

In Peter F. Nardulli (ed.), *The Constitution and American Political Development: An Institutional Perspective* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp. 179-206.

CHAPTER

★ 7 ★

The American Constitutional Framework and the Structure of American Political Parties

KENNETH JANDA

When the framers created the U.S. Constitution two hundred years ago, they made no provision for political parties. Since they wrote before the advent of modern parties, that omission may not be surprising. It is surprising that the Constitution does not mention parties in any of its twenty-six amendments, one of which arose from party conflict in the electoral college in the elections of 1796 and 1800. The Twelfth Amendment, which required the electoral college to vote separately for president and vice-president, implicitly recognized that presidential elections would be contested by party candidates nominated for the separate offices but running on the same ballot. Yet the amendment was written without referring to the political organizations that prompted it.

By not mentioning political parties, the U.S. Constitution stands in the minority of the world's constitutions. According to a survey of 142 national constitutions, 65 percent contain provisions regarding political parties (van Maarseveen and van der Tang, 1978:71). About one-third of the constitutions that provide for parties do so in a discriminatory way. In fact, about one-fifth of all constitutions contain provisions that permit only certain parties to operate or that ban certain ones.

Looking at two hundred years of political development, we can clearly see that competitive political parties are essential for the democratic style of government the framers sought to create.¹ Informed by years of practice with party politics in scores of other countries, we can also see that American parties are quite different from those elsewhere.

Political parties have limited functions in the United States. They function well in structuring the voting choice in elections, but they function poorly in coordinating the actions of officials in government. Some scholars argue that parties, as organizations, need to assume a more important role in initiating and enacting coherent public policies (Schattschneider, 1942; Price, 1984:294). Other observers contend there is little hope for changing the structure of American parties to function more cohesively in government because of the constitutional system, which, they say, determines the basic nature of the parties (Kirkpatrick, 1971:976–77). Indeed, both David Brady and Graham Wilson argue this point elsewhere in this book.

Although parties are not mentioned in the Constitution, conventional wisdom holds that U.S. parties are what they are because of major constitutional features. For example, scholars contend the United States has a two-party system primarily because of the importance of the presidency in the political system and the method for selecting the president. Because the presidency can be won only by the single candidate who wins a majority of electoral votes across the entire nation, political groups coalesce into two rival groups large enough to vie for a majority of the electoral votes. David Brady, among other contemporary scholars, discusses in this volume two salient features of the Constitution—federalism and the separation of powers—which help produce the fragmented, highly decentralized nature of our two major parties.

Contemporary scholars did not originate the view that the Constitution has shaped the nature of American parties. This view surfaced long ago in early studies of our political system.² Based on his observations on American politics from 1870 to 1894, the British scholar James Bryce observed,

I have kept to the last the feature of the House [of Representatives] which Europeans find the strangest.

It has parties, but they are headless. There is neither Government nor Opposition. There can hardly be said to be leaders, and til 1900 there were no whips. No person holding any Federal office or receiving any Federal Salary can be a member of it. That the majority may be and often is opposed to the President and his cabinet, does not strike Americans as odd, because they proceed on the theory that the legislative ought to be distinct from the executive authority [(1889) 1912, vol. 1:151].

Writing nearly a century ago, Henry Jones Ford, an early president of the American Political Science Association, said succinctly, "The peculiarities of American party government are all due to this separation of party management from direct and immediate responsibility from the administration of government" (1898:326). J. Allen Smith, the progressive reformer and critic of the Constitution, concurred: "To understand the peculiar features of the American party system one must bear in mind the constitutional arrangements under which it has developed. . . . It is this lack of power to shape the entire policy of the government which, more than anything else, has given form and character to the party system of the United States" (1907:208–9). Woodrow Wilson, writing as a political scientist before becoming president, severely criticized the "Whig doctrine" of checks and balances and federalism as a mechanical theory of political dynamics that frustrates leadership and control in government ([1908] 1917:54).³ He maintained, "All the peculiarities of party government in the United States are due to the too literal application of Whig doctrine to the infinite multiplication of elective offices" (210).

Two decades later, but still some fifty years ago, Harold Bruce of Dartmouth cited "our federal type of government" and the existence of strong state party organizations as major factors producing the "elaborate organization" characteristic of American national parties, which are really "loose federations of state and local organizations, held together, in large measure, by the habit of cooperation in presidential elections" (1936:69–71).

An exhaustive analysis of all the constitutional features affecting the organization of American parties is beyond the scope of this work. Instead, it focuses on the Constitution's two most prominent features—federalism and the separation of powers—that are so frequently cited in the early and contemporary literature.

Most previous studies of constitutional influences on American party politics have relied on historical analysis of the U.S. experience, perhaps in comparison with experiences in another country. This essay uses a different methodology. Drawing on a cross-national study of environmental effects on party characteristics (Harmel and Janda, 1982),⁴ it relies on a quantitative analysis of the relationship between constitutional structure and party characteristics for seventy-three political parties in twenty-two democratic nations.⁵ This approach is not necessarily better than traditional research; however, introducing a comparative dimension and treating

the issue in a more theoretical manner may improve our understanding of constitutional effects on party characteristics.

Framework of Analysis

Political parties are, to some extent, products of their context—or so it has been widely assumed. Jean Blondel has argued that “in all cases, the influence of outside elements has played a part in the development or modification of internal [party] structures” (1969:125), and Kay Lawson has noted that “no political institution operates in a vacuum, political parties least of all” (1976:27).

Environmental effects have been given special consideration by students of American parties. William Keefe, for instance, began his book on the American parties with this argument:

Any attempt to unravel the mysteries of American political parties might well begin with the recognition of this fact: The parties are less what they make of themselves than what their environment makes of them. The parties are not free to develop in any fashion that they might like, to take on any organization form that might appear desirable, to pursue any course of action that might seem to be required, or to assume any responsibility that might appear appropriate. The truth of the matter is that the shape of American parties is strongly influenced by the design of the legal-political system, the election system, the political culture, and the heterogeneous quality of American life. To a remarkable extent, the party system owes its form and substance to the impact of external elements [1972:1].

To the extent parties *are* creatures of their environment, there are limits to the extent parties can be changed or “reformed.” As Edward Banfield noted,

With respect to the American party system, it seems obvious that the crucial features of the situation are all fixed. The size of our country, the class and cultural heterogeneity of our people, the number and variety of their interests, the constitutionally-given fragmentation of formal authority, the wide distribution of power which follows from it, the inveterate taste of Americans for participation in the day-to-day conduct of government when their interests are directly at stake—these are all unalterable features of the situation. Taken together, they mean that

the party system can be reformed only within very narrow limits [1964:26].

