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THE PARTY FAMILY AND ITS STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Although the notion of the party family, with the various cross-national and cross-temporal similarities it implies, underlies much of the standard work on comparative party politics, it nevertheless remains one of the most under-theorized and least specified approaches to the general classification of parties. Four of the principal approaches that are used to identify party families are discussed: origins and sociology, transnational links, policy and ideology, and party name. The advantages and disadvantages of each approach are assessed, as are some of the more generic problems that may be associated with all four approaches. The two approaches that appear best suited to the specification and classification of party families are those based on the origin of parties and their ideology, but these should be developed in parallel rather than as alternatives. Both tap into what parties are rather than what parties do and hence are more likely to uncover core identities and shared political goals.

THE NOTION OF THE PARTY FAMILY

One of the most commonly used approaches to the classification of political parties in comparisons across both countries and time is that based on the notion of the party "family." In some ways, the metaphor is not a happy one, since the cross-party similarities it assumes are neither necessarily genetic nor formally structured. Indeed, in some of its modes of operationalization, as will be seen later, the family connections that are asserted to exist may even be unrecognizable to a number of the family members concerned, who may be wholly

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unaware of their supposed kinship ties in other countries or in other times. Yet despite its drawbacks, the party family remains an attractive and easily grasped metaphor, and it has now become a standard reference point in much of the comparative party literature. It wins much more favor than the potentially more precise notion of "functional equivalence," even though some of its versions imply this idea.

From one perspective, the adoption of some notion of party families is a sine qua non of comparative party research, because it is only by identifying links and equivalences among parties in different polities that we can get a proper sense of what should and what should not be compared or of what is like and unlike. Hence we tend to compare socialist or social democratic parties with one another, or liberal parties, or Christian democratic parties, even though these broad categories are sometimes further refined—distinguishing between Christian democratic parties in terms of their geographic location and/or denominational identity (Fogarty 1957; Madeley 1977; Gallagher et al 1995, pp. 192–94), for example, or distinguishing between liberal parties in terms of their radicalism or conservatism (Steed & Hearl 1985, Kirchner 1988) in order to capture a more precise sense of the commonalities involved.

As noted, the categorization of parties according to the broader families to which they belong has become a common procedure in comparative research on political parties and party systems. This approach was already evident in the classic studies of Rokkan, for example, which sketched the principal parameters through which the diversity in European party systems could best be understood (Lipset & Rokkan 1967, Rokkan 1970). Rokkan invoked the relatively limited range of types of parties that emerged in mass politics across western Europe as part of the evidence for the stabilization and continued relevance of the core cleavage structures. Indeed, many of the subsequent scholars who sought explicitly to catalogue and identify the key differences between party families have cited Rokkan's work as their starting point (e.g. Seiler 1980, p. 80; von Beyme 1985, pp. 23–24; Humphreys & Steed 1988, pp. 400–2). An implicit notion of party families also informed Duverger's classic work on the comparison of parties and party systems; for example, during his discussion of party organization (1954, pp. 17–27), he related the relative willingness to adopt a branch (as opposed to a caucus) structure to differences between socialist parties, on the one hand ("The branch is a Socialist invention"), and "Conservative" and "Center" parties, on the other hand, with a third group consisting of "Catholic parties or parties with Fascist tendencies" (pp. 24, 27).

It was mainly in the 1980s, however, and in the more systematically developed comparisons of western European party politics then emerging, that a categorization by family was brought explicitly to the fore. In what remains the only single volume devoted to this theme, Seiler (1980; see also 1985, 1986) constructed a typology of what he termed the *famille politique*. Seiler based his

