Critical Dialogue

Crackup: The Republican Implosion and the Future of American Politics. By Samuel L. Popkin. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. 347p. $27.95 cloth.
doi:10.1017/S1537592722001785

— Sidney Tarrow, *Cornell University*
sgt2@cornell.edu

Despite our discipline's proximity to the political process, few of us have bridged the academic and the political world as well as Sam Popkin. His new book consummately combines an insider's political savvy with the theorist's ability to get under the surface of events. It seamlessly stitches together the academic literature on parties, Congress, and elections to the nuts and bolts of politics in a way that few of us have mastered. Bravo, Popkin!

The strength of Popkin's bridging ability is revealed early in the book in his comparison of the new senators Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz in the early 2010s. Both were Cuban Americans; both came from southern states; and both wore their presidential ambitions on their sleeves. But while Rubio tried to build a broad base, Cruz honed in on Tea Partiers and Evangelicals to appeal to a narrow one. As a result, writes Popkin, "Cruz—the politician most responsible for the party's failure to pass any legislation, reach consensus on any issue, or expand its electoral base—had achieved the incongruous distinctions of simultaneously being the most reviled man in Washington and a role model that conservative parents held up for their children" (p. 86).

At times, however, Popkin the political insider obscures the skills of Popkin the academic theorist. For example, his treatment of "Trump's Blue Collar Advantage" over Hillary Clinton (pp. 148–51) in 2016 seems to accept the widespread assumption that the real estate billionaire depended for his election victory on his hold over less-educated white men, eliding the considerable evidence—recently summarized by Nicholas Carnes and Noam Lupu—that Trump's alleged appeal to working-class Americans was ambiguous at best ("The White Working Class and the 2016 Election," *Perspectives on Politics*, 19(1), 2021).

Popkin's astute academic chops are more evident when he argues that the collapse of Republican leadership was largely due to the inability of the party's leaders to forge consensus within their caucus. In this respect, his approach approximates what party scholars call "the UCLA school," the theory that parties are best seen as coalitions of interest groups (Cohen et al., *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations before and after Reform*, 2008; Bawn et al., "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands and Nominations in American Politics," *Perspectives on Politics*, 10(3), 2012). When these internal coalitions fall apart, parties are subject to crack-ups. "No matter how strongly supporters of a party oppose the other party," Popkin writes, "all coalitions eventually fracture" (pp. 191–92). This, he concludes, is what happened to the GOP between the second Bush and the Trump administrations, the period of Republican politics that he covers in greatest detail.

Three long-term factors are adduced to produce this malaise: the adoption of the direct primary, the McCain-Feingold reform, and the *Citizens' United* decision. Together these developments reduced the power of party professionals over policy and nominations, opened the door to extremists to challenge establishment Republicans in local primary fights, and turned the financing of elections over to deep-pocketed private groups with no concern for the party's needs. He might have added the growth of executive partyism, which shifted policy making from the parties to the presidency on both sides of the political divide (Sidney Milkis, *The President and the Parties: The Transformation of the American Party System since the New Deal*, 1993). The parties, as Daniel Schlozman and Sam Rosenfeld conclude, have been "hollowed out" ("The Hollow Parties," in *Can America Govern Itself?* 2019).

This concatenation of factors leads Popkin to his main explanation for the Trumpian takeover of the GOP: "Someone as ill-prepared and improbable as Trump could only win the GOP nomination *because the party had already cracked up into uncompromising groups with incompatible demands*, and had alienated so many of its voters that no Republican leader or politician had the credibility to exploit Trump's record of broken promises, betrayals, and shady deals" (pp. 2–3, italics added).

Popkin's interpretation of Trump's ability to gain the nomination puts more emphasis on the GOP as victim than of Trump as victor. Here too, greater reference to the academic research might have strengthened his

analysis. For example, there is almost nothing in the book about the interorganizational network (Klandermans, "Introduction: Social Movement Organizations and the Study of Social Movements," *International Social Movement Research*, 2, 1989) that the Trump organization built to buttress his campaign in many states (Zoorab and Skocpol, "The Overlooked Organizational Basis of Trump's 2016 Victory," in *Upending American Politics: Polarizing Parties, Ideological Elites, and Citizen Activists from the Tea Party to the Anti-Trump Resistance*, 2020). Through this wide-ranging network, which included Tea Party activists, gun club enthusiasts, the NRA, and Christian conservatives, Trump was able to assemble a remarkable array of support groups (also see my *Movements and Parties: Critical Connections in American Political Development*, 2021, ch. 8; reviewed later in this dialogue). How he did this is worth a book on its own, but suffice it to say that the array of "uncompromising groups with incompatible demands" that Popkin finds in the Republican Party had little to do with Trump's electoral success.