Arguing in effect that “we get the parties we deserve,” Austin Ranney has said that our governmental system is “designed to inhibit majority rule, and in such a system American parties, decentralized and irresponsible as they are, are entirely appropriate” (1954:160).

Environmental Influences

As diagrammed in Figure 1, three broad types of environmental factors can be identified: (1) physical factors, such as the size, shape, and climate of the country; (2) socioeconomic factors, such as the racial and occupational composition of the society, the degree of urbanization, and the educational level of its citizens; and (3) political factors, such as the structure of the legislature, the type of electoral system, and the frequency of elections. For purposes of this inquiry, we are interested only in the last class of factors, the political ones.

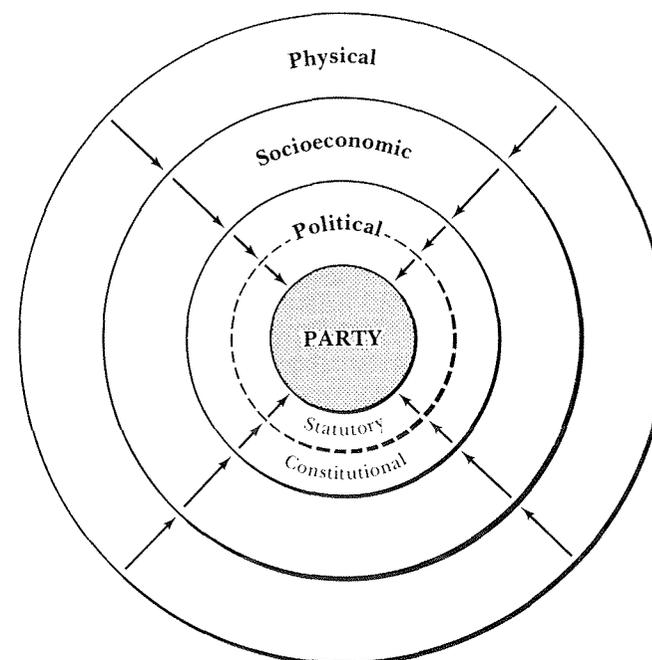


Figure 1. Environmental Influences

Features of the political environment vary in their susceptibility to change. On the relatively immutable side are the constitutional aspects of the governmental system that are either written into fundamental law—as in the United States—or enshrined in tradition—as in Britain. On the more changeable side are the statutory procedures specified by law but not embedded in the constitution or the culture. Again for purposes of this study, we concentrate on the constitutional aspects of the political environment.

By structuring the distribution of political power, constitutions indirectly influence the operation of political parties. Although there are various ways to structure the constitutional distribution of power, this study examines only two structural features, federalism and the separation of powers. Of all the constitutional factors that might impinge on party structure, scholars have identified these as the most important. Lawson succinctly stated the effect of federalism: "Decentralized, federal governments breed decentralized parties; centralized, unitary governments foster parties with power equally concentrated" (1976:79). David Truman elaborated on the theme: "The basic fact of federalism is that it creates self-sustaining centers of power, privilege and profit which may be sought and defended as desirable in themselves, as means of leverage upon elements in the political structure above and below, and as bases from which individuals may move into places of greater influence and prestige in and out of government" (1955:123).

The constitutional separation of powers—especially the division of legislative and executive powers between Congress and the president—is widely viewed as a major factor in the decentralization of the Democratic and Republican parties. Keefe, for instance, has argued, "One of the frequent by-products of this system is the emergence of a truncated party majority—that is, a condition under which one party controls one or both houses of the legislature and the other party controls the executive . . . at no time does [this] contribute a particle to the development and maintenance of party responsibility for a program of public policy" (1980:30–31).

An earlier study to isolate the effects of separation of powers and federalism on political parties was undertaken by Leon Epstein (1964). He compared the United States and Canada for effects of different constitutional frameworks on party politics. While both Canada and the United States have federal systems of government, Canada has a parliamentary, rather than a presidential, structure. Although Epstein focused on party cohesion in legislative voting,

his study was laced with comments on the centralization of power as a more general phenomenon. After reviewing a variety of environmental factors, he concluded, "Explaining the existence of cohesive legislative parties in Canada, within the scope of the factors outlined here, leads straight to the British parliamentary system as the apparent determining factor. Among the four circumstances postulated as basic at the beginning of the essay, it is only this parliamentary system, as opposed to the separation of powers, that Canada has in common with Britain rather than with the United States" (54).

While Epstein's research spoke directly to party politics in the United States and Canada, it was limited in its scope of explanation. By holding federalism constant, it neutralized the variable's influence and could say nothing about how federalism did or did not affect party organization. Epstein's research also did not establish how much the separation of powers affected party organization. Studying the separation of powers *and* federalism in a larger sample of countries can provide a broader and more accurate explanation of these constitutional effects.

It should be noted that the U.S. Constitution, which specifies federalism and the separation of powers, is again in the minority. By any criteria for measuring federalism, most countries in the world are not federal nations, and most constitutions do not provide for a separation or division of powers among national organs. Only 13 percent of the world's constitutions manifest federalism and only 18 percent separate the executive and legislative powers (van Maarseveen and van der Tang 1978:54). Moreover, less than 10 percent of the world's nations have a federal structure *and* separate organs of government that exercise legislative, executive, and judicial powers. If our parties are truly different from parties elsewhere, it may be because of their peculiar constitutional environment.

Nonenvironmental Influences

Earlier writers who argued for the importance of environmental effects on party politics might have conveyed the impression that the environment alone inexorably determines the nature of our parties. Of course, environmental factors are not the sole causes of party characteristics, and any comprehensive theory of party organization must provide for other causal factors. One advantage of a cross-national comparative analysis of party structure is that it

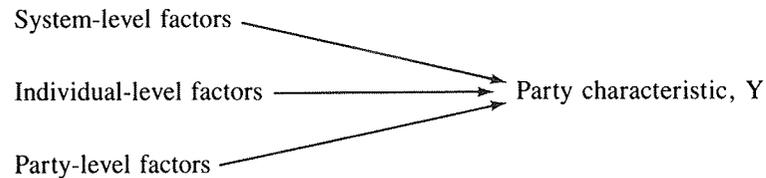


Figure 2. Basic Model for Explaining Party Characteristics

encourages a broader and richer theoretical framework. Parties operating in the same environment (i.e., within the same nation) differ in their characteristics due to two other broad types of causes: individual-level factors and party-level factors. Such nonenvironmental factors may work against environmental influences, or they may even work in addition to the environment. This basic theoretical model is diagramed in Figure 2, which portrays all three factors as independent causes of some party characteristic, *Y*.