categories on Rokkan's earlier cleavage model and associated two distinct (and mutually opposed) party families with each of the four cleavages identified by Rokkan (Seiler 1980). Later, with the 1985 English translation of von Beyme's *Politische Parteien in Westeuropa* (1984), the notion of the party family gained more widespread prominence. This important study constructed several different taxonomies based on different criteria, but its most important classification is that of the *familles spirituelles*, based explicitly on the criterion of ideology (von Beyme 1985, pp. 29–158; see also Ware 1996, pp. 21–49). Like Seiler, von Beyme draws on Rokkan's cleavage model, even though his eventual classification of families differs markedly from Seiler's. The notion of the party family has since been further developed, sometimes explicitly though more often implicitly, in the recent literature on specific party groupings. This abundant literature, mostly comprising edited volumes, includes books on communist parties (e.g. McInnes 1975, Tannahill 1978, Timmermann 1979, Waller & Fennema 1988); social democratic parties or labor parties (e.g. Colomé 1992; Maravall et al 1991; Padgett & Paterson 1991; Paterson & Thomas 1977, 1986; Piven 1991; Waller et al 1994); Christian democratic parties (e.g. Caciagli et al 1992, Fogarty 1957, Hanley 1994, Irving 1979, Kalyvas 1996); agrarian parties (e.g. Gollwitzer 1977, Urwin 1980); conservative parties (e.g. Girvin 1988, Layton-Henry 1982, Morgan & Silvestri 1982); liberal parties (e.g. Steed 1982, Steed & Hearl 1985, Kirchner 1988); left-libertarian parties (e.g. Kitschelt 1988); regionalist parties (e.g. Seiler 1982, Urwin 1983, De Winter 1994); nationalist parties (e.g. Coakley 1992); racist parties (e.g. Husbands 1988, Elbers & Fennema 1993); extreme right parties (e.g. von Beyme 1988, Hainsworth 1992, Ignazi 1994, Merkl & Weinberg 1997); green parties (e.g. Florizoone 1985; Müller-Rommel 1989, 1993; Parkin 1989; Richardson & Rootes 1995); and various versions of right-wing populist parties (e.g. Betz 1994, Pfahl-Traughber 1994, Taggart 1996).

Much of this work has been focused primarily on the Western European experience, which still remains the core area for comparative party studies (Janda 1993). Nevertheless, several authors have claimed that the concept has validity beyond this limited geographic area (e.g. Duverger 1972, Ware 1996), and Seiler (1980, pp. 128–29) also attempted to include non-European democracies within his general classification. In addition, useful attempts have been made to apply the concept to Latin America (e.g. Alexander 1973, Manigat 1973) and, to a lesser extent, to Asia (e.g. Fukui 1985).

Although a plurality of political parties is a recent development in the new post-communist democracies of Eastern Europe, scholars have also applied the concept of the party family in this area. As might be expected, the results of this exercise prove ambiguous. On the one hand, it is sometimes argued that the major differences between the east and west in Europe have been virtually overcome, and that the political parties and party systems on both sides of the

former divide now increasingly resemble one another (e.g. Berglund & Dellenbrant 1991, Lane & Ersson 1996). As Hungarian political scientist Attila Ágh puts it, "The typology of ideological families was originally very arbitrary and misleading, but nowadays it is more and more correct and meaningful, not only because the theoretical and empirical analysis of the ECE [East Central European] parties has developed a lot, but primarily because these parties themselves have developed and changed a great deal" (1996, pp. 22–23). On the other hand, scholars have also sought to develop distinct classifications adapted to the particular features of post-communist democracy, generating categories of parties that bear little resemblance to those employed in the standard Western European comparisons (e.g. Waller 1996; see also von Beyme 1994, Meseznikov 1995). However, even though many of these scholars see the characteristics of post-communist party formation as sui generis, their approach in developing the new classifications often builds directly on the logic of Rokkan's cleavage model (see e.g. Kitschelt 1992, von Beyme 1994, Waller 1996).

THE DIFFERENT APPROACHES AND THEIR PROBLEMS

Although the notion of the party family, with the cross-national and cross-temporal similarities it implies, underlies much of the standard work on comparative party politics, it nevertheless remains one of the most under-theorized and least-specified approaches to the general classification of parties. Parties may be categorized and hence compared in a variety of ways, including, for example, their organizational structures or their location along some spatial dimension, such as the commonly accepted left-right scale. For both of these approaches, as well as for many other alternatives, the literature overflows with discussions of precisely how such classifications might best be understood and defined (e.g. Janda 1980, Katz & Mair 1992, Laver & Hunt 1992). Once party families come into play, however, classification becomes almost a matter of conventional wisdom, and there seems little need to spell out or explain the categorizations involved. Indeed, family groupings are often treated in practice as self-evident categories, requiring neither justification nor specification: To compare parties across space or time requires a prior classification, and some sort of (usually unspecified) shared identity or family presents the most obvious and simple means for this.

