

# Political Parties

Functions and Organisation in Democratic Societies

Wilhelm Hofmeister / Karsten Grabow



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Wilhelm Hofmeister and Karsten Grabow

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# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1. Parties and Party Systems</b>	<b>10</b>
1.1. What is a political party?	11
1.2. Criteria to identify political parties	12
1.3. Why do parties exist?	14
1.4. Functions of political parties	16
1.5. Political party systems	18
1.6. Typologies of political parties	20
1.7. Parties and ideologies	24
<b>2. Modern Political Party Management</b>	<b>26</b>
2.1. Organisation and membership	27
2.2. The members of a political party	33
2.3. Recruitment of new members	35
2.4. Education and training of the party members	37
2.5. Political party programmes	40
2.6. Internal and external communication	41
2.7. Intra-party democracy	48
2.8. Inner party conflicts and conflict resolution	51
2.9. Quota for women and minorities	53
2.10. Party financing	55
<b>3. Political Parties and their Relation with Civil Society and Interest Groups</b>	<b>60</b>
3.1. Parties and civil society	62
3.2. Parties and associations	64
<b>4. Political Parties in Parliament and Government</b>	<b>68</b>
4.1. Parliamentary groups (factions)	70
<b>5. Political Leadership</b>	<b>72</b>
5.1. The dilemma of political leadership	76
5.2. Lessons of political leaders	77
<b>6. Challenges for Political Parties in Democratic Regimes</b>	<b>80</b>
6.1. Political parties and social change	81
6.2. Criteria for sustainable and successful party work	87
<b>7. Conclusion: There is No Democracy without Political Parties</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>8. Notes and References</b>	<b>92</b>

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# Introduction

## Politics is the process to organise how we live together in a society.

In a democracy, every citizen can participate in this process – by freely acceding information about political issues, by openly expressing the own opinion on public affairs, by formulating expectations, proposals or requirements without fear of repression, by voting in elections, by engaging in civil society organisations or political parties, or by standing up as a candidate in democratic elections. In this way, democracy is the “government of the people, by the people, for the people”, in the a famous words of Abraham Lincoln, president of the United States of America from 1861-65

To fully meet all the requirements of a government ‘of the people, by the people, and for the people’, politics in a democracy need to satisfy certain conditions::

- Politics require ideas and values that set the goals and standards of political organisation. Freedom, justice and solidarity are such principles that can guide the political organisation of any society.
- Politics require social organisations that collect interests, aggregate, and communicate them to the political and governmental institutions. Political parties, but also business and workers associations as well as other non-governmental organizations of the civil society, are such organizations that collect and aggregate social interests.
- Politics require institutions that collect proposals for the organisation of society, and then represent, discuss, decide and implement them. Parliaments and governments—which normally rely on political parties—are the most important institutions of politics in a democratic state.
- Politics require active citizens who take part in political discussions with ideas, demands and expectations, and actively contribute to the functioning of political institutions:





In a democracy, most if not all citizens should be involved in political activities. However, a direct democracy where every citizen is directly involved in all political decisions is not possible within modern mass societies. This is why a modern democracy needs institutions and organisations that represent the will and the interests of the citizens as authentically as possible. These can be associations, informal groups or non-governmental organisations. In particular, the political parties carry out such a representative function. They offer to the citizens the possibility to influence politics and political decisions. They are an important instrument and institution of politics.

Without political parties, a modern representative democracy is not conceivable. Only the parties ensure that the citizens are permanently capable to act politically. They articulate and integrate different interests, visions and opinions. They are also the main source for the recruitment of political elites.

In order to participate successfully in elections, the political parties have to be the voice of broad sectors of society. Associations, social organisations or citizens' initiatives normally concentrate more on individual and a limited scope of issues. Political parties, in contrast, are expected to take positions on all those questions and topics that are related to public order and the organisation of society.

Parties are competing amongst each other for the best ways of resolving political problems. They are in competition for influence and power. Without the power to enforce political vision it is not possible to organise a society. Internal discussions and conflicts within, as well as between, the parties accompany this contest for ideas and power. They are legitimate and essential.

In this book, we present political parties as central institutions of a modern democracy. The characteristics and functions of parties, the basic elements of their organisation, their political and social context, as well as the problems of party democracy and the specific challenges faced by parties are main topics. This is to convey fundamental information on the different facets of political parties. At the same time it is meant to raise interest in, and willingness to contribute to, a party. Even though criticism of political parties is easy and always popular, political parties are indispensable for a democracy. They will only be able to fulfil their functions when more citizens are willing to engage politically in parties.

**1**

# **Parties and Party Systems**

## 1. Parties and Party systems

### 1. 1. What is a political party?

**Political parties are a special form of social organisation.** They should not be confused with associations, federations, and social clubs. A well-known definition of political parties comes from the American political scientist Antony Downs, who wrote: "A political party is a team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election"<sup>1</sup>. The Italian scholar Giovanni Sartori, who has lectured for a long time at the Columbia University in New York and is internationally one of the most well-known researchers on political parties, defined a party as: "any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through election, candidates for public office."

Even if these definitions demonstrate some difference in the understanding of political parties, they all emphasize the **participation in elections** and the interest to **gain public offices and mandates** as essential elements that characterise political parties. They must meet certain criteria which can be summarized as follows.



- A party strives to influence the formation of political opinion and aims to have a general political impact. The active influence of political opinion-making is aimed at a longer period of time as well as a wider region and should not be concentrated on a local level or a single issue.
- A party is an association of citizens holding individual memberships, and shall have a minimum number of members, so that the seriousness of its targets and the prospects of success remain clear.
- A party has to demonstrate the will to consistently take part in the political representation of the people during elections. It, therefore, distinguishes itself from unions, non-governmental organisations and other initiatives that do not want to carry any political responsibilities for larger sectors but only try to have selective influence, and that do not participate in elections.
- A party has to be an independent and permanent organisation; it shall not be formed only for one election and cease to exist afterwards.
- A party must be willing to appear in public.
- A party does not necessarily need to win a seat in parliament, but it has to fulfil all the other criteria.

**Parties** can therefore be understood as **permanent associations of citizens that are based on free membership and a programme, and which are anxious to occupy through the path of elections, the politically decisive positions of the country with their team of leaders, in order to materialize suggestions for resolving outstanding problems.** The means of elections implies the competition of at least two parties.

Parties not only strive to participate in the formation of political opinion. They also aspire to participate in the representation of the people in parliament. This presumes that parties take part in elections. A party's political contribution as well as its political "weight" is closely tied to elections. The will of the voters is of significant importance for the parties.

Typical for parties is their "fighting spirit"—their readiness for political action and political confrontation—and their aspiration to takeover and retain governing power. This competition among parties is the instrument to gain political power and the whole organisation of a party is ultimately subject to this aim. Only those parties that participate successfully in this competition can obtain posts of political representation. This is also the main stimulation to participate in party activities and makes a party especially interesting once it is a part of a government.

Even the less attractive opposition role offers interesting elements for active participation. Political parties are always the centre/ for debates and discussions about political reforms and political change. Those interested in politics will mostly find a party that reflects the own perception, may it be a party in government or opposition. Parties in opposition exercise an important function in a democratic system as a "watchdog" of government policy and as a political alternative in the future. Opposition may be considered awful, but it is essential for the functioning of democracy.

Contrary to interest groups, a party is expected to express itself on all issues relevant for government. One expects parties to propose views on domestic and foreign policies, economic and social policies, and youth and civil policies etc. In order to meet these requirements, each party should have a programme, in which its fundamental positioning in various areas is retained. Furthermore, one expects a party to have a consistent organisation.

Within every society there are different opinions, needs, expectations and views over daily issues; likewise “big” questions on the social organisation, its norms and procedures also exist. Something like a common will of the people or a predetermined common good does not exist. In contrast, in every society there are rivalling interests that often collide very hard. In order to peacefully mediate conflicts, the formation of political views must take place in an open process of debate between different opinions. A minimum of common conviction is necessary. This is the common sense of democracy. It is based on the principle that each citizen has the right to represent his opinion and conviction in a peaceful competition of minds.

This assumption of conflicting interests within every society, which in principle are legitimate, is called pluralism or “competition theory” of democracy. According to this theory, the formation of political opinion in the pluralistic society is achieved through an open process of competition between heterogeneous interests. Due to the diversity of opinions and social conflicts there is no perfect solution to problems. Decisions have to be made on the basis of consent and approval of a majority of the citizens. Nevertheless, there may be no “tyranny of the majority” that offends democratic rules and violates inalienable human rights. Even majority decisions may imply deficiencies or even injustice. Therefore, a distinct and constitutionally guaranteed protection of minorities on the one hand, as well as the recognition of voting or election defeat of the losing side on the other hand—provided that it is a (largely) free and fair poll—are constitutive elements of this concept of democracy.

