

Theories of Party System: Contribution of Sartori

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Abstract

Part system has emerged as a critical component of political science in general and comparative politics in particular. In fact, beginning of representative democracy led to crystallisation of diverse interests which led to competition for political power which in the long run gave way to political parties. The nature and character of electoral competition leads to some pattern which is being analysed and some universal laws are framed which is referred as theories of party system. Many political scientists in general and Duverger in particular have provided theories of party system. Sartori has tried to give an objective theory of party system. Unlike Duverger Sartori has included ideology as a critical component of determining the basic ingredients of developing theories of party system. I have tried to analyse the contribution of his theory in comparative politics.

Key Words

Party System, Numerical, deology, Competitive, Non-competitive, Duverer,

Sartori's Classification

Unlike Maurice Duverger, Sartori does not provide a simple classification of party systems based primarily on their numerical character. The reason being, as he claims himself, he has tried to avoid purely numerical variable by adding other variables, like ideology, in order to be as scientific/objective as possible. (Giovani Sartori, Parties and Party Systems: A Framework For Analysis, Cambridge University Press, 1976, pp120-121) He made his critique of Duverger's law clear when he said, "Number of parties approach leads towards frustration. Because, we are incapable of deciding whether one is one, or two is two. Moreover, no accounting system can work, without counting the rule". (ibid ,pp 119-120) In order to be more precise and clear, he has classified party systems under two broad categories, i.e., competitive systems and non competitive systems which are elaborated below.

Competitive Systems:

Multipartism

In this category Sartori, first of all, discusses the phenomena of polarized pluralism. Such a system is characterized by the presence of a relevant anti-system opposition - especially of the communist or of the Fascist variety, but also of other varieties. Accordingly, a party can be defined as being anti-system whenever it undermines the legitimacy of the regimes it opposes. Its opposition is based not on issues, rather on principles. As they believe in changing the system rather than the government they represent an extraneous ideology. These parties may operate from within no less than from without, by smooth infiltration no less by conspicuous obstruction. Secondly, polarized pluralism must have bilateral oppositions that are naturally exclusive and

incompatible. Thirdly, there must be centre placement of one party (Italy) or of a group of parties (France, Weimer). Thus, its competitive mechanics brings on a centre that must face both a left and a right. Fourthly, there is the likely prevalence of the centrifugal drives over the centripetal ones. Thus, there is a persistent loss of votes to one or both the extremes. The fifth feature of polarized pluralism is its congenital ideological patterning. In such a system the parties disagree with not only policies but also, and more importantly, on principles and fundamentals. Thus, all the parties fight one another with ideological arguments and vie with one another in terms of ideological mentality/ moorings. Another feature of polarized pluralism is the presence of semi-responsible opposition or the parties located at the periphery of the centre, and also by the presence of irresponsible opposition or extreme parties that oppose the system. And, finally, this system displays a pattern that can be called politics of outbidding, or of overpromising. And this politics of overbidding results –if we go to economic analogy - in something very similar to inflationary disequilibrium or a situation in which competitors strive to bid support away from each other by stronger appeals and promises, so that the competition for the available supply increases while the supply does not. In fact, Sartori built his argument by differentiating between bi-party system and multi-party system on the basis of his theoretical conceptualisation of ‘polarized pluralism’. He says ; “the classical distinction between two-party system and multi-party system could be fruitfully replaced by a model oriented distinction between bi-polar and multi-polar systems, which firstly, accounts for the positioning and and patterns of interaction of parties(regardless of their members), secondly, breaks down,the undifferentiated category of the multi-party system.” (Sartori, “European political parties: The case of polarized pluralism, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1966, p 139.

Moderate Pluralism

Sartori calls it limited pluralism too, as there are three to five relevant parties in this system. This system demarcated, at one boundary, by the two party systems and, at the other/ by extreme and polarized pluralism. However, its systemic properties are neither the ones of two partism nor the ones of polarized pluralism vis a vis the properties of two partism; the most distinguishing trait of moderate pluralism is coalition government. It is because of the fact that no party generally attains the absolute majority. Thus, the formula of moderate pluralism is not alternative government but governing in coalition within the perspective of alternative coalitions. However, the structure of moderate pluralism, like, two partism, remains bipolar. It is clearly reflected in bipolar alignments of alternative coalitions. As far as differences with the systems of polarized pluralism is concerned, first of all moderate pluralism lacks relevant and/or sizable anti-system parties. Secondly, it lacks bilateral oppositions as all the parties are government oriented or available for cabinet coalitions. Hence, all the non-governing parties can act as united oppositions which means that the opposition will be unilateral - all on one side, either on the left or on the right. The typical mechanics of moderate pluralism is that minority governments are permitted only as caretaker and short lived governments, and single party government can exist only when sustained by an absolute majority. Otherwise the standing rule is to switch partners.

