

Party systems and political participation *

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In Western industrialized democracies, a relationship has generally been found between the social class position of an individual and the extent of his political participation. The examination of the relevant research reveals that this association exists, for example, in the United States, Japan, Germany, Great Britain, France and Finland (1). The first studies were only concerned with voting, but later research examined a wider range of behavior, including discussion of public issues, petitioning political leaders, making monetary contributions, attendance at political meetings, campaigning and party membership.

There is some indication, however, that characteristics of national societies might affect the strength of the association between socio-economic position and extent of political participation. Rokkan and Campbell (2) found that the level of formal education and the level of occupational position were more closely associated with the level of political activity in the United States than in Norway.

The authors explain their findings in terms of the differences between the American and the Norwegian party systems, specifically in terms of the extent to which they are organized along class lines. In Norway, distinct labor and farmer parties exist and there are links between those and economic organizations such as trade-unions. The latter constitute specific channels of recruitment into the political parties for the lower strata.

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(1) See for instance Seymour Martin LIPSET, *Political Man* (New York : Doubleday, 1963) ; Leister MILBRATH, *Political Participation* (Chicago : Rand McNALLY, 1965).

(2) Stein ROKKAN and Angus CAMPBELL, « Norway and the United States of America », *International Social Science Journal*, XII (1960), pp. 69-99.

To this, one might add another factor. The failure of lower-status groups to participate in voluntary associations has been widely documented : they often lack the educational background and particularly the verbal skills to feel at ease in organizational situations (3). Lower-status involvement can thus be expected to increase as the organization concerned becomes more class homogeneous.

By providing roles unique to the working-class, a status distinct party system such as the Norwegian offers better opportunities and stronger incentives for active participation within the lower strata than a system of two socially and economically heterogeneous parties such as the American.

But a different approach to the question of the relationship between class based party systems and class differences in political activity throws light on the paradoxical character of Rokkan and Campbell's findings. Presumably, the degree of class homogeneity of parties is not independent of other features of the social structure. It can be expected to vary with the degree of class salience in society, i.e., with the extent to which class lines are distinct, social class considerations are relevant to attitudes and behavior, and social class position is likely to affect the individual's life chances. The degree of class salience in society is positively related to the class homogeneity of parties (4). But one might reason that the more class differentiated a society is, the more a remoteness from power leads to a low motivation to act on the part of the low status holders so that, even if the opportunities for participation are present, the low motivation results in little actual participation.

Consequently, we have found of interest to study further the possible bearing of class-polarized politics on the relationship between social status and political participation by widening the comparison to other countries. We have chosen the United States, Great Britain and Germany as data about individuals' participation in these nations are available in the form of Survey research data from the Almond-Verba five-nation Study (5).

The purpose of this paper is to test on these countries the following hypothesis :

(3) See for instance James Q. WILSON, *The Amateur Democrat : Club Politics in Three Cities* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 269.

(4) This relationship has been documented in Robert R. ALFORD, *Party and Society* (Chicago : Rand McNally, 1963).

(5) For the first analysis performed on these data see Gabriel ALMOND and Sidney VERBA, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1963). For description of the methods employed and the sampling problems, see chapter II and appendices A and B of that work.

« The more class homogeneous are the political parties, the lower is the correlation over individuals between political participation and class related characteristics. »

We will first examine in the three nations the association over individuals between political participation and social class position. The following two sections will deal respectively with the class homogeneity of the political parties and with the characteristics of the parties likely to affect the lower stratum's political participation. With these data in hand, we will then be in a position to see whether some support is provided for the above-stated hypothesis, i.e. whether the ranking of countries according to the degree of class homogeneity of parties is similar to the ranking according to the strength of the correlation between political participation and class characteristics.

I. Political participation and social class.

A. *The Measures* (6).

We will show here the results obtained with two measures of political participation. The first indicator is an index of political activity which classifies the respondents into non-voters, only voters and organizationally actives (7). However, one may reason that actions are associated with attitudes and that differences in attitudes exist simultaneously with differences in levels of activity. Then, if the correlation between political activity and class characteristics of individuals is found lower where the political parties are more class homogeneous, one would expect the correlation between attitudes showing participation or involvement in politics and class characteristics of individuals to be lower also. We will thus investigate an attitudinal dimension of participation : the normative attitude toward participation, what people believe they should do (8). The indicator used for social class position is the level of formal education.

