

Presidential Leadership in a Government of Parties:
An Unrealized Perspective 50 Years Later

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Fifty years ago this month, the Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association published its report: "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System." In his critical review of the report at twenty years, Evron M. Kirkpatrick, then Executive Director of the APSA, wrote that: "The Report is probably the most publicized document ever published by a committee of the Association" (Kirkpatrick 1971, 965). I expect that statement remains true today. Few, if any, scholarly treatments of American political parties fail to acknowledge the report; some even engage the issues involved.¹

Given this notoriety over time, one might expect continuous high praise for the report. Not so, however. I know of no essay exalting the Committee and its report. Yet one of the leading advocates of responsible party government, James L. Sundquist, properly identifies those several political scientists and journalists (like David Broder) who prefer single-party government as enhancing responsibility (Sundquist 1988, 616-624 and 1992, Ch. 4). And so the subject of the report is of continuing interest, even devotion among some, but the document itself has few enthusiasts. Still the APSA imprimatur serves to legitimate the report as a symbol, a sort of talisman for reformers.

¹ For example, among the more contemporary studies pulled from my shelves: Aldrich 1995, 10-12; Coleman 1996, 3-17; Cox and McCubbins 1993, 275-278; Epstein 1986, 33-37; Maisel 1990, Ch. 15. Oddly the report is not an entry in the encyclopedia of political parties,, though it is likely cited more than any other source among individual entries (Maisel 1991)..

In comments on the 1950 report, William G. Mayer recently observed that it “has come to be fashionable of late to impugn the analysis and recommendations of [the APSA] committee” (Mayer in Shafer 1998, 214). That comment implies that it was not fashionable earlier to so fault the committee’s work. Again, not so. As Kirkpatrick noted in 1971: “In the two decades since its publication it has more often served as a foil than as a model” (1971, 968). His own critique was from the perspective of political and policy science and he found the report wanting.²

The shortcomings of the APSA Committee Report, and the failure of the discipline and profession to clarify more effectively their roles in the public policy field derive from at least four inadequacies: (1) poor handling of value analysis, that is, inadequacies in goal thinking and derivational thinking; (2) failure to explore the interaction of the decisional system and the distribution of values, that is, of policy outcomes; (3) lack of sufficient attention to kinds of thinking peripheral to scientific thinking; goal thinking and derivational thinking (item 1), trend thinking, and developmental analysis; and (4) insufficient empirical theory and inadequate data (1971, 986).

Some of these criticisms were sounded immediately after the publication of the report. In the March, 1951, issue of the American Political Science Review, Julius Turner presented data to demonstrate that “the Committee has underestimated present party responsibility” (Turner 1951, 143). In this “dissent from the floor,” he also worried that certain of the reforms would accentuate the present defects. Clearly, Turner was not persuaded by the report as an example of political or policy science. Austin Ranney, then an Instructor at the University of Illinois, followed Turner’s critique with a more extensive critical review of the report in the June issue of the Review. Ranney had completed a dissertation at Yale two years before the publication of the report that was a detailed analysis of the doctrine of responsible party government (Ranney 1954). Few scholars were more prepared, then, to offer a learned treatment of the report, placing it in the context of the concepts, data demands, and prospects of party responsibility reform.

² Kirkpatrick, then at the Department of State, was himself a member of the APSA Committee.

Ranney raised fundamental questions about core concepts in the report: What is party? What is responsibility? The report stressed party as a member-based organization, which is somewhat odd given the variation among states in party registration, types of primaries, and political participation by eligible voters. Responsibility was judged to be external to the electorate at large and internal to the party membership. Ranney properly asked: "What persons should be considered 'party members'....?" and "How may this 'accountability' be institutionalized and made effective?" (1951, 489) He found the report lacking in both respects. He further criticized the report for failing to undertake what is necessary to achieve majority-rule democracy, citing the views of the public to which the report recommended accountability.

The point is that the same popular beliefs about government which sustain our present anti-majoritarian constitutional system will continue to sustain...our anti-majoritarian party system. Only when the American people have fully accepted the doctrine of majority-rule democracy can the doctrine of responsible party government expect to receive the popular acclaim which...it has so far been denied (Ranney 1951, 499).

Put otherwise, it is difficult to make over a political system by fiddling with the dependent variable.

Many other critical reviews followed these first evaluations. Kirkpatrick identified several such works, concluding that: "Collectively, these criticisms amount to an indictment of the Report's analysis and recommendations as ill-conceived, ill-formulated, and, most often, simply mistaken about parties, about people and about political systems" (1971, 968-969). He stated further that: "I know of no major work that undertakes a defense of the Report but there are distinguished political scientists who support responsible party government and argue the case much more cogently than the Committee" (1971, 969, n5). In his paper for this workshop, Leon D. Epstein observes, correctly in my view, that Party Government (1942), by the chair of the Committee, E. E. Schattschneider, was "more cogent than the subsequent report" (Epstein 2000, 1).³

³ Epstein attributes the difference to the fact that Fritz Morstein Marx, a specialist in public administration, actually chaired the drafting committee. Coleman (1999, 823) rightly points out that Schattschneider acknowledged the potential for a volume of legislation being enacted in divided government, that later caricatures of party government relied more on contemporary analysts (Lloyd N.