Partly because of this assumption, the conventional modes in which the concept of the party family is applied are both various and problematic. In general, four different but sometimes overlapping approaches can be distinguished in the literature: first, those that identify different party families in terms of the origins (and/or the sociology) of the parties concerned; second,

those that develop the classification in terms of the international federations or other transnational groupings to which the individual parties belong; third, those that seek similarities in party policy or even in party ideology, an approach usually employed within the voluminous literature on the formation of coalitions; and finally, those that simply look to the party name or label.

Origins and Sociology

The first of these criteria aims to group together parties "that mobilized in similar historical circumstances or with the intention of representing similar interests" (Gallagher et al 1995, p. 181; for an example that applies this reasoning to parties of the left, see Bartolini & Mair 1990a, pp. 42–43). This approach dates back to the classic study of Rokkan (1970), who based his categorization of parties on four "critical cleavages" that had resulted from the national and industrial revolutions: subject vs dominant culture; churches vs government; primary vs secondary economy; and workers vs employers or owners. Following von Beyme's (1985, pp. 23–24) reading, these divisions could be developed to identify 10 different party families or "ideological groups": liberals, conservatives, workers' parties, agrarian parties, regional parties, Christian parties, communist parties, fascist parties, protest parties, and ecological movements. Seiler (1980) used the same four critical cleavages to identify eight "political families": bourgeois parties, workers' parties, centralist parties, populist parties, Christian democrats, anticlerical parties, agrarian parties, and communist parties, noting that the cleavage between primary and secondary economy had as yet failed to generate an explicitly urban (as opposed to agrarian) alternative, and that the emergence of communist parties in the early twentieth century was primarily due to a "sub-cleavage" (p. 131). Seiler further suggested that individual parties might be allocated to one or another of these families on the basis of both a diachronic and synchronic analysis, first by looking back to the original conflict that had generated the party in question, and second by looking at the character of its contemporary electorate and at the nature of its affiliated interest associations (1980, p. 130; see also Seiler 1985, p. 81).

However problematic this approach may be in practice, not least because of the various parties' ever-shifting sociology, it does nevertheless enjoy the crucial advantage of deriving from a widely shared and comprehensive theoretical model that sets contemporary party distinctions within the broader patterns of European political development. In this sense it is firmly grounded, as the parties themselves are imputed to be. The main problems specifically associated with this approach are that its geographic application may be limited (it was developed primarily for Western Europe) and that time may render it increasingly inadequate. Thus, while this approach might have suited analyses of the

initial periods in which the now established parties began mobilizing support and contesting national elections, many of these actors have since changed in terms of their organizations, their ideologies, and even their electorates. Moreover, new parties have emerged in the latter part of the century that cannot easily be integrated within the original cleavage model. To be sure, there are scholars who would argue that not only new breeds of parties have emerged but also new cleavages, and hence who would incorporate the new developments within a revision of the old model, thus preserving the logic if not the specific content of this approach (see, for example, Ignazi 1992, Kitschelt & McGann 1995, Taggart 1995). Given that nearly a century of mass politics has elapsed in Western Europe since the initial freezing of cleavage structure, however, an approach that focuses exclusively on the origins of parties as the key to their contemporary classification risks neglecting more than it can offer.

Transnational Federations

The second criterion that is increasingly adopted within the scholarly literature is derived from actions by the parties themselves. It involves the international links that political parties establish officially in the so-called transnational federations. These federations exist at the global level, such as the Liberal International (LI); the continental level, such as the Asia-Pacific Socialist Organization; and the regional level, such as the Caribbean Democratic Union. Even stronger links exist between groups of parties in supranational institutions such as the Nordic Council and the European Parliament (see Jacobs 1989; see also Day 1988). In particular, the institution of direct elections to the European Parliament has stimulated increasing cooperation between like-minded parties in different European Union (EU) countries, as well as promoting the institutionalization of official party groups within the Parliament itself. The various Christian democratic parties have now been transformed officially at the EU level into a single "Euro-party," the European People's Party (EPP), with the various socialist and social democratic parties lagging not far behind (see Bardi 1994, Hix & Lord 1997). All these developments have combined to establish the criterion of international links as one of the most widely accepted standards by which to group individual parties into party families, especially at the EU level (e.g. Raschke 1978, Jacobs 1989; see also Hix & Lord 1997).