(6) The results obtained with other measures of political participation and of social class position together with methodological considerations can be found in the paper on which this article is based.

(7) In Great Britain and Germany, the actives are defined as the party members. In the United States — where there are no party members as such —, the actives are sorted out on the basis of the following question : « Have you ever been active in a political campaign, that is, have you ever worked for a candidate or party, contributed money, or done any other active work ? »

(8) The Almond-Verba data include some information on this point as the following question was asked : « We know that the ordinary person has many problems that take his time. In view of this, what part do you think the ordinary person ought to play in the local affairs of his town or district ? » The respondents who spontaneously suggested some kind of participation on the political side of local affairs are considered here as normatively oriented towards political participation.

B. The Results

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Differences between the three countries studied appear quite clearly in the relationship between organizational activity and social class (table I.) The United States shows a much higher relationship than the two European countries. And, in Germany, the degree of association tends to zero.

TABLE I
Social class and political participation

Index of organizational activity. Distribution by educational (in percent).

Level of Education	Non-voters	Only Voters	Organiza- tionally Actives	N = 100 %
Great Britain :				
Primary or less . . .	10.4	74.3	15.3	(556)
Some secondary . . .	12.7	68.9	18.4	(267)
Some university . . .	10.5	57.9	31.6	(19)
Germany :				
Primary or less . . .	7.6	86.7	5.7	(511)
Some secondary . . .	8.2	85.9	5.9	(85)
Some university . . .	11.1	83.3	5.6	(18)
United States :				
Primary or less . . .	35.0	54.1	10.8	(314)
Some secondary . . .	16.7	65.3	18.0	(354)
Some university . . .	13.0	48.1	38.9	(162)

Proportions of respondents normatively oriented toward participation at the local level, at each educational level (in percent).

Level of Education	Great Britain	Germany	United States
Primary or less	22.8	14.8	16.5
Some secondary	28.9	24.2	28.0
Some university	29.2	26.9	39.9

The structure of the relationship also appears to vary from country to country. Two types of behavior have been taken into consideration in this index : voting and organizational activity per se. Voting explains a larger proportion of the relationship in the United States where the percentage of non-voters in the lowest status category is above 30 percent. The level of organizational activity also varies more with social class in the United States than in Great Britain or especially in Germany where there is no such relation.

As for as the participation norm is concerned, the United States displays again a greater degree of association than the European countries. But

the order between Germany and Great Britain is reversed : in the latter country, the correlation is quite low.

Thus, the two measures used do not allow a clear ranking of the European countries on the strength of association between social class and political participation. Yet, in both cases, we have seen that the correlation is higher in the United States than in either of the European countries. Had we not been limited by space, we could have shown that similar results obtain with other indicators of political participation.

Let us now turn to some aspects of the social bases of politics.

II. Class homogeneity of political parties.

In this section, we will examine, for each country, the importance of class as a line of cleavage in politics.

A simple way to assess the class homogeneity of a party is to examine the proportion of its following coming from the different social strata. And the extent to which manual and non-manual strata divide in their support for political parties can be summarized in the simple numerical « index of class voting » (9).

A. *The British Parties.*

Great Britain is characterized by a two party system : in the 1959 (10) elections, the Conservative Party gained 49.3 percent of the votes and the Labour Party 43.8 percent ; the Liberal Party vote was only 5.9 percent (11).

Social class is the main social basis of politics in Great Britain. This appears clearly in the Almond and Verba data : the higher the occupational status, the higher the proportion of the population which identifies with the Conservative Party and the lower the proportion which identifies with the Labour Party. The Liberal Party draws its followers more equally from all social levels. The degree to which politics is polarized along class lines can be summarized by the index of class voting which in this case is 37.5 (Table II).

(9) It is computed by subtracting the percentage of persons in non-manual occupations voting for left parties from the percentage of persons in manual occupations voting for left parties. Farm occupations are excluded from this index. See ALFORD, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

(10) The data presented in the following sections are, as far as possible, relative to a period close to the time at which the Almond and Verba study was conducted (1959) rather than up-to-date.