Within the context of democratically managed conflicts of interests, political parties represent particular interests. Only once the contrasting interests are openly expressed and the parties accord other parties the right to represent particular interests too, and when the parties agree to the principles of the political game—for instance, if they agree principally on the democratic constitution—then it is possible to resolve conflicts in a society and form political compromises in an appropriate manner.

Of course, the freedom of parties must be ensured in the process. That means that the creation of political parties has to be free of political constraints. Nevertheless, there may be some limitations with regard to the creation of parties who openly reject the democratic constitution of a country. In principle, however, citizens must possess the right to create a party, to belong to a party and to express themselves freely in it. Freedom of parties also includes the notion that nobody can be forced to adhere to a specific party or to remain in it against his will—as was the case in some countries and still may be. The affirmation of the diversification of parties is a corollary of the recognition of pluralistic democracy.

This competitive concept of democracy stands opposed to the vision of homogeneity, which supposes a uniformity of the will of the people. The French political philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 78) had created this vision that in theory denies the legitimacy of conflicts and defines democracy as the identity of the government and the citizens. This concept does not accept a plurality of parties. They are not regarded as legitimate, as they would inevitably falsify the “common will” by their particular behaviour. Deviations from the imposed and mandatory common good are not tolerated by this theory. However, it is obvious that this concept is characteristic of totalitarian states where the diversity of parties is banned and where the “common will” is defined only by a small ruling elite. Consequently, totalitarian states are identified with Rousseau. It should be noted that even Rousseau could not clarify how this “common sense” would be discovered and decided. We have to be aware that modern societies are characterized by a diversity of interests and world-views. They need political parties as central instances for the representation of this diversity of interests within the political system.



To participate successfully in the political process and to contribute to the consolidation of democracy, political parties have to demonstrate certain capacities. In political science, these capacities are called “functions”.

### **Functions of political parties<sup>2</sup>**

- They articulate and aggregate social interests: Parties express public expectations and demands of social groupings to the political system (= function of political opinion-making).
- They recruit political personnel and nurture future generations of politicians: They select persons and present them as candidates for elections (= function of selection).
- They develop political programmes: Parties integrate various interests into a general political project and transform it into a political programme, for which they campaign to receive the consent and support of a majority (= function of integration).
- They promote the political socialisation and participation of citizens: Parties create a link between citizens and the political system; they enable political participation of individuals and groupings with the prospect of success. (= function of socialization and participation).
- They organise the government. They participate in elections to occupy political charges. Normally in party democracies, a good part of government authorities arise from political parties (= function of exercising political power).
- They contribute to the legitimacy of the political system: in establishing the connection between citizens, social groupings and the political system, the parties contribute in anchoring the political order in the consciousness of the citizens and in social forces (= function of legitimating).

In modern societies, the process of political opinion-building is a polymorphic process: The mass media, social organisations, associations, citizen's initiatives, religious communities and the modern form of electronic communication via Internet, sms, Facebook, Twitter and other virtual communities exercise enormous influence on political opinions and political decisions. Nevertheless, political parties are still the principal agents to aggregate public opinion and represent it in the political decision-making process—and they finally also take the political decisions through their representatives in the parliament and government. By following the work of the parties, perceiving and evaluating its argumentation during political debate, citizens can orientate themselves politically through the parties. Furthermore, by engaging with a party, every citizen can exercise some influence on the political decision-making process.

Besides its candidates, the political programme is the "merchandise" of a party, which it offers to the voters. The party programmes fulfil in particular two main functions: on the one hand, they shall articulate the interests of the population (parties as "organs" of the people) and on the other hand, they orientate and influence the opinions of the citizens (parties as "former" of public will; see also point 4.2.). With regard to the party programme the voters can evaluate if a party has sufficient sensibility for societal problems and if they are able to propose adequate suggestions for the resolution of problems and challenges.

Oppositional parties have the function to criticise the government, control it and put up constructive alternatives. This function is of great significance for a democracy, because without opposition a government tends to drift towards complacency and presumptuousness and fails to search for alternatives.

By fulfilling these functions, political parties are providing important services for the democratically organised society. The quality of the "delivery"—that is, the way they comply with their functions—contributes decisively to the reputation and the potential of the political parties.

## 1. 5. Political party systems

The entire group of parties in a country forms the political party system. The party system reflects the pattern of relationships between individual parties in relation to each other.

The composition of a party system results mainly from two factors. On the one hand it is the structure of social conflicts and interests. Classical conflicts are for instance those between capital and labour or those between secular and religiously oriented parties. On the other hand, the party and electoral laws also exercise considerable influence on the configuration of the party system depending on how liberal and free or restrictive



the creation of new parties have been laid out and if the electoral system facilitates the representation of a larger number of parties in the parliament or not. Yet, in pre-democratic times the existence of one party provoked at least the emergence of another party. Throughout history, party systems have in principle developed along social and/or ideological lines of conflict.

Party systems can be classified by different criteria. Most frequently it is the number of parties that are fighting for power that serves as the criteria for the description of a party system. In this way, one can differentiate one, two and multi-party systems. In a "single-party" system only one party dominates and there is practically no political competition between parties. A "single-party" system is, as mentioned before, a contradiction in itself since a "party" should only be part of a larger group. Single-party systems are therefore characterised by the oppression of political competition and democratic freedom. "Two-party system" means that two parties primarily dominate the political competition, while other, smaller parties only play a subordinate role. In a "multi-party system", more than two parties have an effect on the political competition.<sup>3</sup>

The existence of a two-party or a multi-party system depends on several different factors: political traditions, the development of political institutions, the socio-economic circumstances, and the relevance of regional cleavages, and ethnical or confessional conditions. The specifications of the electoral law can have a certain, but not decisive, influence on the composition of the party system. The majority voting systems (first-past-the-post-systems) rather favour the evolution of a two-party system (or a system comprising only of a few dominant parties), whereas a proportional voting system is more likely to favour a multi-party system. However, there is no distinct connection between electoral and party systems.

The system of government influences the development of parties and party systems insofar as a parliamentary system offers more influence for political parties because the government emerges directly from the parliament, which is dominated by the parties. In a presidential system, it is the head of government—the president—who is directly elected by the people and thus its legitimacy is based not primarily on the parliament. In addition, he mostly exercises, beside the parliament, also legislative and other functions, and he normally has a right to veto parliamentary decisions or even has the authority to dissolve the parliament. So, at first glance, in presidential systems parties play a minor role. On the other hand, in presidential systems the separation of powers is usually more evident because the parties are not linked so closely with the government. In parliamentary systems, however, the identity and especially the relationship between the government and the ruling party or parties is greater. Even so, in a presidential system the president also needs the approval of parliament and a parliamentary majority. The relative independence from the government which the parties enjoy in a presidential system is of considerable relevance. The number of parties represented in parliament is only slightly influenced by the system of government. This is rather a question of social cleavages, eventually also the ethnic and other cleavages in a country, the structure of conflicts and interests and the electoral system.

## 1. 6. Typologies of political parties

Likewise party systems, also the political parties itself can be distinguished by certain criteria. Such typologies help to sort the heterogeneity of social phenomena, in order to better understand it. To identify parties, one can consider the characteristic features in order to note commonalities and differences between individual parties.

Parties can be classified according to a number of different criteria: according to their level of organisation, their socio-political targets, the social classes that they want to represent and approach, or their positioning towards the political system. Some parties can be classified also by their names, which often express special socio-political objectives that the parties want to be identified with. By their names, parties demonstrate how they want to be perceived, and that means how they want to be classified. This confirms that the classification or construction of typologies is not a mere academic exercise, but part of the political competition of parties.

The typologies emerged initially in view of the multi-party systems in Europe but can also be applied to other regions. Several typologies are introduced below.

### 1. 6. 1. Differentiation of parties by their degree of organisation:

**Electorate parties:** such parties attach less importance to a large membership, but are particularly active in the scope of elections. The bond of the voters to such a party is usually weak.

**Membership parties:** such parties seek a large membership, preferably in all parts of the country. Traditionally, it is usually the popular parties and labour parties that strive for a well-organised party apparatus and a large membership ("mass political party"). At the minimum, this facilitates the financing of the party through membership fees.

With regard to the criteria of socio-political objectives, which are aspired to by political parties, one can distinguish between those parties that seek social or political changes in the frame of the existing democratic order and parties that strive for changes by radical, extremist or revolutionary means. The first group is composed of conservative, liberal, Christian democratic, social democratic, in-part socialist, and also parties that define themselves by religion or confession as long as they do not represent extremist positions. To the second group belong mainly extreme rightist or leftist parties and among those the communist parties, beside others.