This approach enjoys the advantage of being straightforward and easy to apply, since the lists of (affiliated) members of these transnational organizations are normally publicly accessible (see Day 1988, Banks et al 1997). Moreover, this standard follows the party's own choices as to its cross-border links. Thus, the "growing inclination of political parties throughout the world to construct or join international organizations of like-minded formations" (Day 1988, p. ix) has made the applicability of this approach increasingly rele-

vant with regard to both the variety of party groups (such as the greens) and the number of countries (and hence the number of parties) involved.

Despite these advantages, however, the criterion is not as straightforward as is often assumed. First and foremost, not all parties are yet members of transnational federations. In fact, this approach is mainly useful when applied to the older families, such as the Christian democrats, the socialists (and social democrats), and the liberals, each of which has federations at all levels—unlike, say, the conservatives or the greens, which cooperate only at some limited levels. Moreover, while agrarian, regional, and extreme right parties do sometimes build transnational federations at one level or another (as in the European Parliament), their capacity to do so depends on the willingness of the individual parties involved, as well as on the size of their representation. A second major problem is that the classification of parties depends on which transnational federation is selected. Some parties, for example, are members of different federations at the same level, as is the case with the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the Slovak Christian Democratic Movement, which are members of both the Christian Democratic International and the conservative International Democratic Union. Other parties are members of a federation at only one level; for instance, the Danish Social-Liberal Party is a member of the Liberal International (LI), but not of the group of European Liberals, Democrats and Reformers (ELDR), while the Portuguese Social Democratic Party is a member of the ELDR but not of the LI. Finally, and perhaps inevitably, there is often little consistency over time in individual membership within the party groups, especially in the case of small and new parties. The Italian Northern League (LN), for instance, was a member of the regionalist Rainbow Coalition of the European Parliament (1989–1994) before moving to the Euroliberals. The single Member of the European Parliament of the Danish Center Democrats even switched from the socialists through the conservatives to the Christian democrats (Jacobs 1989, p. 531). In addition, families such as the extreme right organized party groupings between 1984 and 1994 (although with changing individual member parties), but not since then, despite the increasing presence in the European Parliament of such extreme right parties as the French National Front, the Belgian Flemish Block, and the Italian National Alliance.

Policy and Ideology

The third criterion often adopted, based on the congruence of the policies and/or ideologies that are professed or even pursued by the parties, is probably the most difficult to delineate. There are a variety of different sources for such classifications, including expert judgments, legislative behavior, mass survey data, and formal policy statements (see Laver & Schofield 1990, Appendix B; Laver & Hunt 1992, pp. 31–34).

Among these, an approach that is increasingly employed, especially in coalition studies, is the so-called expert study. Political parties (or their leaders) are classified by "experts" in the various countries on either a left-right scale (e.g. Morgan 1976, Castles & Mair 1984, Huber & Inglehart 1995) or on various issue positions (e.g. Laver & Hunt 1992). Although these data are not generated explicitly for this purpose, they can be usefully applied to the task of identifying various party families and classifying individual parties within these groups (see, for example, Ware 1996, pp. 27–43).

The advantage of such an approach is that a variety of easily accessible and applicable data sets have recently been created and published, and these appear particularly well suited for quantitative cross-national analysis. This also constitutes one of the main problems, however. The data sets are necessarily created through the use of similar scales for different political systems, thereby assuming, perhaps naively, that the same policy means the same thing in these different contexts. Given that much of what individual parties do is constrained by the logistics of the system of competition in which they are located, what appears as a cross-national party similarity may therefore turn out to be a cross-national systemic similarity. Indeed, as Seiler (1985, p. 81) forcefully argued, particularly regarding any criterion based on the implementation of policies, the risk is that what emerges from such applications is a classification of countries rather than of parties. The comparability of the data involved may therefore prove to have been an artifact of the method of comparison.

Partly in order to avoid these problems, a parallel strategy was adopted that has come to be known as the party manifesto approach, in which the individual parties are classified and then grouped together on the basis of the policy positions they enunciate in their regular election programs. This approach was originally developed for the British case by Robertson (1976) and was subsequently extended as a cross-national research project under the direction of Budge et al (1987). Two major advantages were seen to accrue from this approach. First, the classification and grouping of parties derived from what the parties themselves had chosen to emphasize in their election programs rather than from some position that had to be imputed to them by an external researcher. Second, by analyzing election programs over relatively long periods of time, the analysts hoped to tap into a more fundamental alignment than might be derived from simple snapshot data. In other words, the approach enjoyed a greater chance of revealing the parties' more long-term ideological predispositions. It has also proved popular within the scholarly literature, not least because of its cross-national character and its easy accessibility in terms of quantitative analyses. The party manifesto approach has therefore been applied widely and frequently, albeit principally by the members of the productive research group directly associated with gathering and updating the data

(see, for example, Budge & Keman 1990, Laver & Budge 1992, Klingemann et al 1994).