Cutler and James L. Sundquist) than on Schattschneider's Party Government. This anniversary, however, is a celebration of the APSA Report, not of Schattschneider, per se, and that document is closer to the Cutler-Sundquist perspective (though they too have differences, notably in regard to the role of the president). In fact, divided government is barely acknowledged as an outcome in the Report.

Why should it be that a report so disparaged by criteria drawn from the discipline survives to be celebrated? Perhaps because, as Kirkpatrick observed, there remains a strong preference for party government among many political scientists. In reflecting on the durability of the report, Epstein (1986) observed that: "Virtually all students of American politics agreed at least that effective parties of some kind were necessary, and many may well have preferred the committee's kind of effective parties, although they did not always share the committee's belief that they could be established in the United States" (34). One of the leading advocates of party government, James L. Sundquist, wrote a much-cited paper in 1988 that worried about the state of theory for understanding the role of political parties. He explained that while the report was criticized in several commentaries, support for party government itself was not an issue among political scientists.

The debate was joined on whether party government should or could be made more responsible, not whether it should exist at all. Nobody argued that the parties as they existed in 1950 were too tightly disciplined, and that the need was that they be made less responsible. Nobody argued that the ideal system was the one that was to be ushered in a few years later: coalition government in which no party is or can be held responsible (Sundquist 1988, 619; emphasis his).

Sundquist then cited a number of texts and studies as evidence for the support of party government as a concept, and, implicitly, of party responsibility.

One point cited by Epstein was that Democrats had strong reasons to favor responsible party government. Liberal Democrats were frustrated in their effort to gain more support for their agenda, 1938-1950 (Epstein 2000, 3-4). Those frustrations increased markedly subsequent to the publication of the report. Democrats remained the larger of the two parties as measured by party self-identification in surveys and yet they regularly lost the White House. Between 1952 and 2000, Democrats won just five of the twelve presidential elections while retaining House majorities in 20 of the 24 congresses and Senate majorities in 17 of 24. Having to live with split-party government for 32 of 48 years is hardly sustaining for those devoted to the party responsibility model. Voters continually failed to satisfy the conditions necessary to produce party government, even failing along the way to produce single-party

government in many of the states (see Fiorina 1996, Ch. 3). Yet, as Sundquist observed: "This established theory [of party government] presupposed one essential condition: there would in fact be a majority party in control of both branches of government" (1988, 625).

So the question remains: Why does the theory (if it is that) survive? Voting studies show that there is no majority party in the electorate--rather two minority parties and a huge number of self-declared independents. Neither party has consistently won Congress and the presidency since the New Deal era. The 89th Congress and Lyndon B. Johnson aside, it is a stretch to state that the Democrats "controlled" the two branches, even when they won both (as with Truman, 1949-1953; Kennedy, 1961-1963; Carter, 1977-1981; or Clinton, 1993-1995).

Perhaps the answer is: It just makes sense to want "a more responsible two-party system," especially for Democrats unable to win the White House very often. This response didn't satisfy Sundquist. He explained that the conditions for party government were frequently met in this century prior to the publication of the report. Sundquist comments on the "casual ease" with which the report spoke of the "party in power." Divided government was barely mentioned--"confined...to one subordinate clause of eight words" (Sundquist, 1988, 625). But "divided government invalidates the entire theory of party government and presidential leadership, both elements of it" (626). Accordingly, most scholars decried these split results as preventing the proper unifying function of government. Sundquist agreed. He offered evidence of stalemate, concluding that "it is the system that is at fault" (631).

However, the issue itself of two-directional results clearly troubled Sundquist. The system being what it is allowed for split-party control, with "coalition government" (Sundquist's term) the result. And so "there is a disjunction between theory and practice, between the long-accepted and not-yet-abandoned ideas about how the government of the United States should work and the way in which it is now compelled to try to work" (631). Thus, he called for serious intellectual discourse on the dilemma posed by the theory of party government and the practice of divided government. Those who think the party responsibility model was wrong "have an obligation to provide a new body of theory" (634) and those who are its advocates "must come to grips with the question of how our election system...should

be altered to restore unified government..." (635).

This paper may be considered a partial response to Sundquist's request, as have been a number of my recent writings. I am, however, moved to modify his characterization of the theory and practice. He refers to "party government" and "coalition government." I see the distinction as that between "party government" and a "government of parties." The practice has not been that of party coalitions in the usual sense or as associated with multi-party parliamentary systems. Rather it has been one of bi-, co-, and cross-partisan patterns, supplementing an occasional straight partisanship in the classic mold (see Jones 1994, Ch. 1).⁴

The search for the alternative theory Sundquist asks for sensibly begins with a reconsideration of the nature and purposes of the separated system. For it is the separation of elections and institutions that produces a government of parties and the creative tension characteristic of our lawmaking process. I won't review the many design features of this system and how they were justified in Philadelphia and subsequently in The Federalist for a readership intimately acquainted with those topics. Rather I concentrate attention on my assigned theme--presidential leadership in a government of parties.