Two Party Systems

A two party system may be said to exist where there are only two parties sufficiently strong to take part in the struggle for power. There may be other parties, but the alternation of power remains between the two major ones. Moreover, the format of two party system must be assessed in terms of seats, not of electoral returns. The logic behind this formulation is that governments are formed and perform on the basis of their strength in parliament. "The additional reason is that nearly all the politics having

two party system (except Austria) abide by a single-member district system which turns relative into absolute majorities and even upturns an electoral majority into a parliamentary minority. A two-party system may be said to have three sub-categories, namely, two party system where alternation of power takes place between two major parties; two plus party system where some other party or parties may seldom have a chance to share power with either of the two major parties; and two-party system in the midst of many where parties other than the two major ones have chances, now and then, to share power.(Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework of Analysis*, London, Cambridge University Press,1976, pp185-191)

Predominant Party System

Predominant party systems belong to the area of party pluralism. Parties other than the major one not only are permitted to exist, but do exist as legal and legitimate if not necessarily effective competitors of the predominant party. In other words, minor parties are truly independent antagonists of the predominant party. Thus, it becomes crystal clear that the predominant party system actually is a more than one party system in which rotation does not occur in fact. It simply happens that the same party manages to win, over time, an absolute majority of seats (not necessarily of votes) in parliament. However, the monopolistic 'permanence in office of the same party, election after election, cannot reasonably be imputed to conspicuous unfair play or ballot stuffing. Therefore, it can be said that a predominant party system is such to the extent that, and as long as, its major party is consistently supported by a winning majority of the voters. it must be added that a predominant party system is generally qualified by its major party obtaining the absolute majority of seats, with the exception of countries that unquestionably abide by a less than absolute majority principle. However, a predominant party can seek, at any moment to be predominant. When this happens, either the pattern is soon re-established or the system changes its nature, i.e., ceases to be a predominant party system. Moreover, the predominant party system is a type of party pluralism in which even though no alternation in office actually occurs – alternation is not ruled out and the political system provides ample opportunities for open and effective dissent that is for opposing the predominance of the governing party. For example, in India, political opposition does or did exist, and the predominant party has or had – nearer or less close margins - to compete for power. Competition is so real that many political systems may well be at the end of their performance as predominant systems. And, in the last, it must be mentioned that the phenomena of relatively high rate of entries and exits do confirm that they are competitive systems with respect to which it can be asserted that on the starting line, all the parties have equal opportunities. But, equality of opportunities is always relative for nobody is equal at the starting line. Furthermore, equal opportunities are not the same as equal resources; and in the predominant systems the disparity of resources between the party in power and the parties out of power is likely to be greater than in the other pluralistic systems.(*ibid*, pp 193-198)

Non Competitive System:

A system is non-competitive if, and only if, it does not permit contested elections. In other words, irrespective of the legal ruling, competition ends, and non-competition begins, wherever contestants are deprived of equal rights, indeed, menaced, and eventually punished for daring to speak up. In his classification of non-competitive systems he has discussed two types: single party system, and hegemonic party system.

Single Party System

By uni-partism he means that there exists only one party as no other party is allowed to exist. This is because such a party vetoes, both de jure and de facto, any kind of party pluralism. Moreover, the single party states are more or less oppressive, more or less

pervasive, more or less intolerant, more or less extractive. But, owing to varying intensity of coercion or repression, following three patterns can be singled out: (ibid,p221)

- I. One party totalitarian
- II. One party authoritarian
- III. One party pragmatic

By definition, the totalitarian party is a strongly ideological party which tends to restrict membership and to expel or cyclically purge en masse, its members. As a system, totalitarian uni-partism represents the highest degree of pervasiveness, mobilization, and monopolistic control of the party upon the total life experience of the citizens. In other words, it is characterised by its attempt at total reach, at total penetration and politicization. Whether or not it pursues the goal of shaping a "new man", the totalitarian regime is bent upon destroying not only sub system but also any kind of sub-group autonomy. It, therefore, represents the ultimate invasion of privacy of life.