Animated by his theory of parties, Popkin tries to take his analysis across the aisle to the Democrats, who have been riven by progressive/moderate cleavages since well before the election of the current president. For example, in Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, he sees someone whose "absolutism" (Popkin's term) delayed her ability to see that she would have to make compromises with people "who only partly agreed with her" (p. 214).

If I must criticize, it would be to wonder whether Popkin places too heavy an emphasis on the fractures within the parties, and this for three reasons. First, because he sees parties as essentially coalitions, when a party suffers internal fractures, it will eventually crack up. But if parties are *more than* coalitions, they may have incentives to stay together. In their thoughtful analysis of the theory of parties, Nolan McCarty and Eric Schickler write of the UCLA school of party theory that "the bold simplification at its core obscures the critical role played by both elected officials and voters in party politics, and elides the extent to which changing institutional rules empower officials, activists, groups, and voters in different ways" ("On The Theory of Parties," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 21, 2018, 175–93, 190).

This leads to a second question: Can we use the same logic to account for the cleavages within both parties? In their carefully documented book, *Asymmetric Politics: Ideological Republicans and Group Interest Democrats* (2016), Matt Grossmann and David Hopkins assembled abundant evidence that the voters and activists who support the GOP are far more animated by ideological commitments than their opposite numbers in the Democratic Party, who have been a coalition of interest groups since the New Deal. In contrast—at least since the entry of the New Right into the GOP (Rich Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus*, 2009)—Republicans have been far more animated by ideological commitments. As Grossmann and Hopkins put it, "Whereas the organization of activists within the Democratic party has tended to be divided into multiple social groups and issue areas…the conservative ascendency in the Republican Party occurred via a broad mobilization of ideologically motivated activists who promoted an alternative philosophy that applied across a broad spectrum of policy domains" (2016, p. 135).

This takes me to my third question. Along with many scholars of the contemporary party system, Popkin sees deep-pocketed outside actors impinging on the historical functions of party elites. That is certainly true, but his book largely elides the social movements that have arisen alongside the two major parties and to some extent within them (McAdam and Kloos, *Deeply Divided: Racial Politics and Social Movements in Post-War America*, 2014; Tarrow, *Movement and Parties*, 2021). Even the deepest-pocketed outside actor—the Koch network—is a "hybrid" interest group and movement. As Charles Koch's statement of his aims made abundantly clear, "his language was militant," demanding that "our *movement* must destroy the prevalent statist paradigm" (Jane Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires behind the Rise of the Radical Right*, 2017, p. 66).

These features came together in what Popkin sees as the Republican "crackup" during and after 2016. In Donald Trump, the GOP became subject to an outsider demagogue who was shrewd enough to capture the support of both internal activists and a spectrum of ideologically driven movement allies. Not to put too fine a point on it: the GOP's crackup was also a *crack-in.*

The major question that scholars will want to ask as they come away from Popkin's engaging book is, Does Trumpism signify the nadir of the party— its "crackup"—or its "redemption," using the term to evoke how white supremacists regained control of southern politics after Reconstruction? Trump reordered the pieces of a party that had been deeply fractured by the cleavages that Popkin abundantly details in his book. But what have Trump and his supporters put in its place? And what does the future augur for this political family? If Trumpism was constructed out of an opportunistic coalition of the Cruzes, the Rubios, the McConnells, and the Kochs (who have already moved a distance from him), then it may have a short life, as the alliance among these actors "cracks up." But if, as I suspect, it was built on an ideologically structured coalition held together by "protective white nationalism" (Smith and King, "White Protectionism in America," *Perspectives on Politics*, 19(2), 2021) and by opportunist leaders at its summit, we may be in for a decade or more of Trumpism after Trump.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592722002122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

But these are more questions for Popkin than criticisms of what he has accomplished. In *Crackup,* we have a definitive account of the evolution of the Republican Party from a common or garden-variety conservative coalition to the strange combination of a movement and a party that we see today.