(11) Computed from Jean BLONDEL, *Voters, Parties and Leaders : The Social Fabric of British Politics* (Baltimore : Penguin Books, 1963), p. 81.

TABLE II
 Percentage of expressed party preferences by occupational group (1959)

Occupation	Conservative	Labour	Liberal	N = 100 %
Manual	30.2	60.6	9.1	(484)
Non-manual	67.0	23.1	9.8	(255)
Index of class voting .		37.5		

Yet the British party system is not a mere reflection of the social stratification structure. For, although the Labour Party is mainly a working class party with more than 80 percent of its base coming from manual strata, it does not command all the preferences of the blue collar workers. The Conservative Party, while mainly a middle class party, has an important working class base : 44 percent of its following is blue collar.

The paramount importance of social class position in determining party preference is highlighted in a study by Janowitz and Segal. Analyzing the variance in party affiliation in a total of 3,826 cases, they found that the next most important basis of divergences in party affiliation after social class position was the size of household within the working class. No other variable included in the surveys to which they had access increased the amount of explained variance by one percent or more (12).

B. *The German Parties.*

A two party system prevails in Great Britain, while Germany is only progressing in that direction. Its parliamentary life has been characterized by a reduction in the number of parties : votes go increasingly to the Christian Democratic Union - and its Bavarian counterpart, the Christian Social Union - the Social Democratic Party, and the Free Democratic Party. In the legislative elections of 1957 and 1961 the three parties gained 90 percent and 94 percent of the votes (13). In 1957 the CDU obtained 50 percent of the votes, the SPD 32 percent, the FDP 8 percent, and the German Party (DP) 3 percent (14).

(12) Morris JANOWITZ and David R. SEGAL, *Social Cleavage and Party Affiliation : Germany, Great Britain and the United States* (Unpublished paper, University of Chicago : Center for Social Organization Studies, 1967), p. 20.

(13) Alfred GROSSER, *The Federal Republic of Germany : a Concise History* (New York : Praeger, 1964), p. 49.

(14) Uwe U. KITZINGER, *German Electoral Politics, a Study of the 1957 Campaign* (London : Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 281). We will not consider the other tiny parties to which the affiliation has not been investigated in the survey.

A second essential difference between the party systems of the two countries is the existence in Germany of a Christian Democratic party which appeals largely to religious loyalties and to predispositions created by religious identifications.

Yet the existence of a socialist party and of conservative parties, FDP and DP, points to the importance of social position in determining political affiliation. On the whole, the lower the social class position, the greater the likelihood to choose the SPD. If the occupations are divided into manual and non-manual (table III), one can see that, in 1959, the status polarization was lower in Germany than in Great Britain: the index of class voting is 29,1.

TABLE III

Percentage of expressed party preferences by occupational group (1959)

Occupation	CDU	SPD	FDP/DP	N = 100 %
Manual	41.9	55.6	2.5	(277)
Non-manual	57.3	26.5	16.2	(185)
Index of class voting		29.1		

Nearly three quarters of the following of the SPD comes from manual strata; 56 percent of the manual workers who express a party preference choose the SPD and 42 percent choose the CDU. The blue collar following of the CDU is 42 percent, hardly less than that of the British Conservative Party; the class composition of the CDU's following closely resembles that of the electorate. The bourgeois character of the FDP and the DP is very clear; only 2 percent of the working class prefer them to the two large parties.

As has been suggested above, religious bases play an important role in German politics; they cut across the basic occupational cleavages. Although the CDU attempts to be interdenominational, it is preferred by 63 percent of the Catholics and only 39 percent of the Protestants. The higher appeal of the CDU to the Catholics exists for both occupational groups.

Such social bases correspond to the appeals of the parties. The CDU, as a Christian democratic party, is the locus of heterogeneous tendencies and has, among others, an organized and vocal trade union wing which prevents the SPD from having the monopoly of representing working class interests. This, combined with the lack of sympathy between the SPD and the churches creates a situation very different from the British one: a religious worker, dissatisfied by the conservative center course taken by the CDU, might nevertheless remain with it. Beside the two

large parties, the FDP, a liberal party, appeals to the educated bourgeoisie and to the non-religious, its distinctive stands being anti-marxist and anti-clerical (15).