The APSA Report and Presidential Leadership

Sundquist directly, and other scholars by implication, assert that presidential leadership is a, perhaps the, key to party government. That working assumption is not apparent in the APSA Report, however. The report stresses the weakness of party organization in vesting "leadership of the party as a whole in either a single person or a committee" (APSA Committee on Political Parties 1950, 3). But the report even warns that one of the dangers of inaction in meeting the need for party reform may well be an overextended presidency. Lacking an effective party program, the president may well act on his

⁴ In part the distinction between a multi-party coalition government and a government of parties is in the locus of agreements. In the former they occur prior to legislative confirmation, that is among the party leaders in the coalition; in the latter they occur within the legislature itself and are, therefore, more public.

own, then reaching “directly for the support of a majority of the voters” (94).

Where then should party leadership be centered, if not in the president? The answer is revealing of this basic premise of the report: American political parties can organize alongside of working governments in a manner as to form and integrate policy programs. The parties can do so within the present constitutional arrangements--no amendments are necessary. The consequence of reform will be an effective two-party system that achieves integration, programmatic coherence, leadership responsibility to membership, broad participation, cohesion, effective opposition, clear choice for the voters, and resistance to pressure. By this conception, elected leaders, including the president and those in Congress, will be effective advocates and implementers of the party program. Party, therefore, will emerge as a self-standing structure layered into the separated and federalized system.

Numerous proposals were offered as contributing to this goal. Several were gratuitous, others were hortatory. But one in particular is revealing of the conceptual basis for the report and for comprehending the role of the president in the report's version of party government. Having concluded that neither the National Convention nor the National Committee was effective in remedying the problems of the two-party system, the report recommended formation of a Party Council. The idea for such a coordinating council derived from a proposal by Charles E. Merriam some thirty years earlier. Troubled by the number of party units and the lack of integration among them, Merriam suggested a council of some 600-700 members drawn from the national executive, Congress, statehouses, national party committeemen and state chairmen, other prominent party leaders. The out-party would include defeated nominees for president and governor.

The APSA Committee favored this concept but judged that the size proposed by Merriam made it unwieldy. “What is now most needed is a body that can meet frequently, consult easily with other party agencies, deal with current party problems, and become a source of continuing advice to the President or, in the case of the minority party, to some other recognized party leader” (42). A body of 50 members was proposed, representing five groups: the National Committee, the congressional party organization, the state committees, the party's governors, and other party groups (Young Republicans and Young Democrats) and the party at large (members to be chosen by the National Convention).

What about the president? He and the vice president (or nominees for these offices), national party officials, and “perhaps” Cabinet officials appointed by the president “ought to be considered ex-officio members and fully entitled to participate” (43).

The Party Council was clearly intended to be competitive with, perhaps even controlling of, the White House in regard to party, political, and policy matters. As envisioned by the Committee, the Council would “settle the larger problems of party management;” propose a draft of the party platform; “interpret the platform in relation to current problems;” choose party leaders outside the party organizations; make recommendations “in respect to congressional candidates;” and make recommendations regarding “departures from general party decisions by state or local party organizations.” Further, in presidential years the Council would be a place for discussing presidential candidacies and might screen these candidacies. Again in relation to the presidency, the Council might select a “party cabinet” of its members to advise the president.

As has been pointed out by most critics, the report is weak on how all of this was to come about, that is, by what design or set of decisions and by whom. And, in fact, the section of the report on sources of support and leadership for reform was not very optimistic. It is recognized that the president could be influential “in attaining a better organized majority party” (89). The report stressed how beneficial it would be for a president to have the backing of a responsible party. Reference is even made to the president as “party head.” But he must share, a goal presumably ensured by his relationship to the Party Council (which he does not head but rather serves ex officio). The ambiguity of these arrangements is evident in the following statement regarding the role of the president in his more responsible party.

It is clear that any President or candidate for the presidency who intends to work consistently and continuously in the direction of party responsibility may have to be prepared to share responsibility with other truly representative leaders of the party in the shaping of the party's program. He must also be prepared to use the party and its leaders in the process of policy-formulation.

The President could gain much when party leaders in and out of the Congress are

working together with him closely in matters concerning the party program. As party head, the President could then expect more widespread and more consistent support from the congressional leaders of his party. These, in turn, could present a more united front. As a result, on issues where the party as a party could be expected to have a program, the program of the party, of the party leaders in each house of Congress, and of the President would be the same program, not four different programs (89).

It is, of course, true enough that if everyone agreed, then everyone will have agreed. What is not clear is how that agreement is to come about or where. Nor is it certain who is in charge of what or who is responsible to whom. And that is where I have to leave it as far as the report is concerned. For the report fails to clarify the precise role of a key power holder--the president. Indeed, it is even implied that he may be an impediment to the realization of the intra-party democracy judged to be critical for creating a coordinated program for which the party will ultimately be responsible.

