

April 1978

## The Socio-Economic Correlates of Party Reform

Leonard G. Ritt

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/jops>



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Ritt, Leonard G. (1978) "The Socio-Economic Correlates of Party Reform," *Journal of Political Science*: Vol. 5 : No. 2 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/jops/vol5/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Politics at CCU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Political Science by an authorized editor of CCU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [commons@coastal.edu](mailto:commons@coastal.edu).

## THE SOCIOECONOMIC CORRELATES OF PARTY REFORM

LEONARD G. RITT

*Northern Arizona University*

The question of party reform has interested political scientists since the days of Woodrow Wilson.<sup>1</sup> More recently, particularly in response to events at the 1968 Democratic convention, both pundits and practicing politicians have concerned themselves with the issue. Consequently, a matter formerly confined to the pages of scholarly journals has become the subject of a national debate. Regardless of where the question is examined or who the protagonists are, however a recurring characteristic of the discussion has been an overriding concern with normative questions, and an almost total lack of empirical analysis. "Today," says Evron Kirkpatrick, "there are no studies of which I am aware that establish the ways that value outcomes are effected by party organizations or party institutional practices."<sup>2</sup>

While the impact of party reform on the allocation of public resources has not been examined, some attention has been given to the conditions under which party reform might take place. Thomas Flinn, looking at the somewhat narrower question of party cohesion, has argued that party competition and homogeneous constituencies are conducive to party responsibility.<sup>3</sup> Gerald Pomper, using two decades of survey research data which show both greater congruence among voters between party and ideology and greater voter awareness of party differences, contends that "The nation is more ready for responsible parties today than in 1950."<sup>4</sup> Yet these studies are quite tentative, and do not explore in any systematic way those conditions under which party reform might take place. The present paper addresses itself to this problem.

In thinking about the circumstances most conducive to party reform, one can draw upon two apparently disparate, but nevertheless quite closely related trends in the literature. From the perspective of the state public policy literature, party reform can be conceptualized as an output of the political system. Instead of legislators solely making policy, however, party personnel would also be responsible for this task. If one hypothesizes that certain socioeconomic variables foster different kinds of legislative outputs, there is no reason to suppose that these same influences would not effect the

<sup>1</sup> Evron Kirkpatrick, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System: Political Science, Policy Science or Pseudo-Science?" *American Political Science Review*, 65 (December, 1971), 965-990, contains the most important references.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 988.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Flinn, "Party Responsibility in the States: Some Causal Factors," *American Political Science Review*, 65 (March, 1964), 71. Flinn's study deals only with the state of Ohio, and equates party *cohesion* with party responsibility. The term "party reform" itself is not without ambiguity. While the advocates of responsible parties have traditionally emphasized the need for centralized, programmatic organizations which offer meaningful alternatives to the electorate, the current proponents of reform have more often stressed the need for open, more representative institutions. Given the fact that intra-party democracy (as experience with the primary shows) can serve as a centrifugal force, compelling compromise rather than strict adherence to ideology, the two strains of reform may be logically incompatible. The present paper considers a form of intra-party democracy as its operational definition of reform.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald Pomper, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System. What Again?" *Journal of Politics*, 33 (November, 1971), 939.

policy outcomes within a political party. Of particular interest, in light of the present study, are the relatively high correlations which have been found between per capita income, levels of industrialization and urbanization on the one hand, and judicial, legislative and administrative reform on the other.<sup>5</sup> CONCEPTUALIZING PARTY REFORM AS A POLICY OUTPUT THEN WOULD LEAD ONE TO EXPECT THAT THE SAME FORCES WHICH HAVE BEEN CONDUCTIVE TO REFORM IN OTHER AREAS WOULD ALSO LEAD TO REFORM WITHIN THE PARTY SYSTEM.

From a different perspective, that of the comparative government literature, the opening up of the party to heretofore excluded groups, can be thought of as an indicator of increasing mass participation in the political process. There is a substantial amount of data which suggests that the level of economic development in any given country is related to its level of mass political participation.<sup>6</sup> Closer to the point is the recent finding of Cutright and Wiley, that the degree of political representation, defined as "... the extent to which the executive and legislative branches of government are subject to the demands of the non-elite population..." is dependent upon the level of socioeconomic development.<sup>7</sup> Reviewing this literature then one would be compelled to conclude that reforms which increase participation in party affairs should be dependent upon a specific set of socioeconomic conditions.