C. *The American Parties.*

The two American parties do not take very distinctive stands, but try to appeal to as many groups as possible. They are, nevertheless, associated in the minds of the electors with different socio-economic groups : the Democratic Party with the lower-income groups, the Republican Party with the rich (16). This image corresponds roughly to the tendencies which appear in the relationship between party identification and occupation.

Table IV shows that the index of class voting is 17.2, a level well below the German one.

TABLE IV
Percentage of expressed party preferences by occupational group (1959)

Occupation	Democrats	Republicans	N = 100 %
Manual	69.4	30.4	(356)
Non-manual	52.2	47.8	(312)
Index of class voting . . .	17.2		

The social class distinctiveness of the « left » party is also the lowest of the three countries : 60 percent of the following of the Democratic Party is blue collar, although as many as 69 percent of the working class prefer it to the Republican Party.

Regional differences are the most important element which prevents political affiliation to be defined purely according to social class lines. In particular, the South of the United States displays a distinctive pattern: « Southern politics is a one party politics dominated by extremely conservative elements which distort the national pattern by introducing a right bias within the Democratic Party.» (17).

D. *Conclusion.*

Having presented the main elements pertaining to the status polarization of politics in the three countries under investigation, we can now

(15) Juan LINZ, *The Social Bases of West German Politics* (Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation : Columbia University, 1959), pp. 52 ff., pp. 72 ff.

(16) Angus CAMPBELL *et al.*, *The American Voter* (New York : John Wiley, 1960), p. 36.

(17) ALFORD, *op. cit.*, pp. 232-234.

form an idea of the extent to which they differ in the salience of class in their political structures. The measures clearly point to a lower status distinctiveness in the United States than in the two European countries. A greater class homogeneity of parties seems to exist in Great Britain, than in Germany, but this is less sharp.

III. Parties and the political participation of the working class.

Rokkan and Campbell have argued that, where politics is polarized along class lines, specific opportunities for political participation are offered to the working class. This section briefly examines this question in Great Britain, Germany and the United States. It concentrates on the types of political participation and the channels of recruitment existing in the different parties. Finally, the social background of the parliamentary representatives provides a major test of the existence of the link assumed by Rokkan and Campbell between the degree of class distinctiveness of parties and the availability of unique roles for the working class.

A. *The British Parties.*

The British parties are clearly mass parties (18) : the ratio of members to voters is 57 percent in the Labour Party, 13 percent in the Conservative Party (19). Yet these two parties differ in a number of respects (20). The main difference stems from the origin of their mass organizations. The Conservative Party, once oriented exclusively toward the middle class, had to open its organization to the masses in order to adjust to the successive extensions of suffrage, especially after the Reform Act of 1867 (21). As a result, it has now a strong network of constituency associations which provide contact points with its large membership. The Labour Party was created by trade unions and diverse socialist societies, and the former retain a paramount importance in the organization. Thus, in contrast to the Conservative Party, which admits only direct members, there are two categories of members in the Labour Party. Trade unionists provide the bulk of the membership : by the

(18) The now familiar distinction between cadre and mass party was devised by Maurice DUVERGER in his *Political Parties* (New York : John Wiley, 1966), chapters 1 and 2.

(19) Computed from the figures given by BLONDEL, *op. cit.*, pp. 69, 90.

(20) The following information is based on : G. CARTER, *The Government of the United Kingdom* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962), pp. 41, 45 ; BLONDEL, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

(21) R.T. MCKENZIE, *British Political Parties* (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1955), p. 146.

end of 1960, they comprised about 5.5 million of an estimated 6.3 million members. But, at the constituency level, the Conservative Party has a larger direct membership (2.8 millions) than the Labour Party.

Thus, the British system does provide unique channels into politics to the working class through the trade unions and the mass organization of a party 80 percent of whose followers are blue collar. The resulting important political participation of the lower occupational status-holders appears in the very different social background of M.P.'s representing the two main parties. In 1951, 45 % of the Labour members of the House of Commons were rank and file workers against 4.5 % of the Conservative members (22).