Individual-level factors subsume activists' ideas that a party ought to be formed in the first place, party leaders' views of appropriate party strategy, and party dissidents' campaigns for organizational change. For instance, some prominent Democrats (e.g., George McGovern and Donald Fraser) led a movement to revise the party's rules to select delegates to the 1972 nominating convention, which simultaneously produced more openness in the selection process but also gave the National Committee more control of the process. Such individual-level actions can combat environmental effects, and they are an important source of change in party organization over time.

Party-level factors pertain to organizational theory, which predicts that some organizational characteristics affect other ones. Party ideology, for example, can affect party organization according to whether the party is regarded as an agent of social change. In large part, the Democrats reformed their delegate-selection procedures in 1972 to increase the representation of blacks and women. In contrast, the Republicans did not feel compelled to promote equality by requiring state parties to meet quotas in selecting blacks and women as convention delegates. Because of such individual-level and party-level factors, parties in the same country never have identical characteristics. If the environment has the "causal primacy" claimed by writers cited above, then environmental influences should show clearly in explaining party characteristics across nations.

Research Procedures

This study of constitutional effects on party characteristics extends across many nations and parties. The original sample of fifty-three nations was drawn to represent a random sample (stratified by regions) of all nations in which political parties operated for at least half of the time from 1950 to 1962 (Janda, 1980).⁶ This study focuses on only twenty-two nations which had competitive political parties operating under governments that were more or less democratic during the latter half of this period, 1957 to 1962. Some nations, most notably Lebanon, would not now qualify for inclusion, but all met the criteria at the time and experienced vigorous party politics, albeit of varying forms.

Parties in each country were selected for the study if they could meet minimum standards of strength and stability, which meant receiving at least 5 percent of the seats in the lower chamber in two successive elections. A total of seventy-three parties qualified for inclusion (see Table 1, which lists the countries and parties included in the sample). Although these data pertain to a period over twenty-five years ago, that should not invalidate testing for constitutional effects on party characteristics. Theories of causal primacy of the environment on political parties are as applicable to the 1960s as they are to the 1980s. Both U.S. parties have changed in important respects since the 1960s, but their changes have been minor when judged against the breadth of party experience worldwide. Essentially, the Democratic and Republican parties are still one of the "odd couples" in the political cotillion of the world.

Measuring Party Decentralization

American parties are ineffective in initiating and enacting public policy, the argument goes, because of their organizational weaknesses, especially their extreme decentralization of power. When power is decentralized within a party, the party may have difficulty getting its members in government (particularly in the legislature) to back its leaders' policies. The belief that American parties are decentralized has been widely shared among parties scholars. Almost fifty years ago, E. E. Schattschneider wrote, "Decentralization of power is by all odds the most important single characteristic of the American major party; more than anything else this trait distinguishes it from all others. Indeed, once this truth is understood, nearly everything else about American parties is greatly

Table 1. Nations and Parties in the Analysis

Regions and Nations	Political Parties in the Study	No. of Parties
ANGLO-AMERICAN		
United States	Democratic, Republican	2
United Kingdom	Labour, Conservative	2
Australia	Labor, Liberal, Country	3
Canada	Progressive Conservative, Liberal, New Democratic, Social Credit	4
New Zealand	National, Labour	2
Ireland	Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, Labour	3
WESTERN EUROPE		
Austria	Peoples, Socialist, Freedom	3
France	MRP, Radical Socialist, Socialist, Gaullist, Communist	5
West Germany	Christian Democratic Union, Social Democratic, Free Democratic	3
Greece	Liberal, National Radical Union, United Democratic Left	3
SCANDINAVIA AND LOWLANDS		
Denmark	Social Democrats, Moderate Liberal, Conservative, Radical Liberal	4
Iceland	Independence, Progressive, Social Democratic, People's Alliance	4
Sweden	Social Democratic, Center, Liberal, Conservative	4
The Netherlands	People's, Labor, Liberal, Anti-Revolutionary, CHU, Communist	6
Luxembourg	Christian Social, Socialist, Democratic, Communist	4
SOUTH AMERICA		
Ecuador	Velaquistas, Conservative, Liberal, Concentration of Popular Forces	4
Peru	Movement of National Union, ARPA, Popular Action, Democratic Movement	4
Uruguay	Colorado, National (Blanco)	2
Venezuela	Republican Democratic Union, COPEI, Democratic Action	3
ASIA		
India	Congress, Communist	2

Table 1. Nations and Parties in the Analysis
(Continued)

Regions and Nations	Political Parties in the Study	No. of Parties
MIDDLE EAST		
Turkey	Republican, Democratic	2
Lebanon	Progressive Socialist, Constitutional Union, Phalanges, Nationalist Bloc	4

Note: Total number of countries in the study = 22; total number of parties = 73.

illuminated" (1942:129). Thirty years later, Keefe said, "There is no lively debate among political scientists concerning the dominant characteristic of American political parties. It is, pure and simple, their decentralization" (1972:25). Scholars made such definitive statements, despite the lack of comparative surveys, because the impressionistic evidence seemed overwhelming. Aided now with data on seventy-three parties across the world, we can check out the accuracy of their sharp characterizations.

The term *decentralization of power* refers to the distribution of control over decision making among the levels of party organization. More concretely, it is the extent to which the national level of party organization is free from control by regional and local organs in conducting national party business and is capable of enforcing its decisions on the subnational levels. To measure this complex concept, we can disaggregate the "party's business" into categories and score each party on infringement on national control in each category (see Table 2 for a description of these categories and the scores assigned to the Democrats and Republicans circa 1960).

