

The end of ideology?
Factional competition and the making of modern parties

John Crysler
Department of Political Science
Carleton University
Ottawa, Canada
jcrysler@connect.carleton.ca

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Introduction

It is well known that in established democracies, the chief function of political parties is to engage in electoral combat. Less obvious – and less studied – is the political combat that occurs within political parties. Panebianco observes that, in political parties, power resources tend to accumulate in small groups, but no one group can monopolize these resources (36). Therefore, we can expect constant competition over these resources between rival groups. Indeed, this appears to be the case. Using the term in its broadest sense, we may call these competitive intra-party groups ‘factions’. Not only are factions ubiquitous in political parties, but they are consequential as well. As Sartori puts it, “the nature of a party is in the nature of its fractions” (75).¹ Factional competition may decide who ‘speaks’ for the party. That is to say, it is through factional competition that politicians gain, maintain or lose political power.

If one is to study contemporary political parties, the notion of party transformation must be addressed. The dominant accounts of party transformation include Duverger (1964), Kirchheimer (1966), Panebianco (1988), and Katz and Mair (1995). These studies do not ignore factions, but their emphasis is more on parties as whole entities and how their responses to major social change (e.g. mass enfranchisement, declining class cleavages, innovations in communications technology, growth in postmaterial values) transform their organizational structures and their relationships with civil society and the state. Although factions play an important role in Panebianco’s account of the transformation of mass-bureaucratic parties into electoral-professional parties, very little empirical scholarship exists on the intersection of factionalism and party transformation.

Three empirical phenomena are driving my research: 1) factions (in different forms) exist across time and space spanning all types of parties; 2) significant transformations in party organization and function have occurred in the past few decades; 3) in many parties, factional competition now takes the form of professionalized entourages that revolve around rival party elites. A series of interrelated questions thus arise. What role do factions play in party transformation? How does party transformation affect factionalism? Most importantly, does the triumph of modernization – the de-ideologicalization, presidentialization and professionalization of parties – result in the elimination of ideology as a basis for factional organization? This paper’s first two sections deal with party organizational transformation and factionalism as distinct analytical concepts. In the third section, hypotheses about the intersection of party transformation and factionalism are developed. The fourth, fifth and sixth sections discuss how these hypotheses may be tested empirically. Finally there is a conclusion.

Party transformation

The literature on party transformation focuses on the intensity and character of the political party’s relationships with the state and civil society. Katz and Mair (1995), drawing on the works of Duverger, Kirchheimer, and Panebianco suggest a four-stage process of stimulus and response in the evolution of the political party in Western countries. First, in the 19th century

¹ My use of the term ‘faction’ has the same meaning as Sartori’s ‘fraction’.

cadre parties or elite parties were organized within parliament. The system revolved around local notables who were the elites of both civil society *and* the state. Second, at the beginning of the 20th century, mass parties arose as oppositional vehicles for the newly activated and often disenfranchised elements of civil society who did not see themselves as well represented by the cadre parties. These groups thus created mass parties – often socialist – as their instruments, directing the actions of the mass party in parliament and in government. This was the golden age of ideology in politics.

At the same time, however, in a process described by Kirchheimer (1966), the cadre parties responded to the success of mass parties by trying to ground themselves in civil society in order to win popular support. The cadre parties' sectional bases tended to be far too small for electoral success, so they became 'catch-all' parties that tried to build electoral coalitions through non-ideological appeals that cut across class lines. The third stage in the evolutionary process saw convergence as mass parties responded to the success of the catch-all parties and mimicked their approach. Parties now stood between civil society and the state as brokers. The politicians, who were trustees in the cadre party and delegates in the mass party, thus became entrepreneurs in the catch-all party.

This age of catch-all convergence is similarly described by Panebianco (1988) who writes of the transformation of the mass-bureaucratic party into an electoral-professional one. He emphasizes the dulling of class cleavages, the rise of post-material values and the development of new communications technology such as polling and television. He also highlights the importance of a new cadre of communications professionals such as pollsters, advertisers and public relations experts. The electoral-professional party, like the catch-all one, is essentially non-ideological and focused on what Kitschelt calls a "logic of party competition" rather than a "logic of constituency representation" (56).