B. *The German Parties.*

If, in Great Britain, trade unions are integrated into the Labour Party, the solution chosen in Germany for the relationship between unions and political parties is at the other extreme. Officially, the trade unions, grouped in the *Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund*, are independent of the political parties. On the whole, the DGB has maintained its non-party character. Many trade union officials belong to the SPD, however, thereby creating a socialist climate of opinion in their unions (23).

The parties differ much more in their organization than they do in Great Britain and are influenced in this respect by the federal character of the political system. The CDU is thoroughly decentralized and loosely articulated; its regional organization is highly variable, being in some places more like that of a cadre party, tending in other areas toward a mass party, although nowhere has it actually succeeded in becoming a mass party (24). This is reflected in the low proportion of members among its voters, roughly 2 percent in 1955-1956 (25).

The SPD, on the other hand, presents all the characteristics of a mass party, although its membership, more than double that of the CDU, does not reach more than 7 percent of its voters (26), a very small figure compared to the British parties. The new recruits for the party are won either through the local party organizations - the *Orstvereine* - or, more usually, through the *Betriebsgruppen*, composed of all the Social

(22) W.L. GUTTSMAN, *The British Political Elite* (New York : Basic Books, 1964), p. 105.

(23) Richard HISCOCKS, *Democracy in West Germany* (London : Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 222 ff.

(24) LINZ, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

(25) Arnold J. HEIDENHEIMER, « La Structure Confessionnelle, régionale et Sociale de la CDU », *Revue française de science politique* (juillet-septembre 1957), p. 643.

(26) *Ibid.*

Democrats working in a particular establishment. These groups, along with the *Junge Sozialisten* and, to a lesser extent the *Frauengruppen*, constitute part of the SPD's efforts to counterbalance the influence of the CDU, which has won votes through its own factory groups and has *Hilfstruppen* among which the *Junge Unions* are particularly successful (27). Thus, the working class party in the German system also provides unique channels into political participation for the blue collar workers. But, unlike the situation in Great Britain, this is not reflected in the social backgrounds of the parliamentary representatives. In the 1961-1963 period, only two percent of the members of the German Bundestag were bluecollar workers (28).

C. *The American Parties.*

The individual states are primarily responsible for organizing their parties. The result is a loosely organized group of semi-autonomous and locally interested parties : « in a sense, no nationwide party organization exists, though each party, to be sure, has its national organs » (29). There exist tremendous variations in organization (30) : although they more closely approximate cadre parties, the American local organizations have some of the features of the mass membership parties.

The American parties orient themselves essentially toward electoral activities. As a result, the nature of political participation is very different from what it is in European countries where there is a strong ideological component. Whereas the British and German parties have provisions for formal affiliation and regular dues-paying membership, there is no generally accepted connotation of the term « party member » in the United States : it might be more meaningful to speak of party workers who perform active work during election campaigns. Another particular aspect of the American system is that political work does not necessarily mean affiliation with a party : activists can work for a particular candidate and not associate themselves in any way with a party (31). Besides, diverse organizations, non-political in nature, commit themselves to campaign work. Such is the case of the trade unions

(27) Douglas A. CHALMERS, *The Social Democratic Party of Germany* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1964), pp. 120-196.

(28) Wolf MERSCH, « Volksvertreter in West und Ost », in Wolfgang Zapf (edit.), *Beiträge zur Analyse der deutschen Oberschicht* (München : Piper, 1965), p. 38.

(29) Vladimir Orlando KEY, *Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups* (New York : Crowell, 1959), p. 315.

(30) Frank SORAUF, *Political Parties in the American System* (Boston : Little Brown, 1964), p. 45.

(31) Lewis EPSTEIN : « British Mass Parties in Comparison with the American Parties », *Political Science Quarterly*, LXXI (1956), nr 1, pp. 98-99.

grouped in the AFL-CIO. They have accepted the principle of political neutrality, but support candidates who adopt positions favorable to them. In practice, this support goes primarily to Democratic candidates (32). Contrary to Great Britain and West Germany, then, the American system does not offer the working class specific channels into political activity, nor does it provide the specific incentive offered by parties which have a traditional working class ideology. At a higher level, this situation has an impact on the occupational status of the American representatives, who are much more middle class in character than is the case for Great Britain or West Germany. There were only two percent of wage earners among the U.S. representatives during the 1949-1951 period but, beside them, sat 69 percent of professionals as compared to 10 percent in Germany (33).