A third variable, interparty competition, would also be expected to produce more open parties for the following reason: in the course of American political development, increasingly competitive political parties stimulated both participation and democratization as they sought new partisans.<sup>8</sup> In the context of the present study, therefore, state parties in competitive environments would be expected to encourage the participation of heretofore excluded groups, while those in non-competitive environments, would be more likely to discourage them: competitiveness, in other words, should generate responsiveness.

In reaction to accusations of gross under-representation of women, young people, and Blacks at the 1968 convention, the Democratic Party adopted guidelines for the selection of delegates to the 1972 convention which required states to encourage the representation of these groups in reasonable relation to their proportion in the state's population.<sup>9</sup> This term was ambiguous enough to allow individual states a great deal of flexibility in their interpretations. Nevertheless, every state delegation increased its proportions of these three groups from 1968 to 1972. There were of course controver-

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Vines and Herbert Jacob, "State Courts," in Herbert Jacob and Kenneth Vines (eds.), *Politics in the American States*, 2nd Edition (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971), pp. 291-293; Ira Sharkansky, "State Administrators in the Political Process," in *Ibid.*, pp. 265-268. John Grumm, "The Effects of Legislative Structure on Legislative Performance," in Richard Hofferbert and Ira Sharkansky, (eds.), *State and Urban Politics* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971), pp. 291-293. Citizen's Conference on State Legislatures, *State Legislatures: An Evaluation of Their Effectiveness* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), Chapter 5.

<sup>6</sup> The original hypothesis is found in Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), Chapter 2. For a recent statement, see Norman Nie, G. Bingham Powell and Kenneth Prewitt, "Social Structure and Political Participation: Developmental Relations I," *American Political Science Review*, 63 (June, 1969), 361-378.

<sup>7</sup> Phillips Cutright and James Wiley, "Modernization and Political Representation: 1927-1966," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 5 (1969-1970), 33.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Goodman, "The First American Party System," p. 159, and Richard McCormick, "Political Development and the American Party System," *passim*, in William N. Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham (eds.), *The American Party System: Stages of Political Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967). The measure of interparty competition used in the present article is the Sharkansky-Hofferbert Competition-Turnout Factor found in Ira Sharkansky and Richard Hofferbert, "Dimensions of State Politics, Economics and Public Policy," *American Political Science Review*, 63 (September, 1969), 870-871.

<sup>9</sup> *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, June 17, 1972, pp. 1455-1458. This paper deals only with the Democrats because of their very serious attempt at implementing reforms. Republican efforts in the area were modest, and what data they did produce was very incomplete.



sies, and not every state carried out its task with equal vigor. Indeed, there were wide differences. West Virginia's delegation was 5% female, while Colorado's was 50%; only 9% of Missouri's delegation was young (under thirty), while 44% of Arizona's met this criterion.

It is these disparities, which from a reformer's point of view are galling, that provide the data for the basic reform measure employed in this paper: the *arithmetic difference* between the percentage of a group (in this case: women, young people, and Blacks) found in a state's delegation, and the proportion of that state's total population this particular group represented.<sup>10</sup> For example, 32 per cent of Alabama's delegation were women, while 53 per cent of that state's total population was of that sex. The Alabama "score" therefore was  $53 - 32$ , or 21. For Tennessee, the appropriate numbers were 49 (per cent in delegation) and 53 (per cent in state):  $53 - 49$  equals a "score" of 4. Tennessee, then, was more reformed than Alabama. This was done for 1968 and 1972, for each state and appropriate demographic group. A mean score (the average rank) for each state and each year was also calculated.

The author realizes that this index may not fully reflect any given state's commitment to party reform. Its significance is underscored however by Austin Ranney, a member of the McGovern Commission, who recently contended that "... the most fundamental charge against the established delegate-selecting procedures was that they make the convention 'unrepresentative'."<sup>11</sup>

Table One shows that the different areas of reform are not strongly related on either an intra-year or inter-year basis. There was some tendency in 1972 for state parties receptive to the demands of one group to be more hospitable to the demands of the other groups, but the correlations are rather small. In 1968, even this pattern is much less pronounced. This would suggest that reform is a multi-faceted phenomenon and the fact that a party has opened its doors to one heretofore excluded group does not mean it will necessarily open its doors to others. With regard to women and Blacks, those state parties which were more hospitable to these groups in 1968, were more likely to reform themselves in accordance with national party rules in 1972. This tendency is seen more clearly if each dimension of reform is looked at rather than the mean score correlations.

