Field report for the course:
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Good and democratic political institutions are indispensable to a sustainable democracy. Political parties are one of the central institutions of modern representative democracies and are confronted by a number of new challenges, many of which have neither been anticipated nor adequately addressed by the existing literature on parties. Modern politics is party politics. Political parties are the major actors in the system that connects the citizenry and governmental process.[1] Parties turn the demands into political issues. They recruit candidates for public office, formulate programs for governmental action, compete for votes, and if lucky, exercise executive power until ejected from office.

A well functioning political party system is evidently an important condition for a well functioning representative democracy. One of the more interesting aspects of comparative party politics is the complexity of multiparty competition. Most theoretic models of multiparty electoral competition make the assumption that party leaders are motivated to maximize their vote share or seat share. In plurality-rule systems this is a sensible assumption. However, in proportional representation systems, this assumption is questionable since the ability to make public policy is not strictly increasing in vote shares or seat shares.[2]

Political parties' purpose is to monopolize power, to legitimate political authority. A party is "an organization whose purpose is to win elections by nominating persons and get them elected; they seek a monopolization of governmental power." Fred Riggs sees a party as "any organization which nominates candidates for election to a legislature."[3] Jozeph La Palombara and Myron Weiner claim that to deserve the name of party an organization must set up local units, seek electoral support from the general public, play a part in political recruitment, and be "committed to the capture or maintenance of

power, either alone or in coalition with others".[4] Lipset and Rokan (1967) developed a theory explaining parties as "alliances in conflict over policies and value commitments within the larger body politic".[5] They stressed parties' functions as agents of conflict management and as an instrument of integration. They also convincingly described and systematized the critical lines of cleavage that have historically structured the party systems of Western democracies.

As Strom and Muller have noted[6] the scholarly literature that examines political parties is enormous[7]. Indeed, parties were among the first subjects of analysis at the very birth of modern political science, as exemplified by the classic works of Ostrogorski, Michels and Weber. But it was really in 1950-1970s when studies of parties fully blossomed as subfield in political science. Such works as those of Duverger (1954), Ramnney (1954), Neumann (1956) Eldersveld (1964), Sorauf (1964), La Palombara and Weiner (1966), Epstein (1967), Lipset and Rokkan(1967), Sartori (1976), and Panebianco[8] (1988) established the conceptual and empirical bases for countless studies in comparative politics. As Peter Mair has pointed out "little more than decade ago, students of party politics were often accused of being engaged in a somewhat *passé* branch of the discipline; today it is a field which is brimming with health and promise."[9]

Paradoxically, revitalization of scholarly interest in parties has coincided with frequent assertions that parties have entered into an irreversible process of decline. Cumulative effects of these assertions have given rise in some Western democracies to a literature characterized by its somewhat fatalistic analysis of the organizational, electoral, cultural, and institutional symptoms of party decline (Berger1979, offe 1984; Lawson and Merkl 1988). Some scholars (Lowson and Merkl) regard these challenges as so serious as to threaten the very survival of parties.

Jean Blondel explores party government, patronage, and party decline with Western European parliamentary systems. He approaches the question of party decline from novel a perspective and posing the question: to what extent is party decline the product of semi-legal or illegal practices adopted by parties? Some other authors claim that parties are instrumental to collective benefits, to an end that is not merely the private benefit of the contestants. Parties link people to a government.[10] One of the conceptual problem is a general lack of agreement about what exactly means term "linkage" in the study of politics.

Another interesting aspect of party politics is party assistance programs. Party assistance strategies can be grouped into three core areas: (1) enhancing the electoral competitiveness of parties, including training in campaign strategy and tactics for parties and candidates,

(2) party building, organizational development and internal democracy, and (3) aiding parties in legislatures and governance. Political party assistance is often criticized, and party assistance programs certainly have weaknesses that can and should be addressed. But such criticisms often overlook the less tangible, more fundamental benefits of party assistance: the opportunity to build relationships with local parties and political elites that can reinforce important democratic norms. Even if structural constraints are difficult to overcome, or if resources are not sufficient to initiate a sweeping democratic transition, assistance to political parties can encourage the socialization of democratic norms and the acceptance of basic democratic values. Furthermore, maintaining a presence in a country allows assistance providers to seize unexpected opportunities for democratic reform when they present themselves.

