

Schizophrenia, it might be this psychiatric term that enters one's mind when an amateur observer is asked to describe the contemporary nature of major American political parties in one word. Such an uncomplimentary connotation has its rationale, and, at first sight, the American party system indeed may remotely remind of this ambivalent psychological disorder. Its "Jekyll and Hyde" character can be illustrated by the simple fact that, for example, before the 2000 presidential election, according to a Gallup Poll, 67 percent of the electorate supported the idea of a third party, but, at the very election, only 3.8 percent actually voted for a third party candidate.<sup>1</sup> Also, Americans commonly complain that "there ain't a dime's worth of a difference between the political parties"<sup>2</sup> and they even compare them to two famous brothers from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in the Wonderland* – Tweedledum and Tweedledee; however, if we analyze the floor voting in recent Congresses, we can discern unprecedented high partisan voting patterns which demonstrate deep loyalties of the individual congressmen and senators to their parent party. Moreover, there exists a common feeling of apathy among American voters because, according to them, political parties are too remote, and they do not address their needs but, at the same time, over two thirds of the electorate associate themselves with either Democratic or Republican Party and the number of independents is relatively low.

These obvious discrepancies seem to perplex even political scientists, as they come to contradictory conclusions about American political parties – some claim that they appear in the stage of decline and decomposition, such as Martin P. Wattenberg in *The Decline of American Political Parties 1952-1984* (1986) or William J. Crotty in *American Parties in Decline* (1980), while others celebrate their resurgence and boom, such as Larry J. Sabato in *The Party's Just Begun: Shaping Political Parties for America's Future* (1988) or Xandra Kayden and Eddie Mahe, Jr. in *The Party Goes on: The Persistence of the Two-Party System in the United States* (1985).

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<sup>1</sup> Bibby, John F. 2003. *Politics, Parties, and Elections in America*. Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, p.3

<sup>2</sup> This well-known phrase was coined by a former governor of Alabama and American Independent Party presidential candidate George Wallace so as to show his antipathy towards the Democratic and Republican parties

The goal of this thesis is to unravel the mystery of American party system and to explore its intricate maze, while focusing on different aspects that eventuate this illusive “schizophrenia.” I try to answer the question of whether the contemporary parties decline or thrive, and how their organization, structure of electoral support and behavior in the government have changed throughout their historical development as their presence can be best understood through their anamneses.

Chapter 1 defines the notion of political party and introduces the Key-Sorauf triad, which becomes a dominant approach towards political parties throughout this thesis. Chapter 2 outlines historical development of American political parties from the 1790s until 1932, tracing continuity and discontinuity of the four distinct party systems, and also contemplates rise and transformation of the “mass-based” party. Chapter 3 analyzes the recent trends in the party-in-government, while focusing mainly on Rohde’s conception of the so-called “conditional party government.” Chapter 4 deals with structural innovations that were integrated into the party-as-organization in the 1960s and 1970s, while also describing the rise of a new form of political party in service to its candidates. Chapter 5 focuses on the seeming decline of the political party in the electorate and it also deals with correlation between changing political and social environment and the occurrence of a new American voter in the 1960s. The conclusion is devoted to assessment whether present parties find themselves in decline or resurgence.