**Conservative parties:** such parties want to retain the “approved” order or restore it; they are sceptical of innovations and changes, for instance, with regard to the perception and the role of the family, and alternative models of life (for example, same-sex marriages). They also do not like the transfer of national sovereignty to supranational institutions, but they do acknowledge that traditional ideas, values and principles cannot be continuously maintained without moderate reforms.

**Liberal parties:** such parties espouse the rights of individual freedom and emphasise the democratic character of the constitution. Traditionally, they are anti-clerical and mostly committed to a free market economy.

**Social democratic parties:** such parties mostly emerged in close relation to the labour movement and their political concepts are based on social equality of the people; they assign the state with a strong regulating role in the economy and society.

**Socialist parties:** such parties also emerged in close contact to parts of the labour movement, but they represent a more radical approach to achieving social equality; the abolition of private ownership of the means of production and a state-driven economy are central targets of these parties.

**Parties defined by religion** are special forms of parties that are characterised by their social-political objectives. Worldwide, a vast number of parties are more or less strongly based on religious convictions. There are Christian or Christian democratic, Islamic and Hindu parties that establish their

programmes on the values and standards of their religion or confession. This can lead to considerable differences in the political programmes and political objectives of such parties, depending on how individual parties consider their respective religion's stand with regard to individual human rights and individual freedom or to political democracy. The European Christian Democratic parties, for instance, are committed to individual freedom, social solidarity and justice, self-responsibility of the citizens and a discrete role for the state under the supervision of economic and social actors.

**Extreme right-wing parties:** such parties preach nationalistic ideologies, which are often inter-mixed with a vague ethnic ideology and possibly racist perceptions.

**Communist parties:** such parties propagate the dictatorship of the proletariat and assume a predetermination of history.



1. 6. 3.

Differentiation according to the social classes which they intend to approach

**Popular parties:** such parties attempt to consider the interests and needs of as many social groups as possible and therefore try to integrate as many citizens as possible of various social origins within their party rank and file and to aggregate different social and political aspirations in their programme.

**Parties of special interest:** such parties feel responsible for the interests of a very specific group (a social, confessional, or regional group) and do not claim to be equally eligible for all parts of the population.

1. 6. 4.

Differentiation according to their positioning towards the political system

**Parties conforming to the system:** such parties accept the political system in which they are active and wish to either stabilize the political order or improve it gradually with reforms.

**Parties opposed to the political system:** such parties do not accept the basic principles of their political system and pursue a change of the system, mostly with aggressive programmatic proposals.

Political parties rarely correspond completely to one of these classifications. There are fluent transitions and mixed forms. A membership or mass party for instance can also be an "interest party" if it represents only the interest of a certain social sector or class (the labour class for example). Furthermore, other criteria are also possible: for example, government and opposition party, regional party, protest party, etc. Nevertheless, the classifications allow the identification of the typical attributes of a party, which is a relevant element in the process of political competition.



Ideologies and specific worldviews are of particular relevance for political parties. Ideologies are comprehensive visions of societies and social developments, which contain explanations, values, and goals for past, present and future developments. Ideologies inspire and justify political and social action. They are an essential element for political orientation. The term “ideology” has been and is still used mainly by leftist, communist and socialist parties to characterize their worldviews and political positions. Nevertheless, other streams of political thinking can also be denominated as “ideologies”, like, for instance, liberalism, conservatism, nationalism or fascism.

Sometimes, there are comments about a supposed “des-ideologization” of politics. This refers to the fact that nowadays many parties are stressing their ideological roots less than their pragmatic approach with regard to social and political challenges. The above-mentioned concepts, however, make it clear that ideologies still are of considerable relevance for the identification of worldviews and political positions. We never reached the “end of ideologies” as has been proclaimed by the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama at the end of the Cold War. He supposed that liberal democracy would finally be enforced against all other forms of governance, and therefore all ideological debates could come to an end.<sup>4</sup>

Those who are, or will become, politically engaged should know the different ideological strands. This is relevant not only for defining one’s own political position, but also for evaluating other political positions and eventually for combating them.

## **IDEOLOGIES AT A GLANCE**

### **Ideologies focused on the individual person**

Liberalism, Neo-liberalism, Conservatism, Christian Democracy

### **Egalitarian ideologies**

Socialism, Communism, Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism, Trotskyism, Euro-communism, Neo-Marxism, Anarchism

### **Ideologies focused on the collective**

Socialism, Democratic Socialism, Social Democracy, Communism, Marxism, National Socialism

### **Ideologies focused on ethnicity or nationality**

Nationalism, Zionism, Regionalism, Pan-Arabism, Pan-Slavism, Fascism, Neo-Fascism, Clerical-Fascism, National-Socialism, Racism, Imperialism, Colonialism, Social-Darwinism

### **Ideologies focused on tradition**

Conservatism, Christian Democracy, Neo-Conservatism

### **Ideologies based on religions**

Christian Socialism, Christian Democracy, Clerical-Fascism, Islamism, Neo-Hinduism, Zionism

### **Totalitarian ideologies**

National Socialism, Communism, Islamism, Marxism-Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism, Pol-Potismus

### **Other ideologies**

Green Politics, Ecologism, Internationalism, Cosmopolites, Pacifism, Republicanism, Humanism, Feminism

**2**

**Modern  
Political Party  
Management**

## 2. 1. Organisation and membership

In order to be successful in the political contest and to have an effect on the formation of political opinion a party needs a permanent **organisation**. With regard to the institutional setup of a party there are different basic patterns. On the basis of an individual, meaning the direct membership of individual persons, many parties are organised in a decentralised form, that is on the basis of local associations, according to residential areas or districts, or at least at a municipal level. Higher levels of party organisation usually follow the structure of the state.

### 2. 1. 1. Levels of party organisation

- Base or Municipal committees (according to residential area or municipality)
- District association or association of an electoral constituency
- Regional association (according to Federal state, region or department)
- National association

Figure 1: Levels of a political party organisation

Organs Parties	Members or Assembly of delegates (Party convention)	Board of directors	Party court
National Association	National party convention	National board Executive board	National party court
Regional Association	Regional party convention	Regional council	Regional party court
District / county / constituency Association	Assembly of district delegates	District council	District party court
Local committee / Association	Members Assembly	Local council	

The local party organisations are of particular importance for a stable and active party. Here, members can directly be politically active. At this level, they have the deepest contact with their party and politics in general. Local party organisations should conduct regular membership meetings, and support, promote and integrate (new) members. These should be invited to the party and district meetings and social events, as well as to discussions on local politics issues and local initiatives, for instance, residential redevelopment, road building or laying, schools, business settlements etc.

The local or regional party organisations should have their own political conventions, nominate candidates for local or regional elections, coordinate the activities of the party at a local or regional level, and maintain contact with non-partisan organisations in the local context (like religious communities, civic or professional associations etc.) They should also develop their own local political positions (in line with the principal programme of the entire party) and local government programmes. Finally, the members at the local level also conduct the campaigns for local, regional or national elections.

The local organisational structures of parties contribute to authentic (party) politics, which are close to the citizens. Without them, members and sympathizers of a party would perceive leaders and other top representatives of the parties only from a very distant view. The local organisational structures are the “grounds of party democracy”. Top politicians from the upper party levels, the parliament, or even the government should participate regularly in meetings with the local party organisations.

The structure of the party at a district or county level should normally correspond to its structure at the higher party levels. In addition, at the district or county levels, there is usually an elected Executive Council, comprised of the chairperson, one or two vice-chairs and a treasurer (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). The next higher levels of party organisations (regional or national) usually have a secretary or general secretary, elected by the respective party convention. While party leaders, sometimes as a result of their numerous other activities as members of parliament, ministers, prime ministers or presidents, are acting more in a role of the “dignified part” of the party, the general secretary is the “efficient part” of a party. The general secretary runs the party headquarters and the everyday party business; is responsible for party communications to the outside as well as the inside, and is also responsible for the promotion of programme discussions and the organisation of electoral campaigns.