Katz and Mair's account of the fourth stage of party transformation – the emergence of the cartel party – is influential and controversial. They reject the notion that the catch-all/electoral professional party represents a sort of endpoint in the evolution of the party. Instead they argue that as catch-all parties chased electoral success, they developed autonomous interests for the material rewards that spill from winning office. In addition, as part of their brokerage function they developed an ability to manipulate the state. As membership rolls went down, parties 'colluded' to replace private funding with state subventions in order to fund their expensive professionalized campaigns. The authors thus argue that parties have now become "absorbed by the state" and can be described as "semi-state agencies".

The debate as to whether political parties do indeed 'form a cartel' is not relevant to my analysis. Instead, I will focus on three developments crucial to Panebianco's rise of electoral-professional parties, that are also consistent with the descriptions of the catch-all and cartel parties. First, the three accounts describe a progressive de-ideologicalization of party politics, or the adoption by parties of office-seeking strategies. Second, the party leader plays an increasingly crucial role in the party. This general trend of 'presidentialization' has been observed elsewhere in the literature (see, for example, Poguntke and Webb 2005). Third, Panebianco's description of the professionalization of parties (e.g. the central role of communications experts and other professionals within the party) appears to be empirically accurate. So, while current political

parties meet the characteristics of the various ideal types to greater and lesser degrees, de-ideologicalization, presidentialization and professionalization appear to be qualities that are especially widespread. Collectively, we may refer to these processes as ‘modernization’.

Factionalism in political parties

Belloni and Beller define a faction as “any relatively organized group that exists within the context of some other group and which... competes with rivals for power advantages within the larger group of which it is a part” (Belloni 419). They also observe that three questions dominate the small literature on factions: “How *structured* are factions? What are the *functions* of factions? What are the *causes* of factions?” (Beller 10). For the first question, most analyses rely on Richard Rose’s (1964) influential typology: factions and tendencies. A faction is a specific power group, while a tendency is a patterned set of attitudes (e.g. left-wing and right-wing). Factions are organized while tendencies are not. It is possible to have a faction that is organized around a particular set of attitudes, but the point is that factions and tendencies are analytically distinct.

As for the functions of factions, the literature tends to focus on two questions. First, is factional competition an expression of democracy? For example, factions may take the form of grassroots revolts against the party elites enabling regular party members to engage democratically. As Schwartz argues factionalism “involves a challenge to the status quo, manifested as a rebuke to the host organization for its prevailing policies, power arrangements or ideological interpretations” (53). Although Duverger observes that factionalism occasionally takes this form, he argues that more frequently factional divisions “point to differences of opinion between members of the ruling class. Each fraction is itself authoritarian in structure...” (174). Sartori has a similarly pessimistic view of the democratic value of factional competition, which he places in the Machiavellian realm of pure politics (105). The reason for this is that internal politics can proceed without regard to the reactions of the electorate or the legal rules and regulations that govern inter-party competition. Moreover, the few rules that parties do have are rarely enforced (Sartori 95). So although factions may play a significant role in intra-party decision-making, such as questions of policy and personnel, these processes are not necessarily democratic. An intriguing possibility is that the state’s increasing interventions in party affairs in the last few decades (see, for example, Bartolini and Mair [2001] and Katz [2002]) may be transforming factional competition into something that more closely resembles the democratic characteristics of inter-party competition.

The second question, relating to the function of factions, is to what extent may factions be considered integrative mechanisms? It seems obvious, on the face of it, that factions are divisive because they fight with one another and undermine party unity. In fact, most theorists treat them as such. However, McAllister argues that factions may act as integrative mechanisms in catch-all parties by providing the party’s alienated ideological supporters with collective incentives for belonging: “Organized factions thus permit a party to broaden its political appeal to win votes, while more successfully integrating a diversity of internal interests among the party membership” (207). Thus, the party is free to pursue a catch-all strategy without sacrificing the material and human resources that a mobilized membership provide.