When summed over all seven indicators of decentralization in the 1960s, the Democratic and Republican parties earned (in different ways) the same total score, 32. When scored for the same seven indicators, the British Labour and Conservative parties' scores summed to 10 (each sum earned again in different ways). Judged against parties in Britain, the two U.S. parties certainly were more decentralized. This finding conforms to conventional wisdom that British parties are far more centralized than U.S. parties, and it illustrates the effect of the environment, which appears to impinge equally on parties *within* each country while differentiating among parties *between* countries.⁷

Table 2. Indicators Used to Score Party Decentralization of Power

	Democrat	Republican
1. <i>Control over communications</i> : scored from 0 to 7, with high scores to parties for which regional or local (rather than national) levels of organization controlled mass media or to parties that lacked their own media of communications. Neither party controlled any important means of mass communication.	7	7
2. <i>Administration of discipline</i> : scored from 0 to 4, with high scores to parties that administered discipline locally or that lacked effective means of disciplining legislative members. There was virtually no exercise of discipline within either party.	4	4
3. <i>Selection of legislative candidates</i> : scored from 1 to 9, with high scores to parties that selected candidates locally. Neither national party had any say in naming candidates for Congress: this was normally done by voters in primary elections.	9	9
4. <i>Allocation of funds</i> : scored from 0 to 6, with high scores to parties that collected and allocated funds locally, rather than nationally. National organs in both parties had roles in collecting and disbursing funds, including setting state quotas. Though neither party enjoyed complete success in collecting state quotas, the Republicans did better than the Democrats. (By the 1970s, Republicans began collecting massive funds nationally, which enabled them to reverse the flow and to fund selective state operations.)	4	3
5. <i>Selections of the national leader</i> : scored from 0 to 8, with high scores to parties that allowed local officials to help choose the national leader. Both parties selected presidential nominees at national conventions attended by state delegates.	4	4

Table 2. Indicators Used to Score Party Decentralization of Power
(Continued)

	Democrat	Republican
6. <i>Formulation of party policy</i> : scored from 0 to 7, with high scores to parties letting local officials participate in formulating policy, as in national conventions. Both parties adopted their platforms in conventions in the 1960s. Democrats also used an advisory council.	1	2
7. <i>Nationalization of structure</i> : scored from 0 to 6, with high scores to parties that lacked hierarchical structure headed by the national level of organization. Both national committees consisted of delegates from state organizations and had little authority over state parties. (By 1972, the Democrats' structure changed considerably, as the party issued national guidelines forcing state parties to change their procedures for selecting delegates or be denied seating at the convention.)	3	3
Total decentralization scores assigned to each party	32	32

Note: The original source of these data is Janda (1980:205, 210). In the original, however, the scores were reversed so that high scores meant centralization, not decentralization.

For more exacting comparisons with parties in other countries, all the scores were standardized and combined to form a single, composite scale for the decentralization of power. This scale was constructed so that the average score (the mean) centered toward zero.⁸ Negative scores were earned by the more centralized parties, whereas the more decentralized parties earned positive scores. The composite scale scores for all seventy-three parties in the study are graphed in Figure 3.

The two U.S. parties are rated as very decentralized according to our scale—just as they are described in the literature. In fact, they were among the four most decentralized parties examined. Only two parties in Uruguay were more decentralized, and some scholars

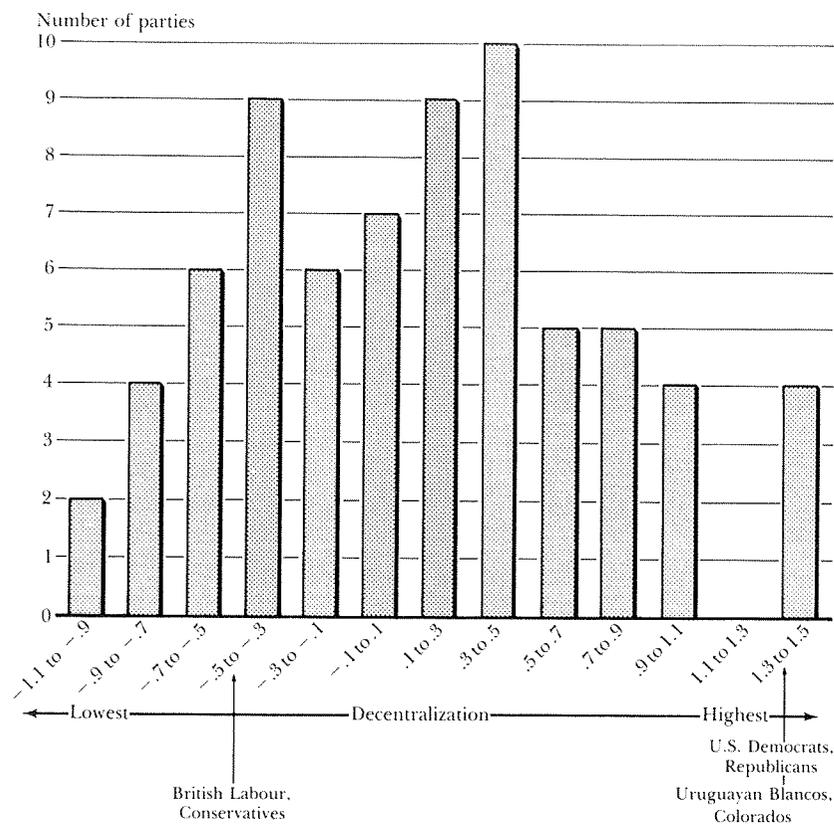


Figure 3. Party Decentralization of Power Scores

argue those parties, the Blancos and Colorados, were not individual parties but coalitions of distinct parties which themselves had different names and were labeled as such on the ballot. These partisan factions coalesced into two larger groups after the election because Uruguay's existing electoral system allowed votes won by factions to be summed to establish control of government. In any event, the two U.S. parties clearly fulfilled their characterization as "extremely decentralized."

Measuring Constitutional Influences

Our cross-national data strongly support scholars who characterize the U.S. parties as decentralized. Do the data also support scholars'

reliance on federalism and separation of powers to explain party decentralization? To answer this question, we must first categorize the nations' constitutional systems; then we can analyze the level of decentralization among parties within each category.

Federalism. Federalism in a constitution does not always guarantee federalism in practice, and we need to draw distinctions between federalism and decentralization of power in the government itself. We can conceive of federalism and governmental decentralization as two separate but related concepts, each of which taps a different dimension of a broader concept, the vertical structure of the political system. Written constitutions usually provide for federalism in a formal sense. The U.S. Constitution, for example, recognizes the formal division of powers between the national and state governments in fixing representation in Congress, in electing the president, in providing for jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, in establishing citizens' rights among states, and in ratifying and amending the Constitution itself. The way federalism actually operates, however, depends on the way the nation's constitutional framework is implemented.