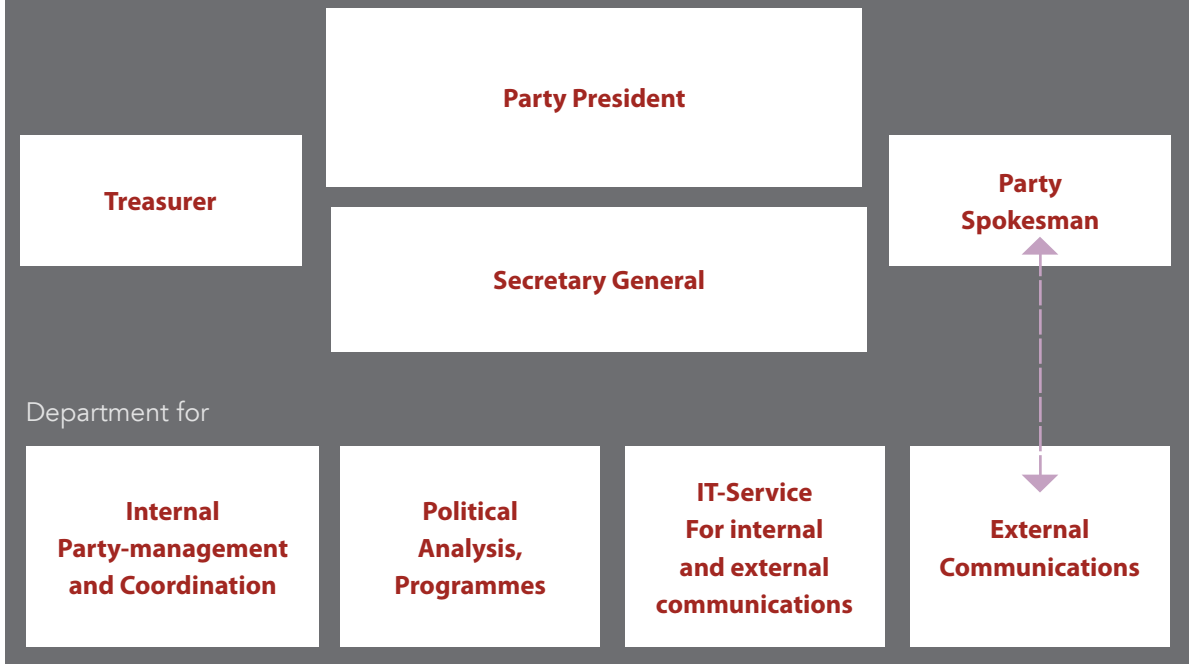
Democratic party laws require that the board positions at all party levels should be decided by regular internal party elections held at party conventions or congresses. This refers to the local, district or country as well as national party conventions. If possible, at the local organisational level, all party members should participate in the election of the local leaders. At other party levels, there may be a system of electing the representatives. The party conventions are formally the supreme decision-making bodies of each level of party organisation. The board members elect from among themselves an Executive Board, the Bureau, which is—on the regional or provincial and national level—the major power centre of the party organisation. Similarly, the candidates for political appointments

and public offices (for example, candidates for parliamentary seats, mayor, governor, prime ministers of regions or federal states, prime minister or president of the country) should also be legitimized by internal party elections.



Parties should be led professionally and should be equipped with modern techniques of communication. The party headquarters is at the top of the party organisation. The basis for the party president and the party council is the party headquarters. This should have some “technical” departments that concentrate on certain issues to prepare the party’s positions on actual themes of the political debate and to provide party members and representatives with information and arguments. Additionally, the party headquarters has to care about the communications and public presentation of the party. Last but not least, the headquarters has to organise and realize the electoral campaigns.

Figure 2: Organisational map of a party headquarters<sup>5</sup>



The communication and coordination of the party headquarters with the parliamentary faction and the parliamentarians is of particular relevance. In the perception of the broader public audience, they are the most important representatives of a party and have decisive influence on its public image. In most countries, the regional party branches also have an important role. Therefore, permanent and fluent communications and coordination with the regional groupings is of equal relevance for a party.



## Scheme of Structure and Organs of Parties

There is no unique basic pattern for the organisation of political parties. In some countries, there are party laws that define some basic requirements which parties have to meet. Mostly, these particularly refer to the respect of intra-party democratic procedures for the selection of party leaders and some general organisational elements. With regard to the composition of the party and its competences, there is a wide range of organisational solutions.

The hierarchical organisation of a political party often corresponds to the administrative division of a country, i.e., the parties have local organisations, municipal or district organisations, provincial or regional organisations, and finally a national organisation. Numerous parties have, in addition, functional divisions, which are similar to the division of the three powers of the state: the intra-party party tribunal for the resolutions of conflicts (Judiciary), which can punish and even expel party members for acts that may damage the public image of a party; the general assembly or party conventions (Legislature); and the party executive (Executive). Some parties have, furthermore, an extended board with representatives of the subordinate party organisations. The structure of parties has been presented in the above diagram. Figure 1 exemplifies the complex geographical and functional division of a political party (not including intra-party associations and special party groupings). It also shows the paths of legitimacy within the party which corresponds to the principle of democratic legitimisation of leaders from the bottom to the top positions of the party hierarchy.

Besides its general committees, many parties have other committees, commissions, technical committees and working groups for specific tasks; for example, for the discussion of programmatic questions (economic policy, domestic policy, foreign policy etc.) as well as for the participation of specific groups (youths, women, unions, local politicians, middle-class citizens, entrepreneurs, seniors etc.). These committees play an important function for the inner life of parties and their external image. On the one hand, they complement or rectify the regional principle of

membership and integrate members according to their specific interests, their professional qualifications or their social status. Within the party, these committees play a part in the development of technical capacities and the formation of political opinion. On the other hand, the committees contribute crucially to contact with a variety of social groups, to whom the contact demonstrate that their concerns are taken into consideration and are represented by the parties.

In several countries, parties have promoted the creation of other organisations in their surroundings, which carry out political educative activities for party members and interested citizens and support the development of programmes and the parties' concepts through research and consultancy. The most well-known institutions of this kind are the political foundations in Germany.

## 2. 2. The members of a political party

The members are the fundamental part of any party and its most important connecting link to the society. Modern and successful parties seek a large stem of members that preferably originate from large portions of social groups. The member strength has a direct effect on the formation of opinion inside the party. The direct membership of persons is nowadays the common way of membership in a party.

However, there was and are parties with other regulations on membership. The basic units of communist parties for instance were often organised through corporate cells and according to the occupation of its members in companies and authorities. The British Labour party is the most famous example of partially indirect membership. Until the 1990s, the Labour Party had approximately 350,000 direct party members and another approximately 4 million "indirect" members of what were known as "affiliated trade unions" and other organisations. These members paid a contribution to the Labour Party and controlled 50% of the votes in party conventions.

The members of a party have greater political influence than citizens who do not belong to any party. They can participate in the formation of opinion within the party, which might even be or become the governing party. A precondition for this form of participation is that the parties offer sufficient possibilities for intra-party discussions and formation of opinion.

Even if inner-party democracy and formation of opinion function perfectly, not all party members will be able or willing to participate actively in all the important decisions of a party. Furthermore, at the local level, active participation and contribution to party work is mostly carried out



by a smaller group of the members. These are mostly the “office holders” that occupy political positions in electoral mandates, having more detailed information as well as political (co-) decision-making power due to their mandate. Nonetheless, there are various options for active participation by “normal” party members that go beyond pasting billboards during election campaigns. Party members can inform themselves better on political matters and positions, and usually have easier access to party representatives and political office holders. They have the opportunity to take part in internal political discussions and can organise political forums themselves. Last but not least, they elect the party candidates for elections (Unfortunately, this is not the case in all parties, but in democratically organised parties the party members should really participate in the election of candidates!) and obviously, any party member should have the chance to compete for electoral mandates.

Local politics has already been mentioned as the area where party members actively contribute most frequently and directly to the party organisation. Moreover, local politics are an important “learning environment” of politics, where party members qualify for higher positions.

Parliamentarians and members of the government are usually the outstanding members of the party. This is the case at the national and

local level. These politicians usually exert a direct and, in many parties, dominant influence. Differences in opinion between mandate-holders and party leadership as such are quite frequent at all levels of a party. In cases of conflict, delegates and government officials can temporarily withdraw from party guidelines due to constitutional provisions (for example, the “independent mandate”). In political practice, however, this conflict is solved through the personal union of party and mandate. The leading parliamentarians and representatives of a government (whether they are ministers of a central government or mayors and directors of local authorities) are normally also present in the executive board and other leading committees of a party.

### 2. 3. Recruitment of new members

Parties with a large membership base have higher chances of participating successfully in the political contest, winning elections and exerting influence on the formation of political opinion. But how can parties gain new members?

Many people are interested in politics because they know that their own living conditions are determined by it; they would therefore like to contribute and take part in decisions in a more direct way. Many of those people wait for the parties to approach them.

**Personal contact** is the best way to approach politically interested people and to persuade them to join a party. A carefully prepared home visit that is conducted with politeness and discretion can facilitate the decision to join a party. The “promoter” should therefore bring along and introduce some party documentation: publications of the party (for example, the basic and most recent election programme), a letter of introduction by the party leader, a membership form and some advertising and other material of the party.



