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Cedric de Leon

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Political parties are central to democratic life, yet there is no standard definition to describe them or the role they occupy. "Voter-centered" theoretical approaches suggest that parties are the mere recipients of voter interests and loyalties. "Party-centered" approaches, by contrast, envision parties that polarize, democratize, or dominate society. In addition to offering isolated and competing notions of democratic politics, such approaches are also silent on the role of the state and are unable to account for organizations like Hamas, Hezbollah, and the African National Congress, which exhibit characteristics of parties, states, and social movements simultaneously.

In this timely book, Cedric de Leon examines the ways in which social scientists and other observers have imagined the relationship between parties and society. He introduces and critiques the full range of approaches, using enlivening comparative examples from across the globe. Cutting through a vast body of research, de Leon offers a succinct and lively analysis that outlines the key thinking in the field, placing it in historical and contemporary context. The resulting book will appeal to students of sociology, political science, social psychology, and related fields.

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