Decentralization of governmental power refers to the extent to which policy-making is actually distributed among the levels of government. A system formally designated as federal does not always display decentralization of governmental power. For example, the Soviet Union formally had a federal system, but the government operated in a centralized manner—at least during the years of this study. Even in the United States, the national government has accumulated powers that test the concept of federalism.⁹ Despite the expansion of national power at the expense of the states, state governments in the aggregate still employ many more employees and account for more domestic expenditures than does the government in Washington. Moreover, the politics of election to Congress and to the presidency ensure that the formal federalism provided in the Constitution is reflected in a real decentralization of governmental power.

Figure 4 shows the relationship between formal federalism and decentralization of governmental power for the twenty-two nations in our study. Only seven nations were classified as formally federal in constitutional structure. Of these, all but two—Austria and Venezuela—were scored as decentralized in governmental structure.¹⁰ All of the formally unitary states were regarded as centralized.

	Unitary Nations (N = 15)	Federal Nations (N = 7)
Centralized Nations (N = 17)	Denmark Ecuador France Greece Iceland Ireland Lebanon Luxembourg The Netherlands New Zealand Peru Sweden Turkey United Kingdom Uruguay	Austria Venezuela
Decentralized Nations (N = 5)		Australia Canada India United States West Germany

Figure 4. Relationship between Federalism and Decentralization of Power

Thus, there is as strong relationship between the constitutional basis of federalism and decentralization of governmental power. Because decentralization of power refers to the actual, rather than the formal, status of the vertical structure of political system, we will use it, rather than federalism, as a predictor of party decentralization. We will examine the empirical relationship between decentralized government and party decentralization after we consider the separation of powers, the other salient feature of the U.S. Constitution.

Separation of powers. One major component of the separation of powers formula, American style, is the separate selection of the president and the legislature. This separation is in marked contrast to the more unified parliamentary system, in which individual

members tend to be reelected or defeated according to the party's overall appeal to the voters. In the parliamentary system, there is both a need for central party direction and a willingness to accept it. In a presidential system, where individual legislators and the chief executive are rewarded separately in elections, control by the national party is not only less necessary but actually discouraged by the dynamics of campaigning within different constituencies.

As noted earlier, most national constitutions do not separate legislative and executive powers. Although students in high school and even college in the United States often regard the separation of powers as a requirement of democratic government, many democratic nations get along quite nicely with the legislative and executive powers joined in a parliamentary structure. Moreover, presidentialism alone does not guarantee separation of powers, which assumes that the legislature is an effective body in its own right rather than merely a rubber stamp for the executive. To classify nations according to the separation of powers, we therefore need to consider two factors: whether the government is presidential or parliamentary and whether its legislature is effective or ineffective. Again, the effectiveness of the legislature does not strictly follow from the constitution, but constitutions can be written so that they produce strong or weak legislative bodies. Clearly, the framers of the U.S. Constitution sought to devise a strong Congress, and they anticipated political conflict between Congress and the president. One can assume that framers elsewhere also planned for the powers of the legislature.

Figure 5 shows the distribution of our sample of democratic nations on the two factors, presidential-parliamentary structure and legislative effectiveness. Since an effective legislature is characteristic of democratic government, we should not be surprised that nineteen of our twenty-two democratic nations have one. Because separation of powers is so peculiar to American thought and practice, we should also not be surprised that most nations with presidential forms of government are in North or South America. Of the nations in our sample outside the Western Hemisphere, only France's unique presidential form of government can qualify as a separation of powers, and even then it is not really like the U.S. model.¹¹ All told, only four nations in our sample manifest some form of separation of powers.¹² Of special note, the United States is the only country in the sample that has a functioning federalism (effectively decentralized government) and separation of powers.

	Presidential Nations (N = 6)	Parliamentary Nations (N = 16)
Partially Effective Legislature (N = 3)	Ecuador Peru	Lebanon
Effective Legislature (N = 19)	France United States Uruguay Venezuela	Australia Austria Canada Denmark Greece Iceland India Ireland Luxembourg The Netherlands New Zealand Sweden Turkey United Kingdom West Germany

Figure 5. Two Factors Involving the Separation of Powers

Effects on Party Decentralization

Before examining the effects of the nation's constitutional framework on party characteristics, we should be reminded of what we could reasonably expect to find or, more specifically, what we should not expect. First, we should not expect to find that the constitutional framework explains all or even most of the variance in party decentralization—despite the strong claims about the U.S. experience. After all, a nation's constitutional framework represents only one set of variables in the class of environmental factors affecting party characteristics. Other environmental factors, such as the size or heterogeneity of the country, would also be expected to affect party decentralization.

Second, we should not expect that all the environmental factors taken together would explain all or even most of the variance in party organizations. How much variance environmental factors can

be expected to explain for any type of social organization is an issue in organizational theory. In their review of environmental influences on organizations, H. E. Aldrich and J. Pfeffer (1976) compared the "natural selection" model, which holds that organizations are formed to fit the environment, with the "resource dependence" model (also called the "structural contingency" model), which holds that environmental influences are important but do not determine organizational properties and that organizations seek to, and can, manage their environments within limits. According to the structural contingency model, we cannot hope to explain large amounts of variance in party characteristics without allowing for the party-level and individual-level factors discussed earlier.

Constitutional Effects

In this analysis, nations that had decentralized (federal) systems were scored 1, and those with centralized systems were scored 0, on the federalism feature. On the separation of powers feature, nations with a presidential form of government and an effective legislature (separation of powers) were scored 1; all others, those with parliamentary forms of government or ineffective legislatures, were scored 0. These constitutional features were thus treated as dichotomies in the analysis (commonly called "dummy variables").

As mentioned earlier, the United States is the only country of the twenty-two studied that manifested governmental decentralization along with separation of powers. The correlation between these constitutional traits over all seventy-three parties is virtually zero ($r = -.03$). However, the product moment correlations between each factor (.31 for federalism and .29 for separation of powers) and party decentralization are positive (as hypothesized) and significant at the .05 level. Still, neither factor explains as much as 10 percent of the variance in party decentralization. While these findings tend to support scholars' claims about the constitutional causes of party decentralization in the United States, these bivariate correlations are less than convincing.