Back to Basics: The Practice About Which It is Said There Is No Theory

The practice to which Sundquist refers is, of course, the ordinary workings of the separated and federalized system. The concepts upon which the system is based, that is, the separation of powers and federalism, do not lack for theory. They have been a subject of interest to theorists for centuries. What is not well explicated, and, in fact, seemingly resisted, is theoretical development of the role and function of political parties in such a system. Rather, scholarly attention has been directed to devising means by which party might perform unifying and centralizing functions to overcome what are judged to be the deficiencies of the distributions of powers within and between governments. It is a curious expenditure of intellectual resources for the following reasons. Parties function to organize and exercise political power. A separated and federalized system distributes power horizontally and vertically. Accordingly parties will, themselves, be separated and federalized. Just as there is no central, all-powerful governing unit, there will not be a single, unifying party structure. Therefore reform impulses are more constructively directed to improving the effectiveness of parties in their several institutional and governmental locations. For if there is sound theoretical justification for distributing and preserving powers among institutions, then it follows that a constructive political party is one that contributes to the

effectiveness of the institution within which it is operating. Contrariwise, a political party overcoming the advantages of the separation of powers and checks and balances is antithetical to the very purposes of the design. The threat is not great, however. An effective separated powers system resists most efforts at unification, including those devised by party government advocates (for example, a Party Council).

Again as suited to the theme of this essay, I will concentrate on the presidency in further discussion of the practice for which we need a theory. One caveat: Treatment of one branch of a separated system inevitably involves its intersection with other branches. One important feature of the separation is that the workings of one branch are enhanced by the effective operations of the others. As I have argued elsewhere, this feature fosters the speculative imagination, inviting, as it does, the understanding and absorption of alternative perspectives (Jones 1999a).

I have found the accompanying chart to be a most useful portrayal of the institutional and political context within which the president works. It shows what happens electorally during a two-term limited presidency: the two-year term for House members, thus four distinct congresses; four one-third-up elections in the Senate, thus continuity and change among four Senates; and no senator ever running again with the same president and several not ever running with the incumbent. The results are as intended: separation, independence, interdependence. Party naturally organizes throughout the institutions and their units, as oriented to the setting, to purposes, and to constitutional and political limitations. No one party structure will look exactly like another, either between the two parties or among the three elected institutions (White House, House, Senate) and the national organization. This is the government of parties at the national level.

--Chart 1 here--

Least clearly articulated is party organization in the White House. The president is said to be his party's leader. How so? What structure does he head up? Granted he has increasingly large legions of political advisers and liaison personnel. He has substantial influence in who manages the National Committee of his party but only limited leverage, if any at all, in the selection of congressional party leaders. Basic works on the presidency have little to say about the president as party leader for the very good reason that there is not that much to say. Attention is directed to his political, policy, and

administrative leadership, all of which have an effect on the party. But he is hardly in charge. Neither he nor his advisers are typically invited to the huge majority of party meetings in Washington. In fact, a president meeting with a congressional party caucus makes news, often with reports that he was “surprisingly” well received.

Please bear in mind that none of this is to suggest the president is unimportant. Rather it is to direct attention to his role and function in regard to his political party. In relation to Congress, a large part of the president’s job is to clarify his policy preferences, seek their approval, and see to their implementation. Seldom is this done by command, as was explained by Richard E. Neustadt (1960) forty years ago. Persuasion and negotiating skills are required, as suited to the variation of partisan conditions characterizing contemporary presidential-congressional relations. It hardly needs repeating that cross-partisan politics has been the norm since 1968. Republican and Democratic presidents have had to court opposite-party members of Congress in one house or both over 80 percent of the time. Among other effects of this pattern has been a realization among party and committee leaders that split control can be satisfying. As one senior Democrat explained: A president of your party tells you what he wants; a president of the other party asks what you want.

Here then are the basics: separation of elections, multiple party structures but no one in charge, high potential for split-party control, limited formal role of the president as party leader, and continual adjustment to shifting partisan alignments on issues. One major challenge for scholars is to specify more clearly (or at all) the connections among various party structures and between them and the president (for example at the national level: House party with Senate party, party in congressional committees with chamber party organization and leadership, House and Senate campaign committees and the National Committees with each other and the other units, and the many interlacements with the White House). In the anniversary spirit of “a more responsible two-party system” we need an improved understanding of which parties we want to be more responsible to whom and why. However, that goal cannot be achieved without a better understanding of responsibility in a separated system.

Responsibility in a Separated System

I well recall the exact circumstances of my more serious consideration of the issue of

responsibility in our form of government. I delivered a lecture at Kyung Pook University, Taegu, Korea, on the role of the presidency in a separated system. I outlined the various partisan strategies--noting the rarity of straight partisanship, and identifying the bi-, co-, and cross-partisan patterns. I stressed the problems of exporting a separationist system, pointing out that: "The separated system is not well understood primarily because most analysts prefer a presidency-centered responsible party system and are therefore not moved to accept a separationist perspective seen by them to be flawed (Jones 1999b, 33)." Following my remarks, a student asked how such a system as ours could foster responsibility at all. I weakly responded that responsibility as commonly understood was simply sacrificed. I then resolved to do better in my understanding of that feature of our government and politics. I can't say that I have made a lot of progress. Few concepts are as complex in a separated system. But the issues involved must be engaged if we are to evaluate the APSA Report at its half century or if we are to undertake reforms designed to provide more responsibility.⁵

⁵ LeRoy Rieselbach (1994) and David T. Canon and Kenneth R. Mayer (1999), among others, make a distinction between responsibility and responsiveness. Canon and Mayer explain that the first has to do with collective decision making in a legislature, the latter with accurate reflection of constituent interests. This important difference is of the essence of separationism, which seeks to preserve, rather than eliminate, what Canon and Mayer call "the collective dilemma" (103-105). As they state: "It is not possible to have it all" (103). A principal goal of a separated system is to prevent any one segment having it all.