Unlike this system, the authoritarian regime represents contrasting features as it lacks a strong ideology and a comparable mobilization capability; and its control does not extend, as a rule, far beyond the normal instruments of power. In fact, authoritarian uni-partism amounts to a control system that neither has the power nor the ambition of pervading the whole society. It is characterized, therefore, not by "totalism "but by "exclusionism", by restricting the sub-groups out of political activities.

Ideologically, one party pragmatic politics gives way to a pragmatic mentality. The pragmatic single party, therefore, lacks the legitimation of an ideology and thus compares to the other two types as the one with the lesser coercive potentiality. This implies, therefore, that pragmatic uni-partism is ill suited for pursuing exclusionary policies and is prompted, instead, to attempting absorbing policies. As a logical corollary the pragmatic single party tends to be aggregative rather than destructive in its relation to outer groups. Moreover, its low degree of internal ideological cohesiveness makes the organization of the pragmatic single party quite loose and somewhat pluralistic.

However, with respect to the dictatorial nature of these regimes, one could say that the totalitarian dictator is unbound and unpredictable; that the authoritarian dictator is unbound but confined, nevertheless, within predictable limits of arbitrariness; and that a pragmatic dictatorship is bounded by the constellation of forces with which it must bargain. Moreover, with respect to channeling function, totalitarian partism can be said to channelise by suppressing; authoritarian uni-partism to canalize by excluding; and pragmatic uni-partism to canalize by absorbing or attempting to absorb.

Hegemonic Party

The term hegemonic party is referred to such a party which neither allows for a formal nor a de facto competition for power. Other parties are allowed to exist, but as second class, licenced parties, as they are not permitted to compete with the hegemonic party in antagonistic terms and on equal basis. Not only does alternation not occur in fact ;it cannot occur, since the rotation of power is not even envisaged. The implication is that the hegemonic party will remain in power unchallenged, whether it is liked or not. However, Sartori further classifies hegemonic party into two sub-types which are as follows: (ibid, pp 230-231)

Ideological Hegemonic Party

In this type the peripheral parties are truly "satellite" parties. Though, they are given administrative, parliamentary, and governmental positions, yet it does not mean that

the power is really shared, and their inferiority status vis-a-vis the hegemonic party is bound to affect leaving their chances of independent behaviour.

Pragmatic Hegemonic Party

It is called pragmatic hegemonic party because of its being pragmatic, inclusive and aggregative as to near amalgam type party. The idea of a one party pluralism is sustained by a one party centred arrangement surrounded by a periphery of secondary parties. In this system the rules of the games are very clear, that is the said party most win anyhow. And, if cooperation of dissident group fails, then the above party is fully prepared to repress them on one pretext or the other.

Fluid Politics and Quasi Parties

In this category, Sartori has bracketed the newly independent African countries, who can neither be incorporated under the Western categories, nor can they provide categories for the West, as they lack structural differentiation and consolidation. He has suggested following categories for analyzing party system in Africa: First, there are "single party state", which indicates that a regime has officially declared itself as such. In such a system all the other parties are banned. Second, there are "de facto single party state", which indicates that this pattern is not backed by an official doctrine; and this may imply a lower degree of coercion. Third, there are "dominant authoritarian states", which indicates a looser and more varied pattern of mono-partism. Hence it does not mean that other parties are outlawed; they might have dissolved themselves, or be atrophied, or might have never materialized de facto. Fourth, there are "indirect and/or dual military rule", which indicates that the military has a decisive hand in the matter, even though the government is returned, at least in part, to civilian hands. And, finally, there are "dominant non-authoritarian party state", which is the fluid equivalent of a predominant party system.

Conclusion

Having discussed the framework of analyzing party system in the realm of comparative politics as developed by Sartori one cannot fail to recognize his seminal contributions in providing a much more scientific and objective tool of establishing and explaining a causal relationship between the electoral mechanism, role of ideology and the kind of political system within which electoral competition does take place. Despite several criticisms his categorization of party system remains most objective and relevant tool of analysis.

References

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