A more appropriate test of scholars' claims about constitutional effects on party decentralization comes from combining both variables in a multiple regression model. The results are in Table 3, which shows that the variables together explain almost 20 percent of the variation in party decentralization. In addition, each variable is statistically significant. These results are encouraging for those who hold that constitutional factors affect party decentralization.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analysis of Federalism and Separation of Powers on Party Decentralization

	Unstandardized b Coefficients	Standardized Beta Coefficients	Standard Error of b	Significance
Government Decentralization	.51	.32	.18	.00
Separation of Powers	.51	.30	.19	.01
Intercept	-.01			

Note: $R^2 = .18$; adjusted $R^2 = .16$; $N = 73$.

However, since these factors explain so little of the variance, how can we be confident they would still retain their effects if other factors were entered into the analysis?

Nonenvironmental Effects

One can really assess the effects of variables on a dependent variable only when the model is properly specified—i.e., when all theoretical linkages are examined. Although we may never know all the causes of any social phenomena, we assume—from the basic model in Figure 2—that party decentralization is also caused by factors other than the environment. Even if we are interested only in assessing environmental causes, we must introduce other causes into the analysis to improve our estimate of environmental effects. We will move toward a more adequately specified model by introducing two party-level variables that are known to relate to party structure. If the explanatory model is valid, the two constitutional factors should retain their effects, the two party-level variables should demonstrate their own effects, and the explanation of party decentralization should improve overall.

To consider all the party-level factors that might affect party decentralization would entangle us in organizational theory.¹³ We can, however, gain some additional confidence in our effort to account for the effects of constitutional factors on party decentralization by introducing two major party-level variables—ideology and institutionalization.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis of Federalism, Separation of Powers, Leftism, and Institutionalization on Party Decentralization

	Unstandardized b Coefficients	Standardized Beta Coefficients	Standard Error of b	Significance
Government Decentralization	.41	.25	.16	.01
Separation of Powers	.63	.37	.17	.00
Party Leftist Ideology	-.31	-.34	.09	.00
Party Institutionalization	.27	.26	.10	.01
Intercept	-.19			

Note: $R^2 = .38$; adjusted $R^2 = .34$; $N = 73$.

As mentioned earlier, party ideology can affect party organization. In the literature on comparative political parties, Maurice Duverger theorized many years ago that the centralization of power in political parties was strongly related to party ideology, with leftist parties tending to be more centralized than "bourgeois" parties (1963:xxxiv). Just as Duverger theorized, there is a negative correlation between a measure of "leftism" and decentralization over all the parties in the study.¹⁴ Moreover, the correlation is significant and fairly strong at $-.30$.

Party decentralization is also likely to be related to party institutionalization, which Samuel Huntington has described as "stable, valued, recurring patterns of behavior" (1965:394). The argument is that newer parties—which are less institutionalized—are more apt to be centralized, because they reflect the organizational forces that created them in the first place. As parties mature, however, they adapt to local bases of power and thus become more decentralized as they become more institutionalized. Supporting this reasoning, the simple correlation between party decentralization and a measure of institutionalization is .36 over all the parties in the study.¹⁵

As shown in Table 4, when these party-level variables are added to the constitutional factors in regression analysis, the new equa-

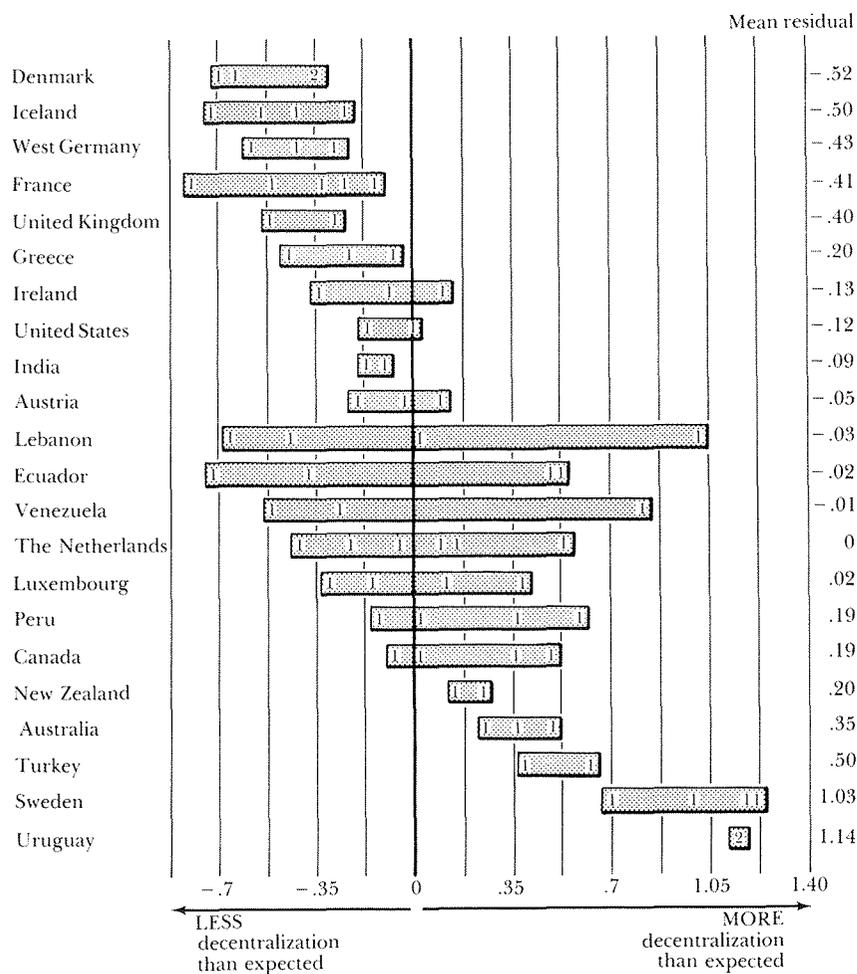


Figure 6. Plot of Residuals from Regression Analysis Arranged by Country

tion explains 38 percent of the variance while retaining the effect of each constitutional factor. A useful part of regression analysis involves examining the "residuals"—the differences between the score that the equation predicts for each case and the score that was originally assigned. Figure 6 plots the residuals for each party by country, with countries arranged according to mean values of the residuals, from negative to positive. A negative residual reveals that

the equation predicted a higher decentralization score than the party actually scored on the decentralization scale. That is, the equation overestimates the party's decentralization. Conversely, positive residuals indicate that the equation underestimates its decentralization.