“Party responsibility means the responsibility of both parties to the general public, as enforced in elections” (APSA Committee 1950, 2). A fascinating circularity is envisioned by which parties design programs at the grass roots, put these programs into effect, then check with the grass roots in elections to judge whether they still approve what they supported earlier. This appears to be the essence of the intra-party democracy of which Ranney was so skeptical. Of relevance, however, is the Committee’s apparent misgivings about party leaders. One gets the impression in reading the report that any slippage that occurs between program design and accountability is because of a failure of leadership responsibility. And so corrections are needed, notably an overarching Party Council to represent and preserve intra-party democracy. Alas, as Sundquist acknowledged, any such solution falters under conditions of split-party government.⁶

To be responsible is, by ordinary dictionary definition, to be “liable to be called on to answer,...liable to be called to account as the primary cause, motive, or agent.” By this standard, is there responsibility in the separated system? Surely the answer is “yes.” Arguably, the two most influential books on Congress in the postwar era, Congress: The Electoral Connection by David R. Mayhew (1974) and Home Style by Richard F. Fenno, Jr. (1978), teach us about responsibility. Seeking reelection is making oneself “liable to be called on to answer.” Designing a “home style” involves the definition of constituency and the determination of responsiveness and responsibility. Agency is at the core of responsibility. Mayhew, Fenno, and the legions of scholars following in their wake have shown us how it works in the House of Representatives (with Fenno directing attention as well to the Senate in recent years).

⁶ Actually one possible effect of such party councils in a split-party government might well be a hardening of policy positions, thus thwarting cross-party agreements that have been so characteristic of contemporary lawmaking.

What is portrayed by these scholars is individual, not collective, accountability. As Fenno has shown, a style is developed to suit the representative's definition and understanding of "home." Seldom does this exercise extend to accounting for the national party.⁷ If anything, conditions for senators are even more personally varied. Fenno explains why in his brief monograph comparing electoral and representational conditions in the two chambers (Fenno 1982) and in his description and analysis of Senators on the Campaign Trail: The Politics of Representation (1996). This failure on the part of congressional candidates to identify and support a party line does not preclude there being a common theme to their individual accountabilities or an effort on the part of the national party apparatus to specify such a theme. Identifying the latter is simple enough by studying the campaign literature, press releases, and public statements of the campaign committees and their spokespersons. Efforts at developing a common policy theme must be carefully developed, however, so as not to interfere with individualized campaigns suited to a particular state or district.⁸

The first phenomenon--a common theme to individual accountabilities--is more difficult to

⁷ One interesting possible exception occurred in 1994 with the Contract With America. Most Republican House candidates (incumbents and challengers) signed on as supporters of the Contract in a highly-publicized ceremony on Capitol Hill. Interestingly many commentators at the time mocked the exercise. An exception was David Broder of the Washington Post, who recognized it as suiting conditions of classic party responsibility.

⁸ The Washington Post (Allen 2000, 1) reported that National Republican Congressional Committee would "tailor their ads [in 2000] for each district, instead of promoting a generic national message..." This reassurance was, in part, a reaction to criticism by candidates to generic ads by the campaign committee in 1998 attacking President Clinton on the Lewinsky affair.

identify and to interpret as party responsibility once spotted. Scholars have found that certain issues are commonly associated with the two parties. Relying on content analysis of local newspapers, Gregory Flemming (1999) confirmed this to be the case for House campaigns in 1992 and 1994. Many of the works on congressional elections make reference to general differences between the two parties' candidates, typically as associated with who becomes a Republican and Democrat in the first place, as well as the processes of recruiting (Jacobson 1992; Herrnson 1998). What is lacking is a fully developed comparative study of the two parties across the chambers to determine the extent to which the sum of individual candidate accountings can be interpreted as a composite party responsibility. If such a phenomenon exists, then we would have the beginnings of an understanding of party responsibility as it applies to a government of parties in a separated system. One can at least hypothesize naturally-occurring bonds of issue positioning, adjusted to constituency differences and maintained by socialization. What is seen as lack of discipline by the standards of a party government model may be simply a zone of tolerance for diversity among states and districts in a government of parties.

Of course, no one can imagine that an encompassing concept of party for identifying and analyzing congressional responsibility can be simple. Once again Fenno illustrates what is involved. In Congress at the Grassroots (2000) he explores the political life of a congressional district (the Georgia district represented at different times, and in different shapes, by Democrat Jack Flynt and Republican Mac Collins). As regards party, he shows how it is that the representative manages at home and in the House (42-50, 141-146). He illustrates how it is that party in these two locations is given meaning by the working representative/lawmaker. Seldom have I read a more revealing portrait of the dual meanings of political party for elected officials. I doubt one needs to read anything more in judging whether a Party Council, as envisaged by the APSA Report, can be effective. Flynt and Collins meant to command how party would work in the district and to extract from party in the House what suited their interests at home. At the very least, this work that seeks to connect Washington to states and districts as electoral units suggests that we have hardly scratched the surface in our understanding of party responsibility.

