

# Parties and Party Systems in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Theoretical, Analytical, and Methodological Challenges

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought about meaningful changes within political parties connected with both intra- and interparty relations. Ongoing processes of decentralization, transnational integration, and globalization as well as changes in social structure itself as well as new ways of political communication have imposed an increasing challenge on parties to develop their activities (and structures) at several levels (beyond the national to transcend the regional, transnational, and even global). Economic, migration and pandemic crises have called into question the position of mainstream parties, causing an increase in polarisation, populism, and the importance of new, often extreme parties. Dissatisfaction with liberal democracy has called into question the role and place of the party within the political system and has paved the way for increasing interest in the idea of direct democracy and anti-politics. This has brought about challenges for political parties, but at the same time has created new opportunities if the parties are able to adapt accordingly.

Starting with intra-party relations, not only are the constitutive traits of parties changing but also the relations between them – some party attributes have gained importance at the expense of others. While on the one hand, party membership decreases, on the other, parties empower their members, including them in the processes of candidate and leader selection or creating party manifestos, therein increasing direct democracy within parties. As party members are atomized and dispersed, in fact, this process weakens middle-level structures and strengthens party elites and leadership, which is referred to as the personalisation and presidentialization of political parties. Traditional party models: the mass party, the catch-all party, the party-cartel are being replaced by models of political entrepreneurs, which have become the main appeal of voters. Though it is increasingly possible to win elections without party members or structures, it is still difficult for this type of party to survive.

Moving on to inter-party relations, the party systems are increasingly fragmented. New parties emerge, gain electoral success, but often disappear as

quickly as they have appeared, coalition patterns change, and forming governments frequently takes more time. It is often difficult to answer simple questions as to who the winner of an election is, who is eligible to form a cabinet, or what should be done to produce a stable government. In a decentralized state, this becomes even more complicated; changes occurring at one level often influence the development at the other one as various levels of political activity are inextricably woven together. Any increase of direct democracy in the decision-making process of the state and the changing relations between social partners also impose new challenges, ones parties have to adjust to.

The contributors to the issue clarify changes occurring in contemporary parties and party systems from theoretical, analytical, and methodological viewpoints. They consider whether old paradigms explain our reality properly or whether these should be updated or changed completely. The authors of these twelve articles look for appropriate theoretical and analytical frameworks that could meet the new challenges as well as proposing methodological toolkits that can be used to investigate the changes occurring.

**Ladislav Cabada** and **Jakub Charvát** of the Metropolitan University Prague deliver an interesting and theory-grounded discussion on changes in identities and social cleavages, including their recent development, impact and ramifications for party politics and political polarization. They emphasise also political trust as a measure connected with the (post)modern party politics and political polarisation. **Dušan Spasojević** of the University of Belgrade provides an overview of the challenges posed by antipolitics to political parties and the responses therein. He points out that antipolitics changes the core attributes of political parties, including their ideologies, organizational structures, and roles within society. The author emphasises that research into antipolitics covers both the issues of demand (citizens) and supply (politicians). The article by **Dominika Mikucka-Wójtowicz** of the University of Warsaw can also be situated among texts dealing with the challenges for parties arising from society itself. The author analyses the origins and innovative organisational structure of progressive movement parties. She addresses the paradox of involving members and the strategic practices of social movements within the arena of party competition, while suffering at the same time from an unexpectedly elevated level of organisational centralisation and personalisation. In addition, the author considers whether progressive movement parties are a product of the crisis or merely a response to the crisis itself.

**Katarzyna Sobolewska-Myślik** of the University of Opole provides an overview of the main trends in the evolution of intra-party democracy (IPD). She focuses on a search for more effective models of democracy, beyond the representative, including the latest development of IPD based on the Internet and online platforms. Inspired by various models of democracy, and introducing them within their internal organizations, parties often try to include in their

decision-making process not only members or sympathizers but also others without clear ties with parties as such. The results and consequences of those changes are also discussed. Party membership is the main subject of the next article. **Maria Winławska** of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and **Anna Paczeński** of the University of Wrocław deliver a stimulating article on methodological changes and challenges for research on party membership. They provide a comprehensive overview of the methods employed in the study of party membership considering whether changes in the subject matter are reflected in the adaptation of established research methods and assess whether new methods and techniques provide for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

**Karina Kosiara-Pedersen** of the University of Copenhagen tests the cartel party model in the new conditions in Denmark, almost 30 years after the cartel party model was published. Using the examples of six established and six new Danish parties, she discusses the question of whether Danish parties, which initially had cartel party features at the party level, but not at the party system level, have changed in this respect. **Beata Kosowska-Gąstoł** of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków provides an overview of definitions and approaches to new parties' analyses. Basing herself on existing subject literature, she proposes a new multi-dimensional framework for analyses that enable one to answer questions as to in which areas and to what extent parties are new. This can also be applied for assessing the level of change within existing parties.

The issue encompasses also two complementary texts related to populism. In the first **Natasza Styczyńska** and **Paulina Lenik** of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow consider the theoretical aspects of populism studies, with special focus on the populist parties in Central and Eastern Europe that have developed in a peculiar post-communist setting, one influencing their performance. In the subsequent article **Arkadiusz Lewandowski** of the Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz discusses the populist strategies of non-populist mainstream parties in Western Europe. He introduces and explains the notion of 'controlled populism' within the context of mainstream parties, which in competing with populist parties also consider populist strategies.

The other authors focus on the relations of political parties with various elements of political systems themselves. **Łukasz Jakubiak** of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków considers the presidentialization of political parties operating within presidentialized systems of government. He identifies the key characteristics of this phenomenon and illustrates them with examples from the semi-presidential system of the Fifth French Republic. **Maciej Hartliński** of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn analyses the attitudes of political parties and their voters in Polish national referendums. He proposes and applies multi-dimensional models of inter-party divisions regarding participation in referendums and responses to referendum questions. Last, but not least, **Jacek Sroka** of

the National Education Commission University in Krakow takes a broader perspective. The author considers whether Arend Lijphart's patterns of democracy are still valid. He does not completely undermine the key features that distinguish majoritarian and consensual patterns of democracy, but at the same time proves that the pattern associated with the concept of policy networks is gaining an advantage, hence the author favours an updating of analyses and predictions for further development.

*Beata Kosowska-Gąstoł*

Early View