Figure 6 clearly demonstrates the effects of a country's environment on the structure of political parties across nations. Except in Lebanon, Ecuador, and Venezuela, where parties range widely across the decentralization scale, parties in most other nations cluster around some national "norm." For example, although the regression analysis does a poor job in estimating the decentralization of power among parties in Denmark and Sweden, its prediction goes in different directions: overestimating each of the four Danish parties and underestimating each of the four Swedish ones.

To explain fully why this occurs requires more discussion than can be given now; however, some explanation is needed to clarify the analysis. Because both Sweden and Denmark are unitary states with parliamentary systems, the constitutional variables in the equation predicted that both countries would have centralized, rather than decentralized, parties. In fact, every party in both countries was more centralized than either of the American parties. During our time period, however, the national organs of the Danish parties, compared with the Swedish, were scored as more likely to exercise party discipline and more likely to publish or control newspapers.¹⁶ This gave the Danish parties lower scores for decentralization. Because the parties in both countries did not differ much in institutionalization and were similarly arrayed above the left-right continuum, the two party-level variables had similar effects in Denmark and Sweden. The model thus overestimated party decentralization in Denmark and underestimated it in Sweden. The explanation for why the Danish parties exercised more party discipline at the national level, and also better controlled communications, lies outside the constitutional environment.

Presumably, one could introduce other environmental factors into the analysis—physical, socioeconomic, or statutory—that would explain additional cross-national variance. Such factors, however, would not account for the great differences in decentralization among parties in Lebanon, Ecuador, and Venezuela, shown in Figure 6. Other variables—either party-level or individual-level—are needed to explain why parties in the same country differ so greatly. The four variables in the present model do a poor job estimating party structure in these three countries, where other factors are

obviously operating to cause some parties to be highly centralized and others highly decentralized.

The same variables, however, estimate the extreme decentralization of U.S. parties rather well, estimating the Democrats almost exactly and only slightly overestimating the Republicans. On the other hand, the equation greatly underestimates the extreme decentralization of the Blanco and Colorado parties in Uruguay. Apparently, Uruguay's peculiar electoral arrangement—omitted from the equation—operated as an additional environmental factor that spurred party decentralization.

Conclusion

Historically, distinguished scholars have attributed the structure of American parties to salient features in the U.S. Constitution. Specifically, they have attributed the extreme decentralization in the Democratic and Republican parties to the horizontal separation of legislative and executive powers between Congress and the president and to the vertical separation of powers between the national and state governments (federalism). The literature contains much scholarly testimony on this constitutional consequence, and it reports some case studies designed to test the thesis of constitutional causation.

In some ways, this quantitative cross-national study of constitutional effects on party decentralization simply extends Epstein's (1964) work, cited earlier. Whereas Epstein compared two federal nations (the United States and Canada) to assess the influence of separation of powers on party cohesion, this study used statistical analysis to examine the effects of federalism and separation of powers on party organization in twenty-two countries. It is reassuring that our findings are compatible. Constitutional factors—federalism as well as separation of powers—do help shape the distribution of power within a nation's parties.

What lessons do these cross-national findings hold for understanding party politics? First, they validate conventional knowledge that links the nature of American parties to the structure of its political system. In this sense, those who wish to see fundamentally different parties in the United States need to produce a fundamentally different political system, which is unlikely. Second, they give more precision to conventional knowledge by estimating constitutional effects on party characteristics. Third, the findings remind us

that single-cause explanations are seldom as powerful as their advocates claim. Party structures are complex phenomena and result from complex causes. While the constitutional environment undoubtedly imposes severe constraints on attempts to change the character of American parties, the cross-national analysis suggests that constitutional factors do not determine party decentralization, as the Danish and Swedish examples clearly show.

Those who favor restructuring American parties to make them stronger can achieve some greater degree of centralization by changing laws and otherwise altering the nonconstitutional environment. Nevertheless, American parties are bound to reflect the decentralizing forces of the U.S. constitutional framework. For good or ill, the Constitution's diffusion of governmental powers between president and Congress, and between nation and state, severely limits the prospects for party government in the United States over the next two hundred years of political development.

NOTES

1. Some scholars vigorously argue that the framers had no intention of creating a truly democratic government. In a landmark study, James Allen Smith, professor of political science at the University of Washington at the turn of the century, wrote, "The framers of the American Constitution, however, succeeded in erecting barriers which democracy has found it more difficult to overcome. For more than a century the constitutional bulwarks which they raised against the rule of the numerical majority have obstructed and retarded the progress of the democratic movement" (1907:207). Smith charged that "American political writers" ignored "the obstacles which the Constitution has placed in the way of majority rule" and laid "the blame for corruption and machine methods upon the people" (212). Smith's (1913) analysis was later cited in Charles Beard's more celebrated indictment of the Constitution's creators for serving their economic interests. More charitable interpretations of the Constitution recognize the great step the framers took toward providing for popular participation in government.

2. For an excellent, annotated guide to writings on political parties in the United States prior to 1915, see New York Public Library (1915).

3. For a colorful diagram of the "Mechanical Representation of the United States under the Constitution" depicting the mechanical theory that Wilson criticized, see Houghton (1884).

4. *Parties and Their Environments: Limits to Reform?* (Harmel and Janda, 1982) sought to determine what constraints, if any, the country's environment imposed on attempts to "reform" American parties—

specifically to change them to conform to the model of "responsible party government." The book concluded that environmental factors did indeed shape the characteristics of a nation's parties, but that the American parties had not yet reached their environmental "limits" and could become somewhat more organized, centralized, and cohesive. Portions of this essay are drawn from that study, but all the data analysis has been redone.

5. The data base for *Parties and Their Environments* was somewhat larger, consisting of ninety-five parties for twenty-eight democratic nations. Given the narrower focus of this essay, several marginally democratic nations (and their parties) were dropped from the analysis.

6. The original data set consisted of approximately 100 variables for 158 parties in fifty-three countries from ten cultural-geographical regions of the world (Janda, 1980).

7. Readers who are more statistically minded may think of analysis of variance as a technique for measuring the variation of party characteristics within and between countries. Harmel and Janda (1982) used analysis of variance extensively to assess the total impact of environmental factors on ninety-five political parties in twenty-eight countries, regardless of the precise source of the environmental impact. We found substantial evidence of "country" effects—ranging from 57 to 68 percent—on decentralization of power, organizational complexity, and legislative cohesion.