What then of responsibility of the president? For openers, if election is the principal time of accountability, then the Twenty-Second Amendment (which was not yet ratified in 1950) limits that accounting to one reelection. An associated complication is that of the differences in term lengths. Responsibility as a composite of individual accountabilities is electorally tested every two years in Congress. Comparable presidential accountings take place every four years, though the incumbent may not be on the ballot (see below). There are occasional mid-term elections in which the president and his record are said to have been a major issue, for example, 1946, 1974, 1982, and 1994. Even where evident, however, the presidential effect may vary substantially among electoral districts. More often the mid-term elections are state- and district-oriented elections.

The record of postwar presidential elections displays their differences as accountability events. Table 1 presents the results. Of the fourteen elections, 1948-2000, six were straight-forward direct accountability contests in which the incumbent sought reelection. Four were reelected (all by Electoral College landslides) and two defeated. In five of the six elections, party accountability was ambiguous in that the president's party did not win House and Senate majorities. Even in the sixth (1992), while Bush lost, the Republicans had a net gain in House seats and held the Democrats to no gain in the Senate.⁹ The four reelections were remarkably similar--an overwhelming win for the president and high incumbent return in Congress. Voters essentially returned the same split-party government, a result that could be interpreted as rewarding cross-party responsibility, hardly what the APSA Committee had in mind.

--Table 1 here--

⁹ Later the Republicans had a one-seat net loss when Kay Bailey Hutchinson won the Texas Senate seat vacated by Lloyd Bentsen, who became Secretary of the Treasury in the Clinton administration.

Half of the fourteen elections involved associated accountability. These elections were of two types: successors seeking election (Truman, Johnson, and Ford) and vice presidents seeking election at the end of a president's term (Nixon, Humphrey, Bush, and Gore).¹⁰ In Truman's case, he had served nearly a full term following Roosevelt's death early in his fourth term. He was eligible to seek reelection in 1952 by special dispensation in the Twenty-Second Amendment but decided against running. Therefore, in terms of time served, his election in 1948 might also be classified as "direct accountability." The Johnson and Ford cases are more clearly those of successors. Both were in the process of putting their stamp on the presidency but their accountability was ineluctably tied to their predecessor. Johnson's win was accompanied by Democrats winning two-thirds majorities in the House and Senate, thus offering the purest conditions for party government in the postwar period, though one cannot imagine Johnson inviting advice or direction from a Party Council.

Until 1960 no vice president in this century ran as his party's presidential candidate subsequent to his service in that capacity. Beginning in 1960 five have been candidates, Nixon twice. Perhaps the earlier reluctance was due to the fact that no such candidate had won since Martin Van Buren in 1836. Whatever the reason vice presidents are now accepted as potential presidential candidates upon the completion of their president's term. As shown in Table 1, one of three vice presidents won, Bush in 1988. Nixon in 1960 and Humphrey in 1968 were narrowly defeated. The 1968 contest was more clearly an associated accountability election as Humphrey sought to manage the volatile Vietnam issue. The 2000 election is fascinating in accountability terms. Vice President Gore seeks to benefit from a robust economy while distancing himself from the Clinton scandals. George W. Bush is the son of the only vice president since Van Buren to win subsequent to service in that capacity and he was defeated by the person Gore wants to succeed.¹¹ As it has happened, the associated accountability elections have produced several more one-party governments than those for which there was direct

¹⁰ There are two other cases of vice presidents running subsequent to the end of the administration in which they served: Nixon, 1968, and Mondale, 1984.

¹¹ For a brilliant analysis of the problems faced by "understudy" presidents once in office, see Burnham 1993.

accountability for the incumbent president. Four of the six produced Democratic governments. That in 2000 has the potential for producing either an all-Republican or an all-Democratic government, though congressional margins would be narrow in either case.

That leaves just one election in the postwar period in which there was no incumbent, successor, or surrogate running directly or associatedly to account for the record in office--a party accountability election. In 1952, Truman was eligible to run but decided not to do so. His approval ratings were very low, an unpopular war was being waged, and scandals marred his full term, 1949-1953. Since neither the president nor his vice president was running, his party had to be held accountable. Eisenhower won handily and Republicans won House and Senate majorities for just the second time since 1928. There has not been an all-Republican government since.

These results are, no doubt, exactly the evidence that encouraged the APSA Committee to prepare its report. What I have described could not possibly fulfill the requirements for an effective and responsible party system, as defined in the report. That reaction is by no means passe; many contemporary professional analysts agree with that perspective.

Another reaction is that the results as described are precisely what one should expect. What is portrayed is not the lack of accountability but rather a mosaic of responsibility associated with the separation of elections and variations in terms that sustain the separation of institutions sharing and competing for powers. The explicit implication is that a research orientation more suited to the workings of the separated system is needed, both for better understanding and for preparing reports designed to make improvements.