Finally, with respect to the causes of factionalism, the distinction made most frequently is between materially motivated and ideologically motivated factions. Sartori, for example, refers to Hume's classification scheme: factions from interest and factions from principle (76-77). There is a rich literature regarding the former that derives from anthropological studies of patron-client relationships in settings that range from tribal villages to modern political parties (Beller 9). The materially motivated faction is described colourfully by Duverger, who refers to teams of individuals "who unite in order 'to shake the fruit tree'" (152). This perspective relies on the widely held assumption in the behavioural sciences that individuals primarily are driven by self-interest. It cannot be denied, however, that many factions appear to be ideologically driven. Both Sartori and Hine acknowledge the existence of ideologically oriented groups, but they also warn that ideology may camouflage the true material interests that may sustain the faction (Sartori 77; Hine 41). Perhaps the Downsian hypothesis that "parties formulate policies in order to win elections, rather than win elections in order to formulate policies" (Downs 28) might be applied to factions as well.

My primary interest in factions relates to the extent to which they are motivated by ideological or material concerns. Whether the faction distributes ideological or material rewards has significant effects on the faction's organization and function within the party. We can expect, for example, that a faction sustained by material rewards will be organized along the patron-client model, whereas an ideological faction is more likely to adhere to internally democratic norms. Similarly, in terms of the faction's function, some have observed that ideological factions are actually integrative (McAllister), while materially-oriented factions are divisive (Betts:2002 2).

Kitschelt and Panebianco are useful guides to the investigation of interest and ideology in the study of factions. According to Kitschelt, we can expect factional competition to take place between ideologues (in pursuit of comprehensive social reorganization) and pragmatists (focused on electoral competition), with lobbyists (primary loyalty to an interest group, such as labour unions) playing an intervening role. He describes the conditions under which the ideologues and pragmatists are most likely to reign ascendant within the party. For example, the ideologues are most likely to be dominant when: 1) the party's social cleavage is highly mobilized; 2) the existing political regime is unresponsive; 3) the party is electorally weak; 4) pragmatic strategies have not worked for the party in the past (236).

The battle between ideologues and pragmatists also figures prominently in Panebianco's analysis. He argues that structural and technological changes are driving parties to shed their mass bureaucratic organizational structures and adopt what he calls an 'electoral-professional' approach. The structural changes – mainly the decreasing importance of social class as a politically salient division and the increasing importance of post-materialist values – has narrowed the social bases that once formed the core electoral support of mass-bureaucratic parties. This puts pressure on parties to reach out to the larger and more diverse 'opinion electorate' to win elections. This new approach is facilitated by new technologies, including television and opinion polls, which reduce the relative effectiveness of reaching potential supporters through traditional communications techniques (pamphlets and meetings). In electoral-professional parties, specialized political professionals play a central role, the party

makes electoral appeals beyond its traditional social base, personalized leadership is pre-eminent, and political careerists play a more important role than ideological ‘believers’.

For Panebianco, these structural and technological changes provide the context for party transformation, but transformation itself is brought about by factional competition and shaped by institutional factors. He argues that pragmatic or modernizing factions, sensing electoral opportunity (and potential disaster) in the changed social environment, will challenge the status quo and initiate the transformation into electoral-professional parties. The speed of the transformation, however, will vary depending on the party’s electoral strength (larger parties facing more pressure to transform) and the degree of institutionalization of the party’s bureaucratic apparatus prior to transformation (the higher the institutionalization, the slower the transformation) (265).

Hypotheses

This project’s first three hypotheses are related to what may be considered an evolutionary account of factionalism in the modernizing party. We begin with Panebianco’s hypothesis that social and technological changes, rather than inspire the mass-bureaucratic party’s hierarchy to transform, will spawn the creation of modernizing factions that challenge the status quo. Second, parties in which the modernizers have successfully begun the process of de-ideologicalization, presidentialization and professionalization will feature factionalism in the form of ideological challenges to the party’s modernizing leadership. McAllister argues that this sort of factionalism plays an integrative role in the party because it encourages a division of labour between the party leadership and its ideologically oriented factions. The party seeks votes in the electoral marketplace and factions mobilize and integrate ideologically motivated members. I hypothesize that this state of affairs can only last as long as the party’s basic direction is contestable. That is, as the ideological factions consistently lose the crucial battles over the basic direction of the party and as possibility of reversal becomes increasingly remote, they will tire of exercising the ‘voice’ option. Instead these activists will exercise the ‘exit’ option of joining or creating other parties, interests or social movements to carry out their goals. Relieved of its most ideological activists, the party’s factional competition will cease to feature ideological elements. The hypotheses that emerge from the process just described may be summarized as follows:

1. The move to modernize will come not from the top of the mass-bureaucratic party’s hierarchy (satisfied by the existing arrangements), but from a faction pushing for the adoption of an office-seeking strategy;
2. Once the modernizing faction transforms the party, factionalism will take the form of ideological challenges from the margins to the party leadership;
3. Once modernization takes hold, ideology will disappear as a basis for factional organization.