Response to Sidney Tarrow's Review of *Crackup: The Republican Implosion and the Future of American Politics*

doi:10.1017/S1537592722001797

— Samuel L. Popkin

I thank Sid Tarrow for a valuable review of *Crackup*; he was generous and thoughtful in discussing our differing assessments about America's path forward.

I second his praise of Michael Zoorob and Theda Skocpol for their analysis of the organizations that actively supported Donald Trump against Hillary Clinton in 2016. I leave the thorny issue of assessing their *actual* impacts for another time. I regret not citing Skocpol's early work on social revolutions as a reminder that the collapse of the state, or a loss of confidence in the center, can be the start of massive change: all great movements do not start from the bottom. This resonates with Marc Hetherington and Thomas Rudolph's research connecting low trust in government with support for outsiders like Trump (see Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 1979; Hetherington and Rudolph, *Why Washington Won't Work: Polarization, Political Trust, and the Governing Crisis*, 2015).

Trumpism will not end with Donald Trump because it did not begin with him. He recycled the promises of the other candidates but with catchier slogans, like "Make America Great Again" (which he trademarked in 2012), and the credibility of an outsider—"the people's billionaire"—untainted by responsibility for the GOP's broken promises.

However, I do not believe that "protective white nationalism," despite its popularity, will be an adequate program to resolve the differing constituencies of senators and representatives over health care repeal, foreign trade, protectionism, alliances, and the Confederate flag. For example, Senator Mitch McConnell supported Republican senators who voted for Biden's infrastructure bill, while GOP representatives tried to strip leadership positions from supportive colleagues. And although some Republican senators support Ukraine and NATO, one-third of their House counterparts would not vote for a symbolic resolution praising NATO's defense of democracy.

Although I take Tarrow's point about differences in party composition, I stand by my belief that Democrats are just as vulnerable to a crack-up. Campaign finance reform was the straw that broke the GOP's back, but there are many ways that a party can crack up. Democrats did not have a two-term president from 1968 until 1992 because of irreconcilable splits related to race, crime, and the social safety net. In the 1980s, moderates pushed the Democratic caucus to write a welfare reform bill they could explain to voters. "If we designed the bill for the mentality of the average man," a progressive replied, "we'd have the Republican bill." The bill died.

Stalemates like this motivated the formation of the Democratic Leadership Conference. Although dubbed the "Rhett Butler Brigade" by the Left, it succeeded in bridging enough of the racial gap to win its former chair, Bill Clinton, two presidential elections.

There are already divides opening in the party as more representatives identify with outside movements. When Representative Pramila Jayapal (D-WA 7th District) cosponsored a bill abolishing ICE during the family-separation crisis, her position was, "We're not about electing Democrats; we're about representing the rights of our constituents." When Speaker Kevin McCarthy moved to immediately schedule the vote on her bill, Jayapal had to disavow her own proposal to bail out the party and kill McCarthy's ploy.

The single most important vote of any legislator is still the vote to elect the Senate or House leader, no matter how committed they are to outside groups. Parties are still a necessary virtue, and I look forward to future contributions from Sidney Tarrow as we struggle to buttress democracy so that the passion of movements and the incrementalism of legislation can coexist.

Movements and Parties: Critical Connections in American Political Development.

By Sidney Tarrow. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. 288p. $84.99 cloth, $29.99 paper.
doi:10.1017/S1537592722002110

— Samuel L. Popkin, *University of California San Diego*
spopkin@ucsd.edu

Sidney Tarrow's wide-ranging book exemplifies the value of comparative politics for understanding the United States. Tarrow's background studying postwar communist parties in Italy and France; his seminal writings, most notably *Power in Movement* and *The New Transnational Activism*; and his productive collaborations with Charles Tilly and Doug McAdam free him of illusions about the United States: "Once we shed the myth of American exceptionalism, we can see… parallels with a variety of democratic experiences" (p. 233).

Charles Tilly's core theme was that "States Make Wars and Wars Make States." For this reviewer, Tarrow's theme is that parties make movements and

movements make parties (pp. 37–38). And just as some wars *break* states, some movements *break* parties. In his examinations of current and past movements, Tarrow concludes—and I agree—that the future of American democracy depends in large measure on how "movements and parties navigate the shoals of a deep democratic crisis" (p. 233).