As ever, there are disadvantages and limitations associated with this approach. First, as is true of almost all existing attempts to classify parties within some common comparative framework, both the focus and the terms of reference are inevitably skewed toward the Western European experience. Moreover, in determining the coding categories with which the various election programs were to be analyzed, the project was also inevitably oriented toward the issue emphases of the older and bigger party families. Second, because the demands of consistency and comparability have required strict adherence to the initial coding scheme, the issues and policies that are defined continue to be tied to the categories deemed appropriate at the beginning of the 1980s, when the initial project was devised. The result is that all subsequent developments have to be squeezed into an issue profile that may no longer adequately pertain, a problem that becomes particularly acute when attempting to use these data to group together some of the newer and smaller parties that have emerged in recent years. Finally, although the diachronic strategy adopted in the manifesto analysis makes it more likely that scholars can tap into the long-term ideological predispositions of the parties involved, the data nevertheless remain tied to the exigencies of short-term electoral competition. Party manifestos and election programs may reflect underlying ideological commitments, but they are also explicitly designed in the context of election campaigns in order to publicize and clarify potentially appealing policy commitments, and it is these that remain contingent. Indeed, it is striking to note how, in certain cases, policy polarization as reflected by manifesto emphases appears to vary inversely with mass ideological polarization as measured by left-right self-placement (see Bartolini & Mair 1990b, pp. 6–8). There is also the danger that the emphases within election programs may hinge exclusively on what may be called the "dimension of competition," neglecting the crucial information that would be more in evidence within the various "domains of identification" (Sani & Sartori 1983, pp. 329–35; see also Mair 1987, pp. 142–47). In general, therefore, despite its attempts to go beyond these limits, the party manifesto project approach appears better suited to analyzing policy rather than ideology (see Laver & Schofield 1990).

There have in fact been few significant attempts to group parties according to ideological as opposed to policy-based criteria. For even though ideology is often traditionally cited as the basis for distinguishing between party families (see for example Seiler 1980, von Beyme 1985, Ware 1996), there is rarely any specification of the differences among these ideological groupings, nor of how precisely the individual parties themselves may be so categorized. Moreover, since comparative studies of party ideology require a comprehensive approach, and necessarily deal with a much greater variety of party literature,

they also prove more time consuming and conceptually demanding. Indeed, up to now, comparative analyses in this field have been limited in terms of both the numbers of parties and the numbers of polities investigated, although, at least in some recent analyses of the extreme right party family (Gardberg 1993; Mudde 1995, 1998), they do suggest an approach that might be usefully extended across the political spectrum.

The notion of ideology is difficult to define and to specify with any precision. Nonetheless, what we have in mind here is the characterization of a belief system that goes right to the heart of a party's identity and is therefore more likely to address the question of what parties are, rather than, as is the case with the policy approaches, the question of what parties do. To adopt the terms used by Sani & Sartori (1983, pp. 329–35) in their analysis of electoral competition, we view ideology as going beyond the characterization of parties simply by their dimensions of competition and as delving instead into their domains of identification. In this sense, and in analytic terms, the ideology of a party is comparable to the origin of a party because both attempt to uncover that which defines the party in the first place. Ideology and origin may also be usefully linked together in a parallel strategy aimed at analyzing the continued relevance and coherence of the whole notion of party families, as we suggest at the end of this review.

Name

It is tempting to believe that many of the problems identified above can be avoided by simply using the party name or label as the appropriate criterion. The assumption here is that the party itself is the best judge of its own ideological identity and that it will have reflected this identity in the name or label under which it chooses to contest elections.[1] Von Beyme (1985, p. 3), for example, based his allocation of individual parties to the different families exclusively on two criteria, of which the name of the party was the more important (and when this was not satisfactory, the voters' perception of party programs and ideological positions was added).