Such differences as exist between the three countries in opportunities for political participation in the working class parallels the differences in status distinctiveness of parties. This confirms the plausibility of the link, between these two aspects of political systems.

IV. Conclusions.

The second and third sections attempted to establish a ranking of countries on class polarization of politics and to examine the opportunities for participation offered to the working class. On class homogeneity of parties, the results show that the United States is quite lower than the European countries. The difference between Germany and Great Britain is smaller.

The lack of strong differentiation between the two European nations vis-à-vis the United States appears also when an attempt is made to rank the three societies according to the strength of the relationship between socio-economic status and political participation.

The hypothesis stated at the beginning of this paper is thus supported to some extent : if, instead of comparing each country with the two others, we concentrate on two pairs of comparisons, first between the United States and Great Britain and second, between the United States and Germany, we see that indeed « the more homogeneous are the political parties, the lower is the correlation over individuals between political participation and class related characteristics ». The measures

(32) KEY, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

(33) Donald MATTHEWS, *The Social Background of Political Decision-Makers* (New York : Random House, 1954), p. 30 and W. MERSCH, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

of political participation which were used to test the hypothesis seem to confirm the assumption on which the proposition was based : the availability of political roles unique to the working class. We had first an index of organizational activity and the normative orientation towards local participation can plausibly be affected by the organization of political structures which depend on parties at the local level, at least partially.

Yet, we are still confronted with an apparently paradoxical aspect of this finding : sharp gulfs between social classes (34) do not seem to have, as a correlate, a feeling of powerlessness on the part of lower classes. The history of Europe during the last century suggests a developmental view of this question which might help to solve this apparent contradiction. Indeed, social and political conditions evolve and they do not necessarily do so simultaneously. The link established in current research between class salience and status polarization of parties has not always existed, and is still subject to change.

Let us assume a society in which a sizeable proportion of the population is deprived of social rights as well of political rights. Class lines are clearly defined and such parties as exist are strictly for the middle and upper classes. With the progressive extension of political rights to the working classes, the latter acquire the opportunities to participate, but their motivation is not particularly high in a society that is so clearly organized along class lines. At that stage, then, working classes participate relatively little, and a positive correlation exists between class position and extent of political participation. Subsequently, middle class parties search to gain working class votes, but these are increasingly going to new parties specifically oriented towards the working class. Once the working class parties achieve a main position in the system, we would find, were we to compare parties, what Rokkan and Campbell found. At this point, however, two other forces are at work. The increased political participation of the working class and the organization of working class interests, which now have formal channels of expression through the parties, induce the government to enact policies directed toward both reducing short run class differentiation and maximizing opportunities for the working classes in the long run. Minimum wage legislation and social welfare policies exemplify the former ; expansion of access to the educational system exemplifies the latter. Over time, the actual degree of differentiation will decrease. Such changes tend to reduce toward zero the differences between social classes in motivation to participate politically, as far as they result from different class mem-

(34) It can be shown that they are found together with class based politics.

berships. But simultaneously, and this is the second force at work, the specific class basis of the working class party progressively loses its point and « the mass-integration party, product of an age with harder class lines and more sharply protruding denominational structures », transforms itself « into a catch-all 'people's party' » (35).

If this view is valid, we would expect the actual modification in the European party systems to be followed by an increase in the degree of association between social class and political participation and in the political involvement among the less privileged classes. In the United States, where the class basis of politics is less strong and the salience of class in the social structure less clear, we would expect a decrease in the correlation between social class and political participation. In other words, the evolution of the class and political systems as we see it so far indicate a trend which, in the next stage, would result in a reversal of the rank order of the European countries and the United States as far as the correlation between social class and political participation is concerned.

(35) Otto KIRCHHEIMER, « The Transformation of the Western European Party Systems », in Joseph La Palombara and Myron Weiner (eds.), *Political Parties and Political Development* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 184.