This book demonstrates the value of bridging the divide between scholars of movements and political scientists studying voters or legislators. Neither side can provide a full picture on its own: movement studies ignored parties, whereas political scientists studying voters and legislatures missed the ways that movements and outside groups constrain party agendas.

Tarrow is as critical of movement studies, including his own past work, as he is of other approaches. On one hand, the '60s generation, with dreams of fraternity and sisterhood energized by civil rights, women's rights, and antiwar sentiment, saw political parties as out of step and out of date. Older scholars, scarred by shattered illusions, considered mass movements dangerous, given their vivid memories of Hitler and Mussolini.

As Tarrow began to connect movement research with parties, he concluded that his original thesis of a "social movement society" with blurred lines between movements and other actors was too simplistic. The burgeoning market for movements and interest groups had unexpected impacts on political parties, and studying movements apart from parties missed the ways that groups, both on the Left and on the Right, have "contributed mightily" to polarization (pp. 23–24, 149).

This is an important step in bridging the gap between movement studies and political scientists studying legislation or elections. Seventy years ago, the authors of *Voting* asked what moves an issue to the point where a party will seize on and articulate it. This question can only be answered by studying the ways that parties and movements interact. Yet, the 2009 *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics* did not even have an index entry for social movements (p. 13).

For all that survey research has taught us about primary voters and campaigns, and for all the advances in analyzing the congressional committee system and interparty bargaining, there are missing pieces. Tarrow rightly casts some of the blame on survey research, which until recently has focused on how citizens respond to questions about candidates and issues. This emphasis downplayed the ever-present battles within parties over which issues to debate and what policies to offer, as well as the intraparty fights between the distinctive interests and constituencies of governors, senators, representatives, and presidents.

It has long been accepted that parties do not "create" issues; they only raise an existing issue when it benefits them. At the same time, as Tarrow notes, critical changes occur in relations between movements and parties when parties are committed to an outdated structure. Tarrow correctly suggests that this happens when movements *already* embedded in a party, like unions or religious organizations, block change (pp. 15, 18).

This book reinforces my belief that it will be more difficult for parties to adapt in the future. The changes that are making it tougher for parties to build consensus in the House and Senate are partially self-inflicted and irreversible, such as campaign finance reform, whereas others are caused by changes in the economy and communications technology. Together, they have made it harder for parties to develop new equilibria when times change and old positions are no longer viable.

Tarrow compares today's contentious politics to a "traffic jam," an apt description of both parties' problems (p. 5). Democrats spent months on battles over whether to settle for incremental progress or fight for all-or-nothing legislation on infrastructure, child support, and climate change. Under President Trump, Republicans debated in the House and the Senate whether anything less than a total elimination of Obamacare was acceptable and, in the end, were unable to fulfill a major promise of repealing and replacing it.

The traffic jam was created by changes that began on the Left to weaken party control of candidate selection and strengthen the role of small donors in financing the parties. The Bipartisan-Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2002, known as "McCain-Feingold," was the joint result of the progressive desire to eliminate bosses, big money, and interests deemed "special" from politics and of the conservative goal to make government smaller and less progressive. McCain-Feingold became a self-inflicted wound that has weakened political parties by strengthening the power of big money to operate outside the parties and amplifying the power of activists to prevent House and Senate leaders from brokering consensus within and between the parties.

Tarrow's historical analysis and his discussion of current alliances highlight the areas where further research is needed. Movements, like parties, are sustained campaigns to advance causes with advertising, organizations, and networks (p. 16). But we need to know more about how movements and parties negotiate. The decline in parties' capacity to manage conflict and "civilize" ideological groupings is occurring because party leaders have less ability to control the traffic. This is due in part to their difficulty cooperating with movement groups associated with the parties.

Tarrow's discussion of Ronald Reagan's co-optive response to the Christian Right is valuable but does not address the tensions and often difficult bargaining since then to maintain the GOP's commitment to the conservative religious program. In 2012 and 2016

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592722002122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Evangelical leaders met to see if they could unite behind a committed religious conservative in the South Carolina presidential primary. In the most Evangelical primary electorate in the country, their chosen candidate lost both times, once to thrice-divorced Newt Gingrich and then to Donald Trump. How does a movement that cannot win in the relatively friendly environs of South Carolina maintain its national power?