The Party and the Presidency

As a final topic I turn more directly to the relationship of party to the presidency. Does the president lead his party? Most treatments presume that he does. And who leads the opposition party that is referred to in the APSA report? The notion that the defeated presidential candidate leads his party as titular head has long ago been abandoned, if it ever made sense. Perhaps the president leads both parties, especially in split-party governments.

Remarkably, some sophisticated treatments of political parties have little to say about the

president as party leader, concentrating more on Congress.¹² Still, Sundquist (1992, 91) insists that the “doctrine of presidential leadership” is central to the theory of party government. A president leads through his party, which (consistent with the tenets of the party government model) will be a majority in Congress. The president sets the agenda, submits the bills, and meets with congressional party leaders, who will have had a role in planning the party program. As Sundquist concedes, the “era of divided government” changed all of that. Often the reformer’s reaction is to restore what Sundquist believed was the central role of the president in party government, presumably as outlined by the APSA Committee.¹³ But what the student needs is an understanding of how and whether presidents lead the parties in the contemporary version of the separated system, a version normally featuring split-party government.

¹² For example, Aldrich (1995) discusses “Political Parties and Governance” with hardly a mention of the president as leader. Principal attention is directed to congressional voting. Neither “president” or “presidency” appear in the index. In a collection of essays on the American party system edited by L. Sandy Maisel, the single chapter on “partisan presidential leadership” concentrates on the president’s appointments (1990, Ch. 13). There are two chapters on Congress. A recent collection of fine essays on Partisan Approaches to Postwar American Politics (Shafer 1998) has an essay by Randall Strahan on partisan officeholders but not one specifically on the president. I don’t make this point critically but rather to note that the president as party leader is not typically judged to be a topic deserving of special treatment.

¹³ In fact, as I have pointed out earlier, the APSA Committee was wary of presidential leadership, per se. They proposed the Party Council as a coordinating unit, and on which the president would serve ex officio.

Leon D. Epstein (1986) and John H. Kessel (1984) directly engage the matter of the role of the president in relationship to the party. Strong emphasis by both is placed on the influence of the separation of powers. As expected, given his work on comparative party systems, Epstein isolates the American presidency as a special case. He also stresses historical or founding principles as continuing to influence presidential status. Thus, for example, the office “was originally nonpartisan” and it “retained its nonpartisan attributes even after the emergence of partisan election and partisan leadership” (80). This ambiguity has continued as there are ceremonial functions and certain issues (defense, foreign affairs) where the president is expected to be above partisanship however much he may serve as party leader otherwise.

Epstein also contrasts “presidential party” with “congressional party” in interesting and relevant ways. The first “is more nearly a figure of speech” than the latter (84). And yet it was the presidential election that “is primarily responsible for the existence of national parties,” not congressional elections (83). As a concept separate from the national party organization, the presidential party is ordinarily quite personal, that is, as associated with a candidate and his win. Kessel anchors this followership in issue advocacy and thus is comfortable with a concept of “presidential party” (323-326). He also has identified some continuity among activists from one president to the next. Epstein is somewhat more cautious in this regard. In any event, the presidential party as defined by election activists remains separate from the national party organization. The latter is, of course, supportive of a president but it has party maintenance functions that extend beyond personal needs of the incumbent. And the relationship of supporters with the losing candidate typically ends with his defeat, though, as Kessel shows, various activists may begin their search for a new candidate.

If anything, the historical ambiguity of a president’s partisan role has been accentuated with reforms in the nominating process that have contributed to candidate-centered organizations (Ranney 1975; Polsby 1983). The consequences for governing are notable, possibly profound. A president enters with a loyalist coterie that may seek to govern as a substitute for party, a strategy that can be further rationalized in split-party government. Party remains available for use by presidents--Reagan was one such, as shown by Epstein. But there is no coherent structure suited to the demands of the

party government model, nor are there clearly evident reforms that would achieve that goal.

Another line of research identifies changes of note regarding presidents and parties. In The President and the Parties (1993) Sidney M. Milkis describes the impact of the New Deal on the political parties. He shows how it was that the Democratic Party became “the party of administration” by enacting programmatic entitlements. The result was “a more centralized and bureaucratic form of democracy that focused on the presidency and executive agencies for the formulation, the enactment, and the execution of public policy” (301). Traditional party politics was “diminished;” “personal responsibility of the president” was “exalted” (301). These arrangements make unlikely the kind of two-party competition called for by the APSA Committee unless an anti-administration party should develop (as appeared to be the purpose of Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich).¹⁴

What then can one say about the president as party leader? If anything, the changes identified by scholars appear to have created more ambiguity, not less. Presidents are left to fashion means by which they can have influence within their own party structures and with greater frequency across to the other party’s structures as well. We appear to be far beyond a time when party renewal of the APSA Committee variety can be rationally devised or practically implemented. Reform, if it is to come, must accommodate the modern government of parties.