Another form of attracting members is by the **organisation of public events, presentations or public debates, celebrations** on specific occasions, and cultural activities, where people can be invited that are expected to be close to the political position of a party.

**Public hearings on topics of local politics** generally draw big attention and give a party the opportunity to introduce its political position and to gain new followers and members.

#### **Forms of integration of non-members in a party**

- Provision of regular and comprehensive information to interested non-members regarding the positions and activities of a party (condition: the party must know about those persons who are interested in its activities)
- Participation of “freelance members” in working groups, project groups or commissions with voting rights, as well as the right for petition and the right to speak for such working groups at party conventions
- Membership surveys on specific topics and decisions on political direction
- Primary election of party leaders and candidates; therefore, all members shall be part of these personnel decisions through elections
- Candidacy of non-members on party lists, which seems particularly possible at the local level

Political parties should refrain from spending on expensive advertising campaigns to get new members or paying payments to “promoters”. Experience shows that the relation between costs and benefits has

an unfavourable ratio when a party tries to attract new members by advertisement. The payment of advertisers often leads to an attitude where both the new members and the advertisers are more interested in financial considerations than by the attractiveness of the policies and programme of a party. Only those parties that honestly tries to tackle specific problems, develop long-term concepts, rely on fundamental values, give potential members real perspectives for participation and offer a clear perspective to gain political power will be the most attractive.

The parties should give special attention to the data base of its members—and if possible they should also have a data base of interested citizens who are not members of the party. The correct management and update of the data base of its is of high importance, as it can be used for various purposes (such as distribution of political information, raising funds, and support in electoral campaigns). Besides the postal address, telephone number, email, Facebook or other communities, Twitter address and the profession of each member, additional information on the special interests of every member, his or her experiences in different fields and his or her membership in other organisations or associations should be included. This enables the party to specifically inform the members on particular topics and to mobilise them for political activities in their respective fields of interest.

#### 2. 4. Education and training of the party members

In the modern mass democracy, the political parties, its leaders and members must constantly face new issues and questions and take positions in view of current day-to-day developments and social change. It is therefore indispensable that the parties take precautionary steps in order to prepare its representatives and members for new challenges and the assumption of responsibility within and outside of the party. This is the task of political education.

Political education within the party is especially successful when it is directed towards the younger party members. The measures of training should comprise three areas:

### **Issues of political training**

- Basic values and principles of the party
- Understanding of the political issues (local, economic, and social politics etc.)
- Preparation for political work within the party, and for taking on political functions in the parliament (political rhetoric, preparation of functions, handling of the media, membership promotion, conduct of election campaigns, and raising of funds)

Many parties have a representative for inner-party training who is responsible of developing a coherent and continuous programme of political educative measures and to monitor its implementation. The participation of prominent party leaders in such educative measures contributes to awakening the interest of the members (and possibly the media, in case where such activities are open to public). These sorts of activities provide important impulses for the commitment in and for a party. The party leaders should therefore invest time and effort for their participation in such measures.

In general, the educational work within a party can orientate itself on the following scheme:

- Organisation of a coherent and continuous training programme
- Preparation of a training team
- Definition of training targets
- Development and composition of suitable material for the various training measures
- Selection of participants
- Planning of measures, and establishment of cost and flowcharts
- Appointment of lecturers and facilitators

In various countries the parties have established specific facilities for political education.

### **Institutions for Political Training and Education Close to Political Parties**

In many countries, political parties have created special institutes for the political education of its members that regularly offers training activities for party members (including courses, seminars, special training workshops, analysis and publications). Such institutions include, for example, the Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung in Germany ([www.kas.de](http://www.kas.de)), the Forum for Civic Development Fundacja Obywatelskiego Rozwoju FOR in Poland ([www.for.org.pl/pl](http://www.for.org.pl/pl)), the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Republican Institute (IRI) in the USA ([www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org), [www.iri.org](http://www.iri.org)), the Fundación Rafael Preciado Hernández (FRPH) in Mexico ([www.fundacionpreciado.org.mx](http://www.fundacionpreciado.org.mx)), the Centro Democracia y Comunidad (CDC) in Chile ([www.cdc.cl](http://www.cdc.cl)) and The Youido Institute (YDI) in the Republic of Korea ([www.ydi.or.kr](http://www.ydi.or.kr)).



Party programmes fulfil different functions. The basic party programme constitutes the identity of the party and offers a general orientation to the citizens and voters on the guiding principles and ideas of a party. With its programme, the party justifies its existence and explains how it differentiates itself from others. The party programme illustrates the political ambition and basic values, demands and suggestions of a party.

The party programme differentiates itself from other party documents such as the election programme, which contains specific suggestions and demands in view of a particular election and therefore has to be re-designed each time. A party programme has a long-term character. It does not refer to issues of an actual political debate. This has to be done by the electoral or special action programme, which are written with a short-term perspective for electoral or other purposes of actual political debates.

Any political party should dedicate special attention to the elaboration of its basic programme. It should invite the highest number of affiliates to participate in its elaboration or at least in its approval. The more the members get integrated in the process of the elaboration of the party programme, the better they will know and defend the basic party lines in public discussions.

To elaborate or actualize its party programme, many parties opt to form a special commission that decides on the topics to be mentioned in the programme and elaborates a first draft, which may be presented to other party or expert committees. An advanced draft programme may be presented for discussion to all party members. If the new programme is finally discussed and approved by a national party convention, the party will reach a high degree of public awareness.

Beside their general programmes, some parties also have **special programmes** or **position papers** that define their political views with regard to certain policies, including, for instance, economic policies, energy policies, policies for women, youths or families, rural policies, and cultural policies. A special aspect of the attractiveness of such programmes or position papers is that they may be developed with the participation of representatives of those sectors that they are addressing. This contributes to a stronger relationship between the party and these sectors.

The **electoral programme** is designed with regard to a specific election and may contain proposals and demands with regard to the future activities that a party may develop after forming or joining a government. Electoral programmes have to be written before each election. Normally, they are written in close contact with the leading candidates of a party who are then responsible for putting forward their political views to the public.

In many countries, a lot of parties do not put much effort into the development of a party programme and pay little attention to it, as they are mostly identified more through their representatives than through their programmes. Nevertheless, they should not underestimate the role of a comprehensive programme for the profile and identification of its members with the party. The party programme reveals towards the party members and representatives, as well as towards the citizens and voters, the basic views of the party and it proves whether a party can actually translate social concerns into political suggestions and programmes. Every party should, therefore, attach great importance to the elaboration of a coherent programme. Moreover, the discussion on the programme of a party should take place in a longer time frame, with the purpose of updating the party programme, thus providing an opportunity to lead the programmatic debate internally and with other social groupings.

## 2. 6. Internal and external communication

“Good” communication is of central relevance for any political party. This involves communication with the voters and the society as a whole, as well as internal communication with its own members within the party. Only those parties with an efficient system of internal communication are capable of efficient external communication.

The communication of political intentions and the search for public consent has always been a part of the main requirements for political leadership in democracy. Since the beginnings of modern party democracy, the conditions and manifestation of communication, however, have changed considerably. Today, there are quite a lot of new demands with regard to communication and public leadership. This refers not only to various aspects of so-called “media management”, but also to different activities such as the guarantee of the “media capability” of major decision-makers, the strategic launching of information to the media or the adapting of the

party apparatus to the dramatically intensified time pressure through the commercialised mass media. The changed expectations of democratic societies, which are bound to legitimacy, are just as important: The legitimacy of political power today is much more linked to communication skills than a few decades ago. Leadership rhetoric is in this context of particular relevance.

## 2. 6. 1. Communication with the society

The professionalised communication between political decision-makers and the public has progressively grown into a power factor. Therefore, political power has been defined as a product of the capacity to influence public opinion and the capability to ensure one's own power position through smart and strategically favourable decisions.<sup>6</sup>

The reach and effectiveness of media-transmitted messages have significantly increased. Politicians orientate themselves on the climate of political opinion; political VIPs communicate directly with the public



by TV, radio, press, and new internet communities like Facebook, Twitter and other means without using their party apparatus. The connection to public relations agents (journalists, pollsters, and consultants) and the detachment from party organisations leads to a high rating and sometimes an over-rating of political marketing compared to the

real programmatic party work. As a result, short-term strategic personal goals often dominate against long-term strategic organisational goals.<sup>7</sup> This strengthens the leadership of a party and a parliamentary faction. But, at the same time, leaders and members at the subordinate level of the party organisation are losing their decision and participation chances.

