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Parties' Decentralization Caused By Nation Mistrust

Americans' distrust of political parties and government has contributed to making U. S. parties among the most decentralized in the world and has led to the replacement of party power by personality cult.

These are among the findings of a Northwestern University political scientist after a seven-year study of 154 political parties in 52 counties of major cultural-geographical regions.

Prof. Kenneth Janda, chairman of Northwestern's Department of Political Science, said the study focused on the coherence, involvement, degree of organization and centralization of power within parties. Each party was scored separately on a set of variables thought to be indicators of the characteristics being compared.

One of the conclusions Janda wrestles with is how "personality politics" has replaced party politics in America.

During Watergate, he noted, the talk was of personal loyalty to the president rather than to the Republican party of the nation. Claiming that the national party organization has very little power, he points out that it was not the Republican national chairman but the Republican congressional majority leaders who advised Nixon on his resignation.

The federal structure of our government makes states important political entities in their own right, he contended in the report. Parties are strongest on the local level and national party organizations are merely a collection of state organizations, Janda explained.

While European parties are concerned with defining policy, American parties are preoccupied with winning elections. Since the role of the party in Europe is a continuing one, coherence is essential, but this is not so in the U. S., the NU professor explained.

Also responsible for the lack of power in national party organizations is the "love-hate" relationship Americans have with political parties. They recognize the indispensability of parties to democratic government but are suspicious of par-

ties acting as private organizations in pursuit of the public interest, he said.

Legislative restrictions on the amount of money a central organization can spend to get its candidate elected guarantee the growth of groups like the Committee to Re-Elect the President which can provide funds needed to run an electronic campaign, Janda said.

Composed of non-party professionals, these groups are candidate organizations loyal to a single person. The tendency is to view the opposition as enemies rather than competitors and a breakdown of constraints on permissible campaign activities is likely, the professor said.

While American parties are neither centralized nor powerful, their long and relatively stable institutionalized existence has them. The party label has become all-important in light of traditional patterns of voting behavior and candidates fight for the right to wear it, he added.

He warned that if the ominous growth of personalized politics is to be retarded and control returned to more broadly based organizations of responsible professionals, national political parties must be strengthened and not reformed.

The professor wants to see control of resources put in the hands of national party organizations so that whoever wins a candidacy would have to negotiate with the party for his share.

Americans like to say they vote for the man and not the party, he added. They say they like independents who don't have to bargain with the party.

Independence is fine as long as your values are in line with those of the candidate, Janda said.

He believes Americans are going to have to reassess their values and decide whether it might not be better to put stock in organizations of men rather than in one-man-

The professor has advanced some interesting ideas and his study must have given him plenty of information. He plans to write five books on his findings.

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