At first sight this seems a very straightforward and self-evident criterion, especially applicable to "families of the left" such as the greens and the communists. Indeed, the ideal type in this respect are many of the small Trotskyist parties, which usually defined themselves as socialist workers' parties. In practice, however, problems arise even within the left, particularly because os-

[1]This seems to have been also the idea of Michael Smart, who in his research note in Gordon Smith's *Politics in Western Europe* presented one of the most elaborated overviews to date of the parliamentary strength of "party groupings" in Western Europe. The parties are classified according to 11 "streams," which "represent the parties' self-images or overt historical traditions rather than any ostensibly objective criterion of support" (Smart 1972, p. 382).

tensibly similar parties on the center left have chosen a variety of labels, including labor, socialist, social democratic, and so on (see Padgett & Paterson 1991, pp. 2–3).[2] This problem has been further compounded in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union by the frantic haste with which various western communist parties have sought to find seemingly more acceptable labels, including the Democratic Party of the Left (Partito Democratico della Sinistra in Italy), the Party of Democratic Socialism (Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus in Germany), and the Left Party (Vänsterpartiet in Sweden). Problems multiply even more obviously on the right of the party spectrum. Labels such as "liberal" or "people's" conceal a variety of very different strands of partisan ideology, while "center" has come to be embraced both by former agrarian parties on the one hand (as in Sweden and Finland) and by extreme right parties on the other hand (as in the Netherlands). In yet other cases, particularly when attempts are being made to tap into an appeal as the party of the nation, the labels are strictly sui generis, as in the case of both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in Ireland, the Rassemblement pour la République in France, and Forza Italia in Italy.

GENERIC PROBLEMS

Beyond the specific problems associated with each of the above approaches, at least three overarching problems confront all attempts to classify parties according to their family identity. The first of these is determining precisely how many party families there should be. Most work in this field agrees at least on the principal groups that need to be incorporated, that is the communist family, the socialist or social democratic family, the Christian democratic family, the liberal family, and so on. Beyond these core families, however, confusion often reigns. Some authors are inclined to distinguish between a new left family and a green/ecology family, for example (e.g. Gallagher et al 1995, pp. 187–90), whereas another reading includes both under the heading of "left-libertarianism" (e.g. Kitschelt 1988) or "new politics" (e.g. Poguntke 1993, Taggart 1996). Most authors identify a distinct conservative family (e.g. von Beyme 1985, pp. 46–59; Steed & Hearl 1985), while others prefer "secular conservative" in order to distinguish such parties from the more religiously

[2]DW Rawson (1969), who developed a pioneering analysis of the life span of the "labor" family in the late 1960s, defined a labor party as one "to which trade unions are affiliated" (p. 313)—a definition which, incidentally, would also have incorporated many of the continental European Christian democratic parties—and noted that this definition coincided with "the presence or absence of the word 'Labour' in party titles." However, he also then added that "[u]nfortunately for consistency, the Dutch Labour Party adopted that title in 1945, just when it ceased to be a Labour party by this definition" (p. 314).

based right (e.g. Gallagher et al 1995, pp. 194–96). Confusion also characterizes definitions of the liberal family, which is sometimes taken to include two separate sub-groupings on the left and the right (e.g. Smith 1988), and which, on the right-hand side of the political spectrum, may overlap with the secular conservative family. The problems are particularly acute in the case of regional and sub-national parties, which are sometimes grouped together as a separate family on the basis of their limited territorial appeal (e.g. Urwin 1983), but which include within their ranks a remarkable diversity of ideological identities (ranging from the Belgian Flemish Block on the far right of the political spectrum to the Irish Sinn Féin on the far left), thus suggesting that the group might be more usefully disaggregated and dispersed among the other competing families.

Part of this problem is the uncertainty surrounding the criteria that should be used to distinguish between party families in the first place, and whether these should be historical, organizational (in the sense of transnational linkages), or ideological.[3] In part it also stems from confusion over the nature of the parties themselves; McHale (1983), for instance, distinguishes between six ideological party families (Christian democrat, communist, socialist, fascist/corporatist, Trotskyist, and Maoist) and seven other interest-group party families (agrarian, national minority, fiscal reformist, trade and business, ecologist, women's, and miscellaneous).