I hope future work by Tarrow and others will help us understand more of the ways competition within and between groups affects both movements and parties. When a party's candidates or activists support an extreme version of its policies, it puts the other candidates in a perilous position: denouncing the extreme but consistent statement will upset many, whereas ignoring it can be more costly. The phrase "legitimate rape" cost Republicans several Senate races in 2010 and 2012. Conversely, "Defund the Police" addressed a serious national problem, but the slogan was hard to defend nationally—even though it was addressed in twelve city councils—and cost Democrats some seats in the 2020 election.

We know little about the ways movements manage activists when their efforts interfere with fundraising. When "Black Lives Matter" began raising substantial corporate contributions—close to $100 million—they denounced counter-rallies that confronted white nationalist rallies. Was this a response to corporate donors, and how was it decided?

Movements and parties have very different standards, and we need to know more about how some groups learn to navigate between them. A movement can sell a slogan without considering how to change any laws. In separate public meetings with Black Lives Matter activists in 2015, both Oprah Winfrey and Hillary Clinton pushed them to focus on legislation. "If you can't explain it and you can't sell it," Clinton told them, "then it stays on the shelf."

No matter how many followers a politician has, or how many marchers or donors support a movement, congressional and senate votes are the coin of the legislative realm. When President Lyndon B. Johnson met with Clarence Mitchell, a legendary civil rights lobbyist, he would say, "Clarence, you can get anything you want, if you've got the votes. How many votes have you got?"

With his book, Sidney Tarrow raises critical questions. Is there any way that movements can help shorten the path of contention over legislation? Can idealism and passion live alongside fine print and thousands of pages of details? How do some organizations manage over time to become fixtures in the political landscape?

Tarrow has changed my understanding of the role of movements in American politics. He has redefined my understanding of what constitutes a realistic solution for the antidemocratic threats facing America. Until we can answer his questions, we do not have a viable path forward.

Response to Samuel L. Popkin's Review of *Movements and Parties: Critical Connections in American Political Development*

doi:10.1017/S1537592722002122

— Sidney Tarrow

In his thoughtful review of my *Movements and Parties*, Sam Popkin recognizes the value of bridging the divide between scholars of social movements and political scientists who study voters or legislators. His review is so gracious that it would be churlish of me to complain about his criticisms. Rather, I focus on three ways in which Popkin urges me to take further my arguments concerning the party/movement nexus. Drawing on his long experience in party campaign work and as a consummate political analyst, Popkin argues that *first,* movements sometimes jog parties to move beyond their existing commitments, a point I could have made more pointedly; *second,* "movements *already* embedded in a party can block change," a point I failed to make; and, *third*, "just as some wars *break* states, some movements *break* parties," the most far-reaching of his amendments.

Movements can jog parties to move beyond existing commitments: In chapters on Wilson's reluctant support of the suffrage movement, the New Deal's partnership with the CIO, and the New Right's defeat of the moderate wing of the GOP, *Movements and Parties* supported this argument but could have gone further. For example, after the 1960s, the Democrats began to absorb the messages of the cultural Left. Similarly, Trumpism shifted the GOP's center of gravity far to the right. When movements jog parties to move beyond existing commitments, they can even convert sectors of the party—as Trump was able to do with opportunists like Lindsey Graham.

Movements embedded in a party can block change: The primary reforms of the 1970s helped lead to the move of Christian conservatives into the grassroots of the GOP, where they helped impede that party's ability to reach out to new constituencies. Once entrenched, these groups can harden into internal interest groups, like the teachers' unions that have been a drag on the Democrats' ability to propose educational reforms.

Just as war can break states, movements can break parties: This is a claim that movement scholars—who sometimes appear to be cheering for movements— have failed to investigate. Think of the inability of the Republicans after their losses in the 2008 and 2012 elections to take seriously that they risked becoming a party of mostly white, majority-male, and increasingly older voters. When a demagogic businessman with a gift for inflated rhetoric appealed to

them in the 2016 election, the party risked "cracking up"—to adopt the language of Popkin's book.

These extensions have led the party system to turn into a "traffic jam." They lead Popkin to worry about the parties' ability to adapt in the future. To the extent that movements have played a role in creating this situation, scholars of social movements and parties should take his concerns seriously. I certainly will!

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592722002122 Published online by Cambridge University Press