The next hypothesis has to do with the motivation of factions. As described above, the two main motivators for factions are ideology/policy and material reward/patronage. The evolution of party change described above is one in which the party’s commitment to an ideological

programme is weakened and its focus on winning elections is strengthened. Factions battle over the prizes that the party provides. If an ideological party provides policy, a modernized party provides the spoils of office. Thus, we can formulate the following hypothesis:

4. The more ideological the party as a whole, the more its factions will be motivated by policy. The less ideological the party as a whole, the more its factions will be motivated by patronage.

This brings us to the main question of this essay: does the triumph of ‘modernization’ result in the elimination of ideology as a basis for factional organization? A theoretical case can be made for the affirmative through an examination of the interconnections of the various aspects of modernization. In order for the party to adopt an office-seeking approach, it must abandon its ideological baggage. However, if the party is internally democratic, then the leadership may be directed by the activists to adopt ideological stands that are unpopular in the electorate.

Therefore, for the party to have the policy flexibility necessary for success in the electoral market, there must be a requisite increase in the leader’s power relative to the instruments of grassroots control. In addition, the demands of party competition are such that the party must exploit the most up-to-date communications tools to defeat its opponents. The leader, to ensure his or her dominance of the party, must control these tools. The party’s parliamentary leadership, rather than the party conference, becomes the ultimate prize and we can thus expect factions to revolve around the party leader or aspiring leaders. The party leadership becomes both the most important prize and the focus of factional challenges. In order to maintain the loyalty of his or her followers, the factional leader must dispense patronage strategically. The cycle repeats endlessly as those excluded from the dominant faction will find a new patron to support in the hope that this person will distribute the spoils of power as the party’s next leader.

In a similar vein, Noel (2001) draws on Panebianco’s thesis to make insights about the changing nature of intra-party competition in Canada and argues that the increased importance of political professionals has had profound effects on the nature of factional competition. Increasingly, intra-party groups are entourages oriented around particular leaders and sustained by the increased flow of patronage to the advertisers, pollsters and lobbyists that form the core of these groups (83). These groups are sustained by the spoils of office and tend to form and re-form every time there is a new leadership contest.

Research design

Since the hypotheses have to do with transformation, it is necessary to take a longitudinal approach. The 1972 to 2007 period is a useful time frame, both because it covers a significant era of professionalization of political parties, and because in the 1970s and 1980s parties – especially those on the left – faced significant ideological challenges in the wake of the failure of Keynesian economics in the 1970s. In addition, since we are trying to draw conclusions about mass-bureaucratic and electoral-professional parties, it is important that the cases selected fall into both of these categories and in between. Finally, it should be noted that there are important determinants of the intensity and character of factionalism other than the degree to which

'modernization' becomes entrenched. Six especially important determinants that should be taken into account are discussed below.

First, the party's competitive position is crucial in that factionalism appears to be the privilege of dominant and marginal parties. This is because activists within these parties do not foresee factional strife as posing any danger to the party's electoral prospects, which are essentially fixed. In the case of a dominant party, it "has guaranteed access to resources and power. This translates into prizes worth fighting for" (Schwartz 60). In the case of marginal parties, they have nothing to lose from their internal fights. Competitive parties, on the other hand, face far more pressure to suppress divisive factional conflict because a small swing in votes can make the difference between government and opposition. However, in the context of the transformation from a mass-bureaucratic party to an electoral-professional party, a different logic is at work. Competitive parties experience the greatest pressure to transform because the potential benefits from transformation (or losses from stagnation) are much greater than in marginal or dominant parties (Panebianco 265). In such parties, we can expect pragmatic factions to challenge the mass-bureaucratic status quo.