The changing communication patterns of the political elites, among themselves and with the population, demand media proficiency as a basic requirement of political communication in the media democracy. Under these circumstances, political leadership means “to constantly create majorities from various groups of interests. The objective rationality of the measures planned ahead together with the political communication and enforcement rationality applies. Political leadership is, therefore, often more pragmatic presentation than hierarchic management”.<sup>8</sup>

Leadership under the circumstances of media communication has “produced the new type of star politician. He distinguishes himself by being ‘entertaining’ and ‘inventive’, ‘quick-witted’ and ‘funny’, a ‘winner type’ and ‘TV-pro’, somebody ‘that could host a talk show’. In this case, it concerns requirements for the gain of prestige and power through television. However, in view of their effective management capacities, these characteristics represent only peripheral qualifications”.<sup>9</sup> At most, these qualifications enable the star politician to generate public attention in certain situations. They represent, however, only a minimal share of those characteristics that are necessary to communicate and implement reforms. Those actors that rely only on these qualifications will soon have problems in maintaining their credibility. They will lose public attention as fast as they achieve it. Such actors “may give external lustre to the execution of power, but do not enable or secure it internally. That requires different qualifications.”

Reforms indeed require political actors that are capable of generating publicity and exploiting the attention strategically, but above all, they need political realists that bring along the persistence to also change structures, if these are not suitable anymore to solve the current problems. If the parties increasingly degenerate into a mere executive authority of top players and



if they or the parliament or other legitimate institutions are deprived of power or are substituted by well-paid experts, than those institutions have only reduced capacities to initiate any reforms. Furthermore, people lose their trust in these structures (parties, associations, and even the media). Hence, political reformers have to find the courage to trigger processes of change in social institutions and to further implement those changes. Quickly leveraging these organisations only covers up the necessity, for intra-organisational change, pragmatic solutions are required!

Social institutions cannot be misused as image-providers for individual politicians. In fact, democratic institutions should be used to transmit political issues. This requires communication that the people can identify with. However, the successful communication of reforms does not only take place in the minds of the concerned, but also in the democratic institutions: **A successful government in a parliamentary democracy requires, therefore, political leadership geared towards both the outside and inside of the party.** It takes perseverance to comprehensibly communicate decisions to the people and to generate support from the institutions involved. The voters are wiser than public relations analysts, I suppose!

The external communication can comprise everything on offer by modern mass communication and political marketing. Regular press releases and press conferences, and publication of bulletins and positions are the basics for party communication. The internet nowadays is of special relevance for modern party communication. The party website is a main source for communication and should be permanently actualized. The presence of political parties in modern internet communities like Facebook and Twitter is also indispensable in order to deliver their messages and present their leaders to the broader public. Regional party branches should have their own website to communicate issues of local or regional relevance. Visual platforms like YouTube should be used to disseminate the messages of the parties and to present their leaders.

Beside that, the organisation of mass events like congresses and seminars are an important tool to deepen the contact with members and representatives of social organisation or local, regional and national opinion leaders. The presence of party leaders in television talk shows and

the radio, and on Facebook and Twitter, are other important tools for party communication.

As, relevant as all these forms of communication might be, it is without any doubt that the small talk of a “simple” party member with his neighbour, his colleague or his friend is a very important instrument for the daily contact



and communication of a party with the broader society. This kind of external communication can only work as far as the intra-party communication is effective.

Parties are a connective link between society and the state. In order to be elected and to formulate political demands capable of gaining a majority among citizens and voters, the parties must know the concerns of the society. Continuous contact with numerous social groupings and associations is therefore necessary. This contact, which is a result of the contribution or membership of party members in other organisations, should also be formally organised by a party in regular intervals at the local, regional and national levels. In doing so, a party sends an important signal towards social associations.

One aspect is obvious: all the efforts towards optimal technical or individual communication will be useless if a party is not committed to political actions that create credibility and are oriented to the common good. Without long-term concepts and concrete contents, all communication efforts—even if exercised in a very professional way—will be perceived as an empty show.

## 2. 6. 2. Communication within the party

Internal party communication is as important as the extra-party communication. Internal communication for a party is important not only to inform its own members, but also to represent party positions towards the society. This is a very relevant function of the “simple” party members. Therefore, each party leadership at the national, regional and local levels should try to build up an efficient communication system towards its members.

Within many parties, the internal party communication does not work very efficiently. There is a lack of regular information to the members with regard to actual political questions. But how can the party members represent or defend their party’s positions if they are not sufficiently informed about them?

Sometimes, there is a lack of the basic conditions for effective communication. It happens quite often that regional party associations do not have an actual list of local party leaders and members with complete addresses and emails etc. Nor do they know about the special interests of their members or their participation in other organisations that could transform them into important party “ambassadors” towards such clubs or

associations. Party leaders, therefore, should permanently endeavour to improve the intra- and extra-party communication. In this context, some activities are of special relevance:

- Regular assemblies of the party members at a local level with the provision of information and discussion of relevant intra-party developments and decisions.
- Planning and coordination of a yearly programme for communication between the different levels of the party organisation.
- Election or appointment of a communication executive at all levels of the party organisation and efficient coordination between the communications executives. At the national level the general secretary and the special appointee for intra-party communication should be responsible for effective intra-party communication. At the regional level there should be appointees with similar functions.
- At all levels of the party organisation, periodic internal reports on important internal and external evolutions should be prepared. The reports shall be submitted to the next higher level in the party.
- Publication of a membership information sheet or party magazine, which should be distributed among all party members. The coverage shall consist of current political topics being reviewed by the party, as well as information of important inner-party events; furthermore, a designated space should be given for party members to contribute to the discussions.
- Continuous evaluation of the efficiency of internal communication.





## 2. 7. Intra-party democracy

Intra-party democracy is necessary in order to increase the influence and contribution of the politically involved citizens in a party. A democratic state cannot be governed by parties with undemocratic structures. Legal guidelines exist, therefore, in many countries, obliging the parties to also respect democratic procedures in their inner processes. However, in reality this is often disregarded.

In many countries, the constitution, or laws, obliges the parties to shape their internal processes according to democratic procedures. However, despite all such legal provisions the influence of “ordinary” party members is relatively restricted and the circle of members who are actually powerful and influential is usually rather small. The reason for this is the lack of interest among members to participate more actively. In other cases, the bureaucratisation of the party apparatus has resulted in a certain distance—if not alienation—between party leaders and party members. This is at least in part due to the particular nature of modern mass democracies that demands fast decision-making processes, which in turn does not allow for long voting procedures within the parties. Nonetheless, experience shows that those who invest time and effort in party work can actually gain influence within the party.

### **The Iron Law of Oligarchy**

In a classical work on party research, Robert Michels had, in 1911, demonstrated the “iron law of oligarchy” (“Reign of a few”).<sup>10</sup> According to the research, every organisation inevitably brings forth a ruling class, which it cannot control effectively in the long-term. Accordingly, party leaderships and party structures also become more and more independent, given the advance in information technology and the increasing specialisation of politics. The accumulation of responsibilities and monopoly of power are symptoms of increasing oligarchy, which constitutes a problem for the democratic formation of opinion within a party. An improvement in democratic procedures and in the exchange of views can contribute to the removal of stiff party structures.

The influence of local party committees on the shaping of political opinion and the decision-making processes of the party varies depending on the nature of the current problems. It is not everywhere that they have an influence on the selection of the parliament candidates. This, however, varies from country to country.

Many party systems worldwide deplore the lack of intra-party democracy, not least because of the decreasing numbers of membership. Many parties are now seeking to implement more attractive policies for their existing members and find incentives for non-members to join their party. One possibility is to open up towards non-members and to allow them options of participation at the lower levels of the party. Yet, experience shows that the activities of non-members in parties are rather few. There is also the risk that the individual political benefits of party membership will decrease if non-members receive the same rights and participate, for instance, in intra-party decisions on candidates. In any case, the party bases should participate in intra-party decisions. Whether this is directly

through member surveys and voting procedures or in an indirect form by delegates, each party should decide according to its own circumstances. Both ways are legitimate forms of intra-party democracy, even if nowadays the general tendency is more in favour of the direct participation of party members. It is important that the selection process of party leaders and candidates for elections respect the democratic criteria. Here, by principle, it should be applied as a “bottom up” approach; that is, any party or elected position is legitimized by the respective electoral body within a party. In most cases this is a party convention, which can be at the local, regional or national level. This mode of appointment equips the holder of an office to relate to potential rivals within the party and those of other parties with legitimacy.

#### **Respect of intra-party democracy means**

- Promotion of the participation of all members in the internal matters of the party.
- Possibility for the members to voice their opinions within the party.
- Possibility of participation for specific groups within a party (for example, women, youth, and middle-class people).
- Tolerance towards different opinions as long as they are within the limits of the basic party programme.
- Compliance with the rules and regulations for membership participation and decision-making processes within the party.
- Respect of the party leadership towards the “ordinary” party members.

