

## 17.588f13 Week 10 “Parties, Party Systems, and Electoral Behavior”

### Questions for Class Discussion

Why are political parties important in modern democracies? What function do they play? Can you imagine democracy without them?

Summarize Lipset & Rokkan’s argument. Descriptively, how accurate is it? What explanatory power does it have, both in Western Europe and elsewhere? What other reasons might there be for how party systems develop?

What sorts of policy positions would you expect parties to adopt if Stokes is right? If Riker is right? What would they do if Lipset and Rokkan are right? Thinking of new democracies as a sort of natural experiment in party system development, which of the two explanations – or some other explanation – seems most compelling?

How are social divisions politicized, in the sense that they become the basis for electoral decisions? When will divisions be formed around class (i.e., sectors, occupation, or income levels) and when will they form around ethnic identities (e.g., language, religion, or race)? When will they form around something else entirely?

What assumptions about the behavior of individual voters lie behind the Lipset-Rokkan analysis of parties? Behind the work of Kitschelt, Stokes, and Riker? Do you find these assumptions plausible? How would altering them affect the conclusions these authors reach?

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