



The Dynamics of Two-Party Politics: Party Structures and the Management of Competition (Comparative Politics)

Alan Ware

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This book examines the role played by the parties themselves in two-party systems. It rejects the argument that the behavior of the parties is determined largely by social forces or by the supposed logic of the electoral market. Instead, it shows that both structure and agency can matter. It focuses on three major aspects of change in two-party systems: (i) why occasionally major parties (such as the British Liberals) collapse; (ii) why collapsed parties sometimes survive as minor parties, and sometimes do not; and (iii) what determines why, and how, major parties will ally themselves with minor parties in order to maximize their chances of winning.

With respect to the first aspect it is argued that major parties are advantaged by two factors: the resources they have accumulated already, and their occupying role similar to that called by Thomas Schelling a "focal arbiter". Consequently, party collapse is rare. When it has occurred in nation states it is the result of a major party having to fight opposition on "two separate fronts". The survival of a collapsed party depends largely on its internal structure; when a party has linked closely the ambitions of politicians at different levels of office, party elimination is more likely. The main arena in which agency is significant--that is, when leadership is possible, including the politician acting as heresthetician - is in the re-building of coalitions. This is necessary for maximizing the chances of a party winning, but, for various reasons, coalitions between major and minor parties are usually difficult to construct.

Comparative Politics is a series for scholars and students of political science that deals with contemporary issues in comparative government and politics. The General Editor is David M. Farrell, Jean Monnet Chair in European Politics and Head of School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester. The series is published in association with the European Consortium for Political Research.

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