Intra-party democracy also implies that the individual inner-party group should be able to voice their views and controversy to a large extent in public. A party should not shy away from this, even though open confrontation of differences in opinion and conflicts is at times believed to be a sign of

weakness, little credibility and a lack of unanimity within the party in the mind of the parties and the voting population.

In the extreme case, it is indeed possible that the different positions are so far apart that the energies of the politicians are ensnared and internal arguments interfere with the programmatic vision of the party. On the other hand internal differences do nurture political discussion. It might, therefore, also be a sign of strength when a party accepts the differences in opinions and does not choke them off due to the popular call for unity. As much as intra-party debates and controversies can be a demonstration of a vibrant party life, during election campaigns parties have to postpone their intra-party conflicts and present themselves with a unified profile. All party forces have to be concentrated on the electoral campaign. For competitors in the intra-party races, this means putting asides personal sentiments and respecting the vote for contenders. Nevertheless, frequently, the opposite can be observed. Those candidates who have lost intra-party competitions sometimes create their own political parties or electoral platforms, thereby damaging their relations with their old parties without necessarily gaining considerable personal advantages.

## 2. 8. Inner party conflicts and conflict resolution

Within parties, conflicts may occur time and again—because of different perceptions on political issues, as well as due to personal rivalries for positions and influence. These conflicts are inevitable and legitimate, but must be argued out in a correct manner. Within a party, there is always a concurrence of power and influence; this is part of everyday business. In the end, however, internal conflicts must be decided within the limits of democratic and transparent procedures. It is very important that everybody involved in such conflicts respects the democratic decisions of the party.

In some countries, especially prominent party members, who might also have parliament mandates or occupy other public offices, have the tendency to leave their parties in cases where conflicts are not resolved in their favour. This not only harms the party, but is also an example of bad democratic behaviour. After all, democracy means that one must respect majorities, even if the personal position is “only” the opinion of a minority.

The formal body for the settlement of intra-party conflicts and disputes are the party meetings and conventions, where differences of opinion may be discussed and decided in a democratic way. The last instance to decide on disputes – but normally not political disputes - are the party courts which in some countries are required by law or are by the proper party statutes. These party courts ensure that conflicts can be settled first internally, and not before public courts. The party courts mostly have to deal with status disputes about membership and voting rights, the internal review of voting procedures and other procedural issues or sanctions against members whose behaviour are not in accordance with the party line and who may have violated the statute or the party's fundamental values.

In addition to these formal forms of conflict resolution and mediation, parties often also apply "soft" forms of conflict mediation between rival groups and individuals. The best known forms are certainly the offering of power sharing by inviting rivals to certain offices. Illustrative of this practice is President Barack Obama's invitation to his inner-party rival Hillary Clinton to be his secretary of state. He also invited a cross-party recognised expert of the Republicans, Robert Gates, to be his secretary of defence. The old principle of "divide and rule" has not lost its relevance. It helps to protect one's own position of power and frequently offers for all involved parties a so-called "win-win" situation.

Intra-party conflicts and intra-party ideological differences can also be attenuated by the invitation of rival intra-party groups and their representatives to the management level of political parties—where party leaders are able to establish a reasonable form of cooperation, leading to the benefit of the whole party. The same holds true of the efforts to integrate representatives of different intra-party groupings to a party council or other leadership positions. These forms of negotiated integration of rivalling groups into the party management have proved to be more successful than quota arrangements, which are more formalized and contested. Nevertheless, quota arrangements can also contribute to improving the representation of certain groups within a political party.

Even though most constitutions all over the world stipulate equal treatment of men and women, women are under-represented worldwide in parties and political leading functions. In many countries efforts are being made to achieve stronger participation of women in politics. An intensified contribution in parties is a basic requirement for this purpose.

In order to give women a larger space for political contribution and involvement, a statutory female quota has been set up in many countries with different regulations. Usually, the point is to reserve a minimum number of party offices and positions for women during elections. Experience shows that such quota regulations—where they work!—can in practice actually contribute to a higher percentage of women in politics.

However, experience has also shown that quota regulations are often not put into practice, so the outcome is that there are no more women in the parliaments than before. Hence, there must be effort to ensure that the female quotas take effect and that there is an increase in the percentage of women in politics, i.e. also in parliaments. This is certainly a question of political culture that needs time to develop.

Some parties apply quota regulations to guarantee certain minorities' appropriate cooperation within their rank and file. Policies to guarantee ethnic minority representation take place in two forms: candidate nomination quotas in political parties and legislative reservation. Legislative reservation includes reserving seats for specific groups and only members of a group can vote for the representative of the group.



This leads to a separate voters roll for the minorities. This system is not very favourable in a multicultural society as it undermines any incentive for political inter-mixing between communities. The participation of ethnic or racial minorities in legislatures often raises the questions as to what level these groups are represented in the parties and legislatures and to what extent they can influence policy and decision-making.

There have been significant efforts among political parties to increase support by ethnic minorities. They are recruited through the establishment of ethnic liaisons units by political parties in order to increase the parties' profiles within the ethnic communities. This can play an important part in local elections because unless the ethnic minorities get their share in representation, no aspiring ruling party is going to get their support in return.



Political parties need financial resources in order to carry out effectively their functions in the spirit of fostering the democratic society, to acquire expertise, to develop their programmes and distribute them, to maintain a stable organisational structure, to cultivate communication with the members and, last but not least, to conduct electoral campaigns. In the ideal case, this financing should enable the parties to carry out their tasks without being financially dependent on one interest group or person.

Since the necessity of parties for the democratic system is undisputed, many democratic countries have financial government support for parties. This support can take the form of direct grants from the treasury (usually as a refund for election campaign expenses) or the form of indirect support through tax deductibility of donations for parties.

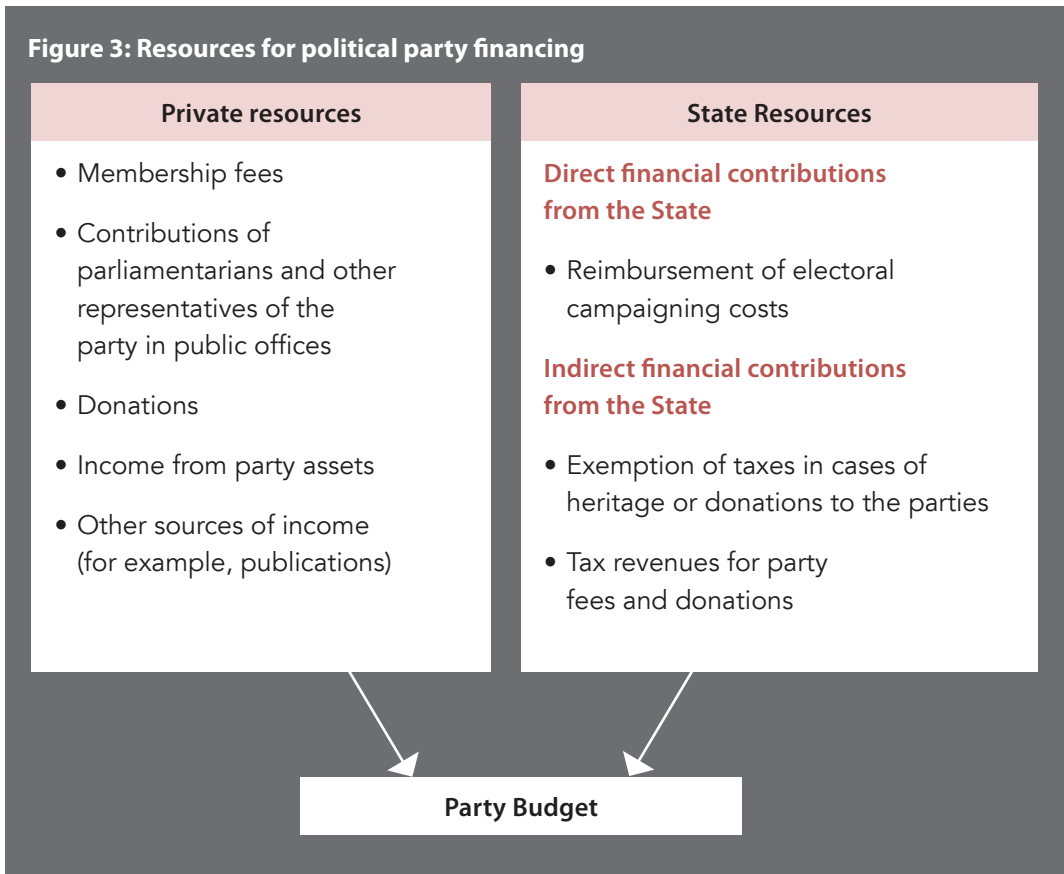
#### **Means of income**

- Membership fees is the least controversial source of income. The fees are a sign of the bond between members and their party. The membership fees are not only an important financial source but also an expression of affection to a party. Unfortunately, the poor members of a party often cannot afford to pay a fee. And if there are malpractices or misuse of the party funds, there is even less willingness to pay any fee. Therefore, the political parties should give an account of the use of the membership fees (as well as of other income) in a transparent form. Even in poor countries, parties should try to collect some small fees from their members—but they also should offer some service in return. Where there is no way to collect fees in the form of money, there is always the possibility of collecting “fees” in the form of some services for the party.
- Financial contributions of parliament members and similar regular dues of officials from the parties; these persons contribute to the party beyond their membership fees, as they owe their mandates or positions in the public administration, etc. to their party.