8. The scale was constructed by transforming all the indicators into standard scores with means of 0 and standard deviations of 1, summing the standard scores for each party over all its indicators, and dividing by the number of indicators with valid data. The resulting scale has a reliability of .83 as measured by Cronbach's alpha. See Janda (1980:153–54) for the procedure. Note that the scale used herein has dropped one item and contains only seven items rather than the eight items reported for the centralization of power scale in Janda (1980).

9. Whether the United States still has a truly federal form of government or is simply a decentralized unitary state has been hotly debated. Opposing positions are summarized in Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (1986:1–3).

10. For support of these codings, see Wheare (1964:22). For additional evidence on Austria, see Lane and Ersson (1987: 194–95).

11. See Lane and Ersson (1987) for a discussion of the French form of presidentialism.

12. Uruguay qualifies for inclusion in this analysis under the constitution in effect during the period of study.

13. For an extensive investigation of this topic, see Harmel (1977). For a shorter treatment limited to only environmental factors, see Harmel (1981).

14. The measure of "leftism" is the seven-item Marxism scale described in Janda (1980:147–49). The scale has a reliability of .90, as measured by Cronbach's alpha.

15. The measure of institutionalization is a standardized scale of four variables: party age, competition for leadership, legislative instability, and

electoral instability. The reliability of the scale, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, is .79. See Janda (1980:143–44).

16. At least this is what the few sources had to say about parties in these countries in the late 1950s and early 1960s. There is evidence that these parties would be scored differently in the 1980s. In his comparative analysis of parties in Denmark and Sweden, Sjöblom (1987) reports little differences in party organization between the countries, but he does not address the specific indicators I used to measure decentralization for individual parties. Nevertheless, he concludes that "Swedish party organizations are stronger than the Danish" (194).

REFERENCES

- Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations. 1986. *The Transformation in American Politics: Implications for Federalism*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office.
- Aldrich, H. E., and J. Pfeffer. 1976. "Environments of Organizations." *Annual Review of Sociology* 2:79–105.
- Banfield, Edward. 1964. "In Defense of the American Party System." In *Political Parties, U.S.A.*, edited by Robert A. Goldwin. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Beard, Charles A. 1913. *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*. New York: Macmillan.
- Blondel, Jean. 1969. *An Introduction to Comparative Government*. New York: Praeger.
- Bruce, Harold R. 1936. *American Political Parties and Politics*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Bryce, James. [1889] 1912. *The American Commonwealth*, vol. 1. New York: Macmillan.
- Duverger, Maurice. 1963. *Political Parties*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Epstein, Leon D. 1964. "A Comparative Study of Canadian Parties." *American Political Science Review* 58:46–59.
- Ford, Henry Jones. 1898. *The Rise and Growth of American Politics*. New York: Macmillan.
- Harmel, Robert. 1977. "Relative Impacts of Contextual and Internal Factors on Party Decentralization: A Cross-National Analysis." Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University.
- . 1981. "Environment and Party Decentralization: A Cross-National Analysis." *Comparative Political Studies* 14:75–99.
- Harmel, Robert, and Kenneth Janda. 1982. *Parties and Their Environments: Limits to Reform?* New York: Longman.
- Houghton, Walter R. 1884. *History of American Politics*. Chicago: Caxton.
- Huntington, Samuel. 1965. "Political Development and Political Decay." *World Politics* 17:386–430.

- Janda, Kenneth. 1980. *Political Parties: A Cross-National Survey*. New York: Free Press.
- Keefe, William. 1972. *Parties, Politics, and Public Policy in America*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- . 1980. *Parties, Politics, and Public Policy*. New York: Dryden.
- Kirkpatrick, Evron M. 1971. " 'Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System': Political Science, Policy Science, or Pseudo-Science?" *American Political Science Review* 65:965–90.
- Lane, Jan-Erik, and Svante O. Ersson. 1987. *Politics and Society in Western Europe*. London: Sage Publications.
- Lawson, Kay, 1976. *The Comparative Study of Political Parties*. New York: St. Martin's.
- New York Public Library. 1915. *Political Parties in the United States, 1800–1914: A List of References*. New York: New York Public Library.
- Price, David E. 1984. *Bringing Back the Parties*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Ranney, Austin. 1954. *The Doctrine of Responsible Party Government*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Schattschneider, E. E. 1942. *Party Government*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Sjöblom, Gunnar. 1987. "The Role of Political Parties in Denmark and Sweden, 1970–1984." In *Party Governments: European and American Experiences*, edited by Richard S. Katz. New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Smith, J. Allen. 1907. *The Spirit of American Government, a Study of the Constitution: Its Origin, Influence and Relation to Democracy*. New York: Macmillan.
- Truman, David. 1955. "Federalism and the Party System." In *Federalism: Mature and Emergent*, edited by Arthur Macmahon. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.
- van Maarseveen, Henc, and Ger van der Tang. 1978. *Written Constitutions: A Computerized Comparative Study*. Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Oceana.
- Wheare, K. C. 1964. *Federal Government*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, Woodrow. [1908] 1917. *Constitutional Government in the United States*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Interest Groups and the Constitution

GRAHAM K. WILSON

Two of the central questions long asked about the political system of the United States are, How great is the power of interest groups and which aspects of the system and society promote the power of interest groups? Implicit in these questions was the assumption that interest groups were more important in the United States than elsewhere, as observers of American politics from Alexis de Tocqueville onward have contended. The contribution of interest groups was celebrated by some (Tocqueville, [1840] 1986; Dahl, 1956) and deplored by others (Schattschneider, 1960; Lowi, 1969). The importance of interest groups was accepted by all involved in the argument, however. It did not seem particularly difficult to explain the importance of interest groups. The supposed tendency of Americans to be "natural joiners" of interest groups was noted by Tocqueville, and more recent political scientists provided apparently confirming evidence (Verba and Nie, 1972). Weak political parties allowed scope for interest group activity by, for example, hardly constraining legislators through party discipline. The supposed pragmatism of American politics, better understood as the curtailment of political debate to that narrow part of the political spectrum which falls within the dominant ideology of the country, was unusually well suited to interest group politics, or so the argument went. The size and diversity of the country likewise required a political system that would be responsive to local needs or interests, often best articulated by interest groups.

Finally, and for our purposes most relevant, the Constitution itself has been thought to advantage interest groups. As will be discussed later, the Constitution not only gave interest groups rights and liberties but also provided them with unusual opportunities to influence public policy. In particular, the separation of powers created a multiplicity of points of access to decision making. Interest