The Georgia case illustrates well the constructive role political party assistance can have in the run up to competitive elections and the critical need for continued party assistance during periods of post electoral consolidation. Since the 2003 Rose Revolution and Eduard Shevardnadze's peaceful departure from power, USAID has continued to work closely with political office holders and, as a result, continues to provide valued assistance to Georgia's political parties. The central challenge for USAID party assistance in Georgia today is translating the success the party institutes had working with the united 2003 pro-democracy coalition to engaging many competing yet still pro-democracy oriented political parties.

The political science literature reflects two viewpoints regarding the formation of party systems in post-Soviet societies. Scholars drawing on traditional theories of party formation usually argue that the formation of institutionalized party systems in post-Communist states will be an extended process. However, newer studies reveal that parties, partisan support, and even party systems may form relatively quickly. The prevailing view among scholars who study the former USSR is that party identification and party loyalty may take years, even decades to develop. The public has been characterized as anti-party, distrustful of political parties, and indifferent toward parties in general.

Party politics in the former Soviet Union is fundamentally different from party politics in Western democracies in many ways. Since 1991, two crucial aspects of party politics in the less-than-democratic former Soviet republics have been the impact of authoritarian practices on party politics and the volatile nature of party politics. Starting with the observation that the creation and operation of parties in the former Soviet Union is driven by elite actors, scholars like Max Bader emphasizing the need to better understand these two aspects of party

politics by studying the incentive structures for elite actors from both within the political regimes and outside the region.[11]

Current work on political parties and partisanship in post-Soviet states is primarily focused on parties in government, parties in the electorate, and mass-elite linkages. Although there has been some recent work on party organization, these organizational analyses, while thorough and thought provoking, have been either largely theoretical in nature, case studies of individual parties, or historical event analyses of regional party activities. Moreover, too few investigations have attempted to shore up critical knowledge gaps about post-Soviet states by conducting comparative analyses of political institutions and developing rigorous methods suitable for cross-national longitudinal analysis.[12]

For nearly two decades, Georgia has been struggling to develop its democratic political party system. Although, significant progress has been made in democracy and election process, multi-party systems, and rule of law the country still characterized by a democratic deficit, a weak civil society, administrative inefficiency and an infant parliamentary culture. In addition to that, there is little appreciation of the rules of procedure or "spirit: of the constitution, necessary prerequisites for a functioning parliamentary democracy. Reckless obstruction by political parties holds back progress too in the economic field. Further the political cultures are typified by a lack of consensus especially on constitutional and electoral norms.

Some amount of work was done during last decade on Georgian election, party identification and institutional analysis. The most notable research projects were implemented by Georgian as well as international researchers: Ghia Nodia, Alvaro pintho Scholthbach,[13]Lincoln Mitchell.[14] however, sadly enough, most of this research has not been integrated with theoretical framework that is applicable to multiparty systems.

A closer look to Georgian political party system gives rise to questions. This is a country where politics is about leadership and not representation. The problem of Georgian political parties is that they are being built around the persons leading them. In fact, politics is so personalized that legitimate divergence in political opinion often go unnoticed.[15]This generates a focus on personalized debates, not on topics. Since all parties are founded on a personality, it could probably explain why there are more than 100 registered political organizations. Another major problem of Georgian politics is immaturity of political parties. Most experts (Nodia) blamed the political parties, including the ruling party that see revolution as the primary means of winning power. The core of this problem is this very confrontational political culture which was developed after the independence in parallel with

Civil war and military coup d'état. It should also be noted that not a single president has completed a full term since the country declared independence after the fall of the Soviet Union which is the clear illustration of fragility of Georgian political system.

Summing up the analysis of party systems in Georgia, it should be remarked that the main works do not have a primarily comparative character, and thus do not offering the political science community the possibility of a quite distinguished perspective of sub-regional scale. At the same time, according to the author, national and local variations of party system configuration, particular features and specificity of which are not sufficiently worked out at the moment, are not a fully-exhausted area of research.

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