Presidential Leadership in a Government of Parties

I suggest celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the APSA Committee Report by altering the mission for reform-oriented political party scholars. A different question should direct our research. The primary question for the APSA Committee was: How do we get more responsible and effective party government? I propose this alternative: How do we make a government of parties work more

¹⁴ John J. Coleman (1996) comes to similar conclusions by emphasizing the emerging fiscal state. “By institutionalizing fiscal policy, introducing new components of policy making, and encouraging plebiscitary voting, this state set in place the long-term conditions for party decline and, I argue, the keys to party renewal” (3) Coleman concentrates his research on Congress.

effectively? I understand that few, if any, scholars are admitted devotees of the Committee report. But here we are attributing significance to its leverage while proclaiming that we don't take it seriously. Personally I find Sundquist's position persuasive. The party government model continues to dominate the thinking of many, perhaps most, scholars and certainly of a huge majority of political analysts in the media. By this view, split-party government is bad for all of the reasons cited in the report. Single-party government is better but, according to the report, it must be more fully integrated for purposes of achieving more responsibility. Sundquist himself agrees with those sentiments but is troubled by the persistence of political conditions anti-thetical to realizing "a more responsible two-party system." And so he is willing to ask an honest, logical question: If not party government, what? In so doing he crosses an important threshold--from seeking to achieve unitarian, parliamentary-style outcomes in a separation of powers system to asking for an alternative model, one suited to a separationist rationale for governing. No celebration of the APSA Committee Report should proceed without acknowledging the importance of Sundquist's paper at the thirty-eighth anniversary of the report in 1988.

Sundquist's challenge remains to be met, even as our experience in governing continues to defy the conditions necessary for party government. We understand the shortcomings of the separated system but what are the benefits? David R. Mayhew (1990) has shown that split-party government is not gridlocked to the point of low productivity, quite the reverse. The reaction to Mayhew's findings has often been: Well, but how about this? Or: Can he really be right? A crossing-the-threshold reaction might have been: Gee, I wonder how that works? Or: What do you suppose explains those findings?¹⁵

¹⁵ A recent positive contribution to Mayhew's research is that by William Howell, Scott Adler, Charles Cameron, and Charles Riemann (2000). They examine all legislation enacted, 1945-1994, and identify four categories. They find that divided government depresses the production of "landmark" legislation, has no effect on passage of important legislation, and seemingly stimulates the passage of least significant legislation. They call for more research, including attention to "the theoretical foundations of legislative productivity (302)." A further refinement should be a more sophisticated treatment of the variations allowed by a government of parties. Not all "divided governments" are alike, nor are all "unified governments." Still to be accomplished is an analysis of legislative production associated with the variety of party splits that have been experienced in this period when both parties keep winning. Also worth nothing: Schattschneider (1942) contrasted total legislative production for divided and unified government (90).

Mayhew himself questions how can it be that the 93rd Congress (1973-1974) matches the 89th Congress (1965-1966) in production of major legislation. Part of the answer seems to be analysts' preoccupation at the time with Watergate rather than the compensatory features of a separated system when the presidency is under siege. But the policy record of more recent split-party governments also invites the interest of party scholars. How was it that Reagan was successful in getting House Democratic support for his agenda-bending tax and budget cuts in 1981? What explains the productive 100th Congress with a lame-duck President Reagan and a revitalized congressional Democratic Party? What does the 1992 stalemate between a beleaguered President Bush and a scandalized Congress (notably the House banking scandal) tell us about conditions for cross-party conflict? How is it that the one-party Democratic government in 1993-1994 failed to enact major Clinton priorities and one of the most contentious split-party governments in decades produced a flood of legislation in 1996? Each of these cases is illustrative of the workings of a government of parties, as well as instructive as to differences among split-party and one-party control.

The past fifty years have witnessed an extraordinary variety of political conditions for governing in the separated system. We now have a decent enough sample to prepare comparative analyses of these partisan variations. A first step is to embrace an altered perspective of the role and function of political parties in the American system, one that acknowledges the plurality of settings within which parties legitimately organize. Effectiveness is then judged by the extent to which the advantages of this arrangement are realized. Presidential leadership is often vital for achieving this goal. Seldom in recent decades can it be fulfilled by reinforcing strictly partisan strategies.

Table 1
Variations on a Theme of Accountability in Presidential Elections
1948-2000

<u>Type of Result</u> (Number)	<u>Election Years</u> (Party)	<u>Split Party Control</u>	<u>One-Party Control</u>
<u>Direct Accountability</u>			
President Reelected (4)	1956 (R)	X	
	1972 (R)	X	
	1984 (R)	X	
	1996 (D)	X	
President Defeated (2)	1980 (D-->R)	X	
	1992 (R-->D)		X
<u>Associated Accountability</u>			
Successor Elected (2)	1948 (D)		X
	1964 (D)		X
Successor Defeated (1)	1976 (R-->D)		X
Vice President Elected (2?)	1988 (R)	X	
	2000? (D?)	?	?
Vice President Defeated (3?)	1960 (R-->D)		X
	1968 (D-->R)	X	
	2000? (D-->R?)	?	?
<u>Party Accountability</u> (no incumbent or vice president running)			
Incumbent Party Defeated (1)	1952 (D-->R)		X

Source: Prepared by the author.

Notes: A former vice president won in 1968 (Nixon) and one was defeated in 1984 (Mondale). Truman in 1948 and Johnson in 1968 were eligible to seek reelection but decided not to run.

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