Turning to the specific hypotheses, Table Two shows that level of affluence does have some influence on the participation rate of women in political party affairs, but the effect on the participation rates of young people and Blacks is very small. A similar conclusion can be drawn from looking at levels of industrialization and urbanization. What is more striking about the effect of these latter two variables is their negative impact. In states with higher levels of industrialization and urbanization participation by previously excluded groups tended to be suppressed — precisely the opposite of what had been expected. This phenomenon is much less pronounced in 1972 than in 1968, suggesting that pressures from the national party might have had their greatest effect within the Democratic parties of the most industrialized and urbanized states.

Nor is party competitiveness related very strongly to party reform. While increased primary participation has been shown to be related to inter-party competitiveness, broadened participation in the party's decision making structure is apparently not encouraged by this phenomenon. It should also be noted that party competitiveness correlates higher with affluence than with industrialization and urbanization. Given

<sup>10</sup> The 1972 delegate data is taken from *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, July 8, 1972, p. 1642. The 1968 data is from the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, *Mandate for Reform* (Washington, D. C.: Democratic National Committee, 1970), pp. 9-11. The population data is taken from the various state volumes of the 1970 census.

<sup>11</sup> Austin Ranney, "Turnout and Representation in Presidential Primary Elections," *American Political Science Review*, 66 (March, 1972), 21.

the tendency in the data for affluence to relate somewhat positively and for industrialization and urbanization to relate negatively to some elements of party reform, one might speculate that the same factors which contribute to party competitiveness also contribute to party reform. The data, however, are only suggestive — not conclusive.

In most of the literature where competitiveness has been related to participation, the measure of participation has been voter turnout. But, as Verba and Nie have recently shown, participation is a multi-dimensional phenomenon.<sup>12</sup> Competitiveness correlates quite highly with 1968 presidential voting turnout (Rho=.78), but very poorly with the present measure of party reform. In other words VOTER TURNOUT AS A MEASURE OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IS ONLY ONE DIMENSION OF A COMPLEX PHENOMENON, AND THE SAME ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO HIGH VOTER TURNOUT DO NOT NECESSARILY CONTRIBUTE TO OTHER FORMS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION.

Given the thrust of most of the literature that economic development paves the way for broader participation, these findings are most surprising. As pointed out earlier, level of economic development was strongly related to other areas of governmental reform. Party reform is apparently much less susceptible to influences of this kind. Political factors peculiar to each state apparently explain party reform better than socioeconomic factors, and in contrast to much of the recent literature which stresses the importance of economic forces in explaining public policy, in this particular issue domain "politics does count."<sup>13</sup>

TABLE 1. The Interrelationships Between Areas of Reform (Spearman's Rho)

<i>Democratic Party Reform</i>	<i>Women, 1972</i>	<i>Youth, 1972</i>	<i>Blacks, 1972</i>	<i>Women, 1968</i>	<i>Youth, 1968</i>	<i>Blacks, 1968</i>	<i>X Reform Score 1972</i>
Open to:							
Youth, 1972	.37						
Blacks, 1972	.27	.36					
Women, 1968	.34	.35	-.03				
Youth, 1968	.04	.11	-.20	.21			
Blacks, 1968	.10	.09	.36	.16	.07		
X Reform Score, 1972	.72	.78	.71	.30	.00	.23	
X Reform Score, 1968	.24	.21	.02	.71	.63	.67	.32

<sup>12</sup> Sidney Verba and Norman Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), Chapter 4.

<sup>13</sup> One final note: the degree of party reform apparently did have some political impact, for when it was correlated with the vote for George McGovern the following results were obtained: X score, .32; women, .22; youth, .21; Blacks, -.03.

TABLE 2. The Correlates of Party Reform

<i>Democratic Party Reform</i>	<i>Affluence*</i>	<i>Industrialization*</i>	<i>Urbanization</i>	<i>Party Competitiveness</i>
Open to:				
Women, 1972	.32	-.07	.00	.22
Youth, 1972	.09	-.22	-.01	-.05
Blacks, 1972	.13	.05	.04	.14
Women, 1968	.46	-.55	-.16	.27
Youth, 1968	-.03	-.23	-.30	-.08
Blacks, 1968	.16	-.14	-.15	.21
X Reform Score, 1972	.22	-.11	.00	.15
X Reform Score, 1968	.27	-.53	-.40	.20
Affluence		-.10	.31	.63
Industrialization			.66	.08

\* The Affluence and Industrialization Factors, which measure two different components of economic development, are taken from Richard Hofferbert "Socioeconomic Dimensions of the American States," *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 12 (August, 1968), 401-418.