The second (and related) general problem confronting these approaches is that of distinguishing precise borders among the different families. Depending on the number of families identified, as well as the criteria used to differentiate between them, the most obvious border problems are likely to be (*a*) those between the conservatives, on the one hand, and right-wing populists or right-wing extremists and nationalists (when using the criterion of ideology), on the other; and (*b*) those between communists and socialists (when using the criterion of origin) or between Christian democrats and conservatives (when using the criterion of transnational federations). Border problems also arise around the classification of individual parties that sit uneasily between liberalism and the extreme right [such as the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ)], or many of the former communist parties, such as the German Party of Democratic Socialism

[3]One of the best illustrations of this problem is offered by the case of the Italian Lega Nord (LN). By the historical criteria of Rokkan, the LN would clearly fall within the regionalist party family. By the organizational criterion of transnational linkages, however, the party would currently constitute part of the liberal family, because it is a member of the Euroliberal fraction in the European Parliament. Finally, applying the ideological criterion would require a discussion of whether the party falls into the family of the extreme right (e.g. Pfahl-Traughber 1994), or that of right-wing populism (Betz 1994, Taggart 1995), or into yet another variety of right-wing politics (Ignazi 1992).

or the Italian Party of the Democratic Left, both of which would now probably find their best (ideological) fit within the socialist group.

The third general problem that confronts all these approaches, most obviously in the case of the transnational federations, is how to deal with the inevitable instability and flux. If federation membership is the principal criterion for the allocation of parties to a particular party family, for example, and if the purpose of the analysis is, say, to compare the electoral strengths of the different families in various countries, then a significant part of the temporal variation found might be due simply to the status of the parties involved rather than to any other intrinsic development. Thus it might be noted that liberalism is in decline in Austria, even though this might have simply resulted from the formal departure of the Austrian FPÖ from the liberal family, or that it has made unexpected Italian gains, simply because the LN has exchanged its membership of the Rainbow fraction in the European Parliament for that of the liberals (as it did in 1994). Such chopping and changing clearly offers an ad hoc and unstable basis for systematic cross-national and cross-temporal comparison.

TWO SUGGESTIONS

All this indicates that we should be both wary and precise in defining what constitutes a party family and in determining what family links exist. In fact, we would suggest that only two approaches be adopted and that these be developed in parallel rather than as alternatives.

First, families of parties can and should be identified on the basis of their shared origins, that is, appropriately enough, on the basis of their shared "genetic" identity. This also reflects Rokkan's approach. Thus parties that developed in different countries out of the same general movement (e.g. workers' parties, farmers' parties, religious parties), or, following Rokkan, parties that were mobilized along the same "side" of the same cleavage, would then each constitute a separate party family (see also Seiler 1980).

This approach is best suited to analyses relating to the long-term development of political parties, such as those dealing with their relative electoral performance, access to government, and so on. It taps into what parties are rather than what parties do (Mair 1997, pp. 20–24). More importantly, any classification employing this approach necessarily disregards subsequent transformations in the parties involved, building the categories according to how the parties began rather than how they later developed. The classification of the individual parties therefore always remains stable with no room for reclassification at a subsequent stage. A socialist party is a socialist party is a socialist party, regardless of the extent to which its ideology, policies, or electoral base might later be modified. That said, it is certainly of interest in analyzing the fate of particular families to see how they may later fragment or become inco-

herent (whether in terms of ideology/program or strategy), so that, for example, the only thing continuing to define them as a family is that which tied them together at their origins. Subsequent incoherence might also be evident if parties with a shared genetic origin later threw in their lot with different types of allies—agrarians allying with social democrats at one stage and with bourgeois parties at a later stage, for example, or some agrarians going in one direction while their erstwhile siblings in another country went in an alternative direction. Indeed, by adopting such a strict definition of family membership, and by testing for subsequent coherence, whether in ideological or strategic terms, we could then measure the extent to which the whole notion of the party family continues to be meaningful.

The classification of newly emerging parties is also relevant here. On the one hand, a number of new parties, such as the greens or even the extreme right, could be seen to constitute a new party family on the basis of shared origins or shared genetic identity. In other words, with time, we might anticipate an expansion in the numbers of identifiable party families. On the other hand, our intuition suggests that quite a few newly emerging parties might prove sui generis, with little or nothing in their genetic makeup to suggest an equivalence beyond the borders of their own respective polities. The Progressive Democrats in Ireland might be cited as one such party, for example, as might Democrats 66 in the Netherlands. Indeed, what could be most interesting and telling in this regard is the extent to which polities become increasingly characterized by the presence of new parties of this genre, a development that would suggest that patterns of party formation in the late twentieth century are undergoing a process of fragmentation, localization, and particularization.

