. However, the important point is that the American formula is certainly not majoritarian.
28. Mark P. Jones, *Electoral Laws and the Survival of Presidential Democracies* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 94, table 6.3. In fact, Costa Rica has a modified plurality rule in which a candidate who wins a plurality and also at least 40% of the vote is deemed elected.
29. Fernando F. Sanchez, ‘The Twilight of a Predominant Party: Institutional Crisis of the Partido Liberacion Nacional in Costa Rica’, paper given at the European Consortium of Political Research Joint Workshops, Edinburgh, 2003, p. 4.
30. Jim Carey, ‘Strong Candidates for a Limited Office: Presidentialism and Political Parties in Costa Rica’, in Scott Mainwaring and Matthew Soberg Shugart (eds.), *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 199.

31. Bruce M. Wilson, 'Leftist Parties, Neoliberal Policies and Reelection Strategies: The Case of the PLN in Costa Rica', *Comparative Political Studies*, 32 (1999), 763.
32. *Ibid.* 764.
33. Carey, 'Strong Candidates', 204.
34. Deborah J. Yashar, 'Civil War and Social Welfare', in Mainwaring and Scully (eds.), *Building Democratic Institutions* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 88.
35. *Ibid.* 89.
36. *Ibid.* 83.

Chapter 7: Concluding Remarks

1. On Roosevelt's successful attempt to transform the coalition that had produced his victory in 1932, see Ware, *The Democratic Party Heads North*, ch. 4.
2. Ware, *The Democratic Party Heads North*, 261.

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