

POLITICAL PARTIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Directors:

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Outline of the topic

The overall aim of this workshop is to explore the character of political parties' relationships with civil society and its organizations in liberal democracies, both across time and space. By civil society, we mean the public sphere and intermediaries which are neither the state nor the extended family (Scott and Marshall 2005), and more specifically 'the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values [that] commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power' (CCS, 2004). In other words, the workshop addresses the relationship of parties with 'organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups' (*ibid.*). However, the workshop is also open to broader understandings, including parties' possible relationships with firms.

Several questions will be on the workshop agenda. First, the workshop aims to contribute to the conceptual debate: *What constitutes parties' possible relationships with non-party and non-state groups and organizations?* 'Relationship' is a fuzzy concept and how to study it is a moot point. Sometimes, 'party-interest group relationship' is used in a very abstract sense for example by pointing to a degree of ideological affinity. In addition to some sort of organizational integration or contact, transfer of finances and other resources are commonly seen as possible indicators (see e.g. Wilson 1990; Sundberg 2003). Still, in a more narrow sense, the notion 'relationship' only refers to how parties and interest groups are in fact connected, behave towards each other or deal with each other as organizations (Allern 2007: 40). But what are the different ways parties, in this sense, can be linked with other groups and organizations? And what are the possible benefits and costs involved in such relationships?

Second, the workshop will deal with the actual nature of contemporary relationships by addressing the *extent to which parties are linked with numerous and various groups and organizations*. Have these relationships changed over time? Are we seeing, for example, the disintegration of previously intimate relationships? Informed by the results of such general

developments in society and state as the erosion of traditional collective identities, the decline of old cleavages, and the introduction of public subventions to party organizations, it has been suggested that party organizations today prefer more contingent links with more numerous and different groups, or even virtual detachment from civil society in general, in line with the *cartel party model* (Katz and Mair 1995). And what about Europeanization – is there any evidence that European integration, inasmuch as it is impacting on political parties (Poguntke et al. 2007), is also impacting on their relationships with either ‘domestic’ or ‘Euro’ groups?

The third and final issue to be addressed is *whether there is homogeneity or considerable heterogeneity among parties and, if the latter, then what can explain possible differences between political parties, both within and across countries?* To what extent does national variation in economic, social and political conditions matter? A general assumption in new institutional perspectives is that political institutions breed differences in parties’ relationship with interest groups across countries, since institutions can, for example, ‘rule out some types of behaviour and make others more or less likely by influencing the costs and benefits that a party can expect when following a certain course of action’ (Müller 2002: 252). Yet the question is whether systematic exploration of endogenous factors and party agency is also needed. Can rational choice cost-benefit analysis help us explain the variation in party relationships with interest groups? Or are historical and ideological legacies more fruitful explanations, as the perspectives of historical and normative institutionalism would suggest (Allern et al. 2007; Allern 2007)?

To sum up, this workshop aims to find out what characterizes parties’ relationships with civil society as a whole, but also to explore party relationships with different types of organizations and groups. We want to test the common wisdom – most commonly associated with the notion that we are moving into the era of the ‘cartel party’ – that these relationships have atrophied and are withering away in established democracies (Katz and Mair 1995). Finally, we want to reveal the extent to which the relationships between parties and other groups and organizations varies across and within countries – and explore the conditions under which parties and interest groups choose to establish links, or opt for distance or separation.

Relation to existing research

Historically, political parties in established democracies have used links with other organizations as an instrument for communication and exchange with their constituencies, and parties have been involved in close relationships with specific interest groups. The archetypal *mass party* was characterized by an intimate relationship with a particular interest group, be it

trade unions, farmers' unions, business organizations or religious groups (Duverger 1954/1972).

With the general development of political parties in the 20th century towards more open and professionally driven structures, it is widely agreed that long-established links – like those between social democratic parties and trade unions – have declined in many cases (see e.g. Kirchheimer 1966; Padgett and Paterson 1991: 177; Minkin 1991; Thomas 2001a; Quinn 2002; Sundberg 2003). In the United States, there is a growing literature on party–group relationships (cf. Thomas 2001c), and the study of how new democracies consolidate and develop includes the issue of parties and other organizations (see e.g. Morlino 1998; van Biezen 2003; McMenamin 2004; van Biezen 2005).

However, relatively few have systematically studied the general party–interest group dyad empirically, either within or across countries (but see for example Morlino 1998; Warner 2000; Thomas 2001a; Poguntke 2002; Allern 2007). A common view is that the relationship between parties and interest groups shapes the nature of democratic governance (cf. Schattschneider 1942; Almond and Powell 1966; Katz and Mair 1995), but the relationship between parties and interest groups has generally been taken for granted across different political systems, institutional make-ups, types of party systems, and sectors (Thomas 2001b: ix). The aim of this workshop is to significantly improve our understanding of the nature, shaping factors – and perhaps also consequences – of this largely overlooked dyad of democracy

Type of papers

To date, despite substantial theoretical interest, there has been a relative lack of cross-nationally valid indicators and data to systematically assess the relationship between political parties and organized parts of civil society. Thomas Poguntke (2002) has recently presented relevant times series on a number of countries, but many of the formally linked organizations studied here are party-created and not external interest groups. Primarily, we therefore aim to attract papers based on new empirical research in this field, whether single case (country) studies or comparative cross-national treatments, including both old and new democracies.

Type of participants

The workshop will appeal to, and bring together, scholars working in the areas of party organizations, on the one hand, and those specialising various types of civil society groups and organizations on the other. We also expect a substantial interest in the topic from scholars

working on parties and/or civil society in new democracies. Since the workshop addresses a 'new' topic which links into established research fields, we would hope that a number of younger and less well-networked participants will apply to attend this workshop along with more experienced scholars.

The workshop is officially endorsed by the ECPR Standing Group on Political Parties.

Bibliographical note

Elin H. Allern is currently working as Senior Researcher at Institute for Social Research in Oslo, and has recently been appointed as Post Doctoral Fellow at the University of Oslo (from August 2008). Allern's doctoral thesis dealt with party relationships with interest groups in civil society: *Parties, Interest Groups and Democracy: Political Parties and their Relationship with Interest Groups in Norway*. Allern's recent publications includes 'Between Electioneering and "Politics as Usual": The Involvement of Interest Groups in Norwegian Electoral Politics', in Farrell, David and Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck (eds): *Non-Party Actors in Electoral Politics: The Role of Interest Groups and Independent Citizens in Contemporary Election Campaigns* (Nomos Verlag 2008, with Jo Saglie). Her work appears in *West European Politics* and *European Journal of Political Research*.

Tim Bale is currently a Senior Lecturer at the University of Sussex. He convened the section on political parties at the ECPR General Conference in Budapest in 2006. Bale's publications include work on parties across the political spectrum and appear in journals like *West European Politics*, *Party Politics*, *Government and Opposition* and *Comparative European Politics*. He is the editor of *Immigration and Integration Policy in Europe* (Routledge, 2008) and the author of *European Politics: a Comparative Introduction* (Palgrave, 2nd Edition, 2008). He is also the co-editor, of the Political Data Yearbook of the *European Journal of Political Research*. He is writing a book on the British Conservative Party.

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