Our second suggestion is that families be characterized on the basis of their ideological (as opposed to simply policy) profile—that is, again, on the basis of what they are rather than what they do. While an overlap between ideology and origin is inevitable, it is by no means invariant over time. In the agrarian family, for example, a number of parties went on to develop a centrist ideology (especially in the Scandinavian cases), whereas others moved in a distinctly right-wing direction (as, for instance, in the case of the Dutch Farmers' party). As noted above, the notion of a party's ideological profile is very different from that of its more short-term policy profile, since the latter is too "soft," too circumstantial and contingent, to offer a stable reference point for cross-national research. However, taking a lesson from research on policy positions, the analysis of ideology must be framed in terms that can "travel" cross-nationally (Sartori 1970, Rose 1991). This is one of the more difficult aspects of this strategy, because the analysis of ideology requires a more comprehensive and in-depth approach than is normally applied to the analysis of policy positions, and it requires the assessment of a wider variety of documentary sources (including, for example, programs of principle and party papers). In

this sense, it is also a more time-consuming and intensive strategy (for a useful example, see Mudde 1998) that may incline the researcher toward more case-specific interpretations, thus discouraging comparison and generalization. That said, these problems might be largely overcome by projects in which different international experts analyze the ideology of individual parties on the basis of some shared "ideological checklist" (similar to the successful policy-based party manifesto project). This would help guarantee not only an in-depth study of individual party ideology by experts, valuable in itself, but also a high degree of similarity in the use of more complex ideological features. Such projects would provide a very robust foundation for cross-national comparisons.

In contrast to the classification of parties on the basis of their shared origins, a classification based on ideology necessarily allows parties to move from one category to another over time and also allows the researcher to group together parties that may have developed out of very different sets of circumstances (for example, Christian democratic and conservative parties). In fact, identifying such a movement from one category to another over time is crucial, because it can reveal that the classification itself is time-bound and constrained and because a grouping of parties at time t can look very different at time $t + 1$. This is interesting in itself and can afford insight into the dynamics of party competition. However, unlike the genetic approach outlined above, this ideological approach is not well suited to an analysis of the long-term development of party families, except insofar as it can be shown that, with time, a particular family (as defined by ideology) becomes more pervasive—for example, by becoming more electorally successful and/or more fertile (having an increasing number of family members).

In sum, these two strategies reflect two different but equivalent orientations to the study of party families. The genetic approach is best suited to a more diachronic analysis, in which the fortunes of particular families can be traced over time and in which both the contrasts and the continuities in long-term alignments can be traced most effectively. The ideological approach, on the other hand, is best suited to a more synchronic approach, in which the differences between countries at any one time can be highlighted and even explained. Both strategies should be pursued in parallel, however, since it is only through the crossing of both sets of boundaries that the changing identities of parties can be properly brought to light.

CONCLUSION

The core of the classification of party families rests on the uncovering of a shared political goal that, in turn, harks back to the parties' core identities. It tells us what parties are. Whether this goal be reflected in the championing of

the rights and interests of particular groups of citizens (as in the case of the genetic approach) or in the pursuit of a shared belief system (as in the case of the ideological approach) is in this sense secondary. Indeed, it is probable that all the approaches discussed above share in this definition; that is, they all seek to identify a group of parties with a common political goal, even though this search is eventually elaborated in contrasting ways. Nevertheless, some of these approaches are inadequate in this regard, in that they fail to delve back into the parties' core identities. The criterion of membership of transnational federations, for example, though easily applicable, suffers from the problem that many of these federations accept parties too easily, being more interested in the power of numbers than in the power of ideological homogeneity. The policy approach suffers from being too dependent on national influences and contingent political opportunities; party policy choices are only partly guided by the political goal in question.

What we propose, therefore, are two approaches that are designed for two distinct but equivalent research questions—the one prioritizing what parties are, based on genetic origin; the other prioritizing what parties are, based on ideological profile. Moreover, it is likely that the most fruitful findings of all would derive from the combination—or, better still, the cross-tabulating—of both, and from an understanding of precisely which genetic identities are more susceptible to ideological change and regrouping.

Neither approach wholly evades the difficulties involved in any such classification, including the problem of determining how many party families to distinguish and that of locating the borders between the different families. As with any such classification, the only effective solution is to remain sensitive to the original conceptual definition and to the properties associated with the initial categorization.

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