Second, the electoral system shapes factional conflict takes place in two ways: the quantity of factionalism and the arena in which it occurs. With respect to the former, Duverger argues that parties in proportional representation (PR) systems are more factionalized than parties in majoritarian systems because larger parties in PR systems do not receive the seat bonuses enjoyed by their counterparts in majoritarian systems (248-49). Thus, in a majoritarian system, where larger parties routinely win a significantly higher percentage of seats than votes, there is more incentive for a divided party to stick together to reap these seat bonuses. With respect to the latter, the electoral system affects the locus of factional conflict. For example, candidate selection is a crucial activity in all electoral systems and one to which rival factions pay particular attention. Thus, in single member plurality systems, we can expect factional competition to take place at the constituency level (if the local parties control the nomination process), or, in the case of PR list systems, at the nominating convention or party committee responsible for creating the candidate list. In open list PR and single transferable vote systems, a different dynamic is at work because the electoral system encourages competition between candidates of *the same party* during general elections. For example, Japan's former electoral system, which pitted candidates of the same party against one another in multi-member districts, was blamed for encouraging factional strife.

Third, a number of authors (e.g. Duverger, Panebianco and Schwartz) argue that federalism can colour factional competition. Duverger "suggests that party organization tends to assume structure and articulation paralleling that of the governmental system: thus federalism encourages decentralization and weak vertical articulation" (Hennessey 12). In such parties, the opportunity structure will thus encourage factions to reflect the country's federal divisions. These federal divisions may disrupt the development of factions from some broader purpose, such as the promotion of a certain ideological perspective. The development of ideological factions is therefore less constrained in unitary states.

Fourth, Hine argues that "a group's need for [factional] organization will depend on the rules and conventions governing party life" (38). For example, proportional representation in internal party

elections (i.e. the allotment of a certain number of party posts to each faction based on their strength within the party) may be established in recognition of pronounced factionalism, but once established it provides an ongoing incentive that encourages factional organization.

Fifth, the party's formative history leaves an imprint that may affect the forms that factionalism takes in the future. Schwartz observes that multiorganizational fields can be a source of factionalism. That is to say, if certain well-defined groups come together to form a party, we can expect factional competition between these groups to endure. The factions within the Liberal Democrats of Japan, for example, descend from the separate parties that united to form the larger party. Similarly, it is possible that the new Conservative Party of Canada, the result of a merger between the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative Party, will feature ongoing factional competition between these two intra-party groups. In the NDP, the institutionalized partnership with labour unions ensures that this group will play a significant role in the outcome of factional competition itself.²

Finally, the party's experience with factionalism may depend its placement on the left-right ideological spectrum. For example, Hine observes that in right wing parties factional competition tends to be restricted to the upper echelons, while in left wing parties factional leaders will carry the fight onto the grassroots membership (48).

The importance of these six determinants requires that the cases for this analysis be selected with care in order to allow the proper testing of the hypotheses.

Case selection

For this project, there are four main considerations in the selection of cases. First, there should be a mix of mass-bureaucratic and electoral-professional parties. Second, all of the cases should have at least experienced the pressure to transform in the areas of de-ideologicalization, presidentialization and professionalization during the period of study. Third, there should be a mix of parties at various levels of competitiveness (dominant parties, competitive parties, marginal parties). Finally, in order to control for institutional features such as the presence or absence of federalism and the type of electoral system, it is important that we select several cases in each country that is studied. By doing so we may also take into account the possibility that there are differences in the experience of factionalism according to the parties respective positions in the political spectrum (i.e. left, right or centre).

Bearing these considerations in mind, cases within the following countries may be selected for this project: Canada, Britain and New Zealand. In terms of institutional features: Canada is a genuine federation with a single member plurality electoral system; Britain was a unitary state but became a quasi federal state with recent constitutional reforms and it also has a single member plurality electoral system; New Zealand is a unitary state that moved from single member plurality to a form of proportional representation in the early 1990s. For consistency's sake, the three largest parties as of the most recent national election (excluding parties with solely regional aspirations) will be selected for examination. Thus, the parties selected include:

² Hine observes that in socialist parties, trade unions tend not to form factions, but rather to act as a support group or kingmaker in factional disputes.

in Canada, the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party; in Britain, the Labour Party, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats; in New Zealand, the Labour Party, the National Party and New Zealand First. These cases constitute a mix of parties in terms of placement in the spectrum between mass-bureaucratic and electoral-professional parties, the degree to which the parties have transformed from the former into the latter, the parties' competitive positions, and the parties' respective positions along the ideological spectrum. As a result, a thorough examination of these cases may permit some general statements relating to the hypotheses stated above.