- Revenues from capital, events etc.; some parties own businesses (for example, print houses for the distribution of party documentation and party brochures etc.) or carry out other activities from which they generate revenue. In principle, they should officially account for their entire revenues from such activities and for their capital.
- Donations are the most controversial public source of party financing. This is especially so for big parties that obtain an important portion of their revenues through donations. The concern is that major donors from the economy could try to exert political influence along this path. This would contradict the principles of democratic equity.
- Loans are an important but problematic source of financing of political parties. Loans will lead to debts, and for many parties indebtedness represents a serious problem. It is not easy to reduce the debts by legal means. If possible, political parties should avoid this source of financing. In any case, they should officially account for their liabilities towards credit institutions.
- Refund for election campaign expenses. This is a common practice of public party financing. The refund of election campaign expenses is usually tied to the election results of a party.

**Figure 3: Resources for political party financing**



**Principles of party financing**

- The parties shall annually and officially account for their finances, especially in cases where they receive public funds.
- Membership fees should be a major part of a parties' revenue. Membership fees not only has a financial effect, but also improves the identity and obliges the party leadership to be transparent towards their own members.
- Government contributions to parties should respect the principle of equal opportunity, as well as the impact of an election, which is expressed by its election results.

- The total annual volume of government contributions to parties should be fixed.
- With regard to government contributions to parties, the volume of donations to a party should be considered.
- The limit of tax deductibility for membership fees and donations should be fixed as low as possible.
- From a preferably low limit onwards donations to parties should be made public.

### **Raising funds for the parties**

Public financing of parties should neither constitute the only nor the main source of income for parties. Hence, the parties have to develop the ability to generate proper means of income. This is a central task for every party and, therefore, has to be sufficiently considered when structuring and allocating tasks within a party.

In order to raise funds, a strategy is necessary, and this should be developed by the treasurer of the party. He shall direct and coordinate all activities to raise funds; furthermore, he should coordinate with the regional and local treasurers of the party. At all party levels, there should be an official for finances (a treasurer) who is responsible for raising funds.<sup>11</sup>

The raising of funds shall be conducted through a strategy. The following measures have, amongst others, proven successful:

- Personal pleas for donations that are carried out by leaders and members or by other people close to the party.
- Personal letters soliciting donations from members and other people.
- Convocation of a committee for funding means.
- Organisation of specific events (celebrations, summer parties, thematic events) that can also be used to ask for donations.
- Calling people to solicit for donations.
- Home visits to members, corporations and people, from which a donation is expected.

As for attracting new members, personal contact proves to be the best method for soliciting donations. Necessary for this, however, is a well-managed register of members and sympathizers, which allows advertisers to target potential donors in person. Impersonal mass letters usually produces costs with no effect. Donations can also be provided in the form of voluntary work by helping to organise events and information evenings, so-called "street canvassing" during election campaigns, or by providing meeting rooms for parties.

It is especially important for cash donations that the parties explain to the donors what purposes the donations are used for. This is a question of transparency and it generally increases the willingness to donate. Parties should also appreciate donations appropriately, for example, by a personal letter of thanks, small gifts, so-called "giveaways" such as pens, notepads or USB sticks with the party logo, and general information about the party. However, parties must be careful not to waste their resources by giving generous awards. All measures associated with the raising of funds must comply with legal regulations and should respect the principle of transparency.

3

**Political Parties  
and their  
Relation with  
Civil Society and  
Interest Groups**

## From its origins in the 19th century, political parties were originally civil society organisations.

In particular, the (Western) European parties emerged as an organised expression of social and political conflict. The liberal, conservative, rural, and the Social Democratic organisations tried to reaffirm their positions in and through party organisations. Through participation in elections, representation in parliaments and participation in democratically elected governments, they sought to implement social and political reforms. By their origins but also by their parliamentary orientation, and the desire to achieve public office, until today the political parties are positioned between civil society, parliament and government.

In a certain way, political parties can be considered as political organisations of the civil society that aggregate the interests of a particular group (or several groups), articulate and represent them. Through participation in democratic elections, they are anxious to present these interests to the representative and formal institutions of politics.



Parties normally are founded in two ways: by social elites who gather around them a group of influential supporters to defend their positions, or by citizens who seek the support of like-minded people to achieve political or social change. In the first case, it is more a top-down approach to party building, as has been the case with the first liberal parties, which were based on loosely organised election committees applying for parliamentary representation.

These ways of creating political parties are not only typical in the history of Western European parties in the late 19th Century. The reform movements in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, like "Charta 77" in Czechoslovakia, "Solidarnosc", the trade union and social reform movement in Poland, or the democratic citizens' movements in former East Germany, such as the "Initiative for Peace and Human Rights", the "New Forum" and the "Democratic Departure", arose from civil society and were later formed into political parties or joined existing parties.

Since the 1990s, in the context of growing general criticisms on political parties by social activists but also by social scientists, there started an intense international debate over the concepts of representation and participation. There was a general perception of a crisis of democracy, focused on a crisis of representation and institutions and not least of the political parties. In the context of this debate, the extension of direct participation appeared to be a cure-all measure to replace the unsettled fundamentals of representation. Civil society organisations like local citizens' initiatives or "new social movements" (peace-, women-, and environment-movements) became a new challenge for the parties given their inability to solve existing problems and due to the demobilisation of their members. The number of such initiatives and movements, in many cases, so-called "single-issue movements", has increased significantly over the last two decades. In some countries new political parties have been formed that concentrate only on one or a few issues (anti-immigration parties, "internet parties" etc). In many cases, the traditional political parties have integrated the new issues, like protection of the

environment, alternative energies, and sustainable development etc. These issues nowadays are part of the programmes of the established parties. On the other hand, some of the new social movements have taken over the functions of the parties, mainly the articulation and representation of social interests.



In recent years, however, there have been signs of disillusion concerning the possibilities and capacities of civil society organisations and an increasing consent about the necessity to reach a reasonable balance between representation and participation. It has been proven that mass democracy can only function in the form of representative democracy and

that the parties are in the end the only institutions that are legitimated by their participation in general elections, justifying their representation and legitimacy through their participation in these elections. Civil society organisations usually are not able to prove their real representativeness (unless they are associations with a clearly defined clientele). They also lack the necessary structures, processes, experiences and also personnel to execute the additional classical functions of political parties, like legitimization, selection of candidates and, most important of all, democratic government. Civil society organisations can not substitute the political parties.

Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that civil society organisations offer an important contribution to the political process and to the stabilisation of democracy in each society. The higher number and increased importance of civil society organisations all over the world prove that practically everywhere a significant proportion of citizens wishes to take part in political processes. But even in the area of civil society organisations similar tendencies as for political parties can be observed: traditionally strong institutions like the labour unions are nowadays weakened; the multitude



of organisations is not necessarily proof of stronger influence, but an indication of their fragmentation; many of those organisations are neither transparent nor do they respect the democratic rules in their internal procedures; they are usually rather weak in terms of organisation and rarely accomplish long-term relations with their members; identification with them is often ephemeral. Thus, the demobilisation of the parties is only partly compensated by the civil social organisations.

The civil society organisations may carry out certain functions that also apply for parties. However, they cannot fulfil the most important function of the parties: participation in general elections, which not only provide to the parties their share of political power, but also ensures their representativeness. In contrast, the real representation of the civil society organisations remains unclear even though they are able to move big crowds for specific occasions. Social organisations can only prove their real backing within the society if they transform into political parties.

### 3. 2. Parties and associations

Interest groups are a specific form of organized civil society. They organize and articulate the social interests of individual citizens, social groups or other social organizations such as businesses associations or trade unions. In the context of institutional policy-forming and decision-making structures they exercise the functions of interest articulation and mediation. They carry out similar functions as political parties. However, their focus lies on a specific sector, in contrast to the territorial and political generalized representation basis of the parties