Data collection

In order to test the hypotheses, parties and factions need to be classified, and variables developed. The first step is to classify the selected parties according to Panebianco's ideal types. The second step is to classify the factions within the selected parties according to their motivation and goals.

The data collection related to the identification of party type and party transformation will focus on four main areas: 1) party manifestoes, campaign promises and public statements; 2) party organizational structure and rules; 3) opinion structure of party members and party elites; 4) campaign techniques. The first area is useful to determine the extent to which there has been a decline in the coherence and salience of ideology in the party.³ The second area is useful to determine the extent to which there has been a move away from grassroots democracy and a concomitant concentration of power in the party leader, which would indicate presidentialization.⁴ In the third area, attitudes relating to ideology may be investigated.⁵ Finally, in the fourth area, we may test for evidence of professionalization of campaign techniques.⁶ In all these areas, there is an existing literature that will assist in the development of specific indicators.

The second step is to identify factions within the selected cases and to classify along two dimensions: 1) whether the faction is sustained by patronage or ideology/policy; 2) whether the faction supports or opposes efforts to modernize. Hine offers a rough guide to the placement of factions on the first dimension: if it is short in duration and inconsistent on policy, then it is likely motivated by material interest (42). If, on the other hand, it is long in duration and consistent on policy it is likely motivated by ideology. This is because factions sustained by patronage, by definition, rely on a particular patron who gains the support of his or her followers through the distribution of material benefits. If patronage is the main motivator, then it is unlikely that the faction will survive a change in its leadership. The reason for this indirect method of analysis is to address the problem of camouflage observed by both Sartori and Hine: a

³ Here, for example, the work of the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) would provide useful data and a framework for analysis.

⁴ See, for example, Poguntke and Webb (2005) for different approaches to investigating presidentialization.

⁵ In two of my case countries, survey research has been conducted on the ideological attitudes of party members (for Britain, Seyd and Whitely [2004]; for Canada, Cross and Young [2002]). This data could be supplemented through elite surveys.

⁶ See, for example, the methods of analysis used by Denver et al (2003).

faction may *claim* to be motivated by ideological concerns, but these concerns are simply camouflage for material benefits that are truly motivating faction members.

As to whether the faction is involved in efforts to support or oppose modernization, the best places to look for evidence are the party's internal 'showdowns' that relate to the party's organizational and ideological future. Possible arenas of conflict include the drafting of party manifestos, proposed amendments to the party's constitution, policy resolutions and elections for internal party posts. The research into factionalism will have to rely on elite interviews, media reports, party documents and secondary research.

Conclusion

Factions are found in almost all political parties, through both time and space. The small scholarly literature that exists on factions is not commensurate to their ubiquity and importance. The investigation proposed by this paper will shed light both on the role of factions in the process of party transformation and on the function factions now play within modern political parties. Through the testing of the hypotheses outlined above in a comparative perspective, the generalizability of Noel's observations regarding the increasing importance of short-term, materially-sustained and leader-centred entourages in political parties may be ascertained. On the face of it, it appears that this form of factionalism is a natural organizational response by politicians and party members to a de-ideologicalized environment.

Perhaps the best illustration of this process may be found in the British Labour Party. The current prime minister, Tony Blair, and his successor-designate, Gordon Brown, were leading members of the party's 'modernizing' faction that sought to cast off the perceived shackles of the party's mass-bureaucratic organization and ideological orientation. The modernizers took control of the party following the devastating 1983 election, but the party's left-wing old guard slowed their progress and remained vocal critics of the new direction. Tony Blair's ascension to the party leadership in 1994 and electoral victory in 1997 marked the triumph of the modernizers. Today, despite significant left-wing criticism of the Labour government, the left of the party was unable to nominate a single candidate to challenge Gordon Brown, Tony Blair's political soul mate and personal archrival. Factionalism in the party now takes the form of entourages sustained by patronage and personal loyalty with few policy differences between them. The party's ideological elements have been relegated to the margins. What remains to be seen is if this is an isolated case or an inevitable outcome in parties in which the processes of de-ideologicalization, presidentialization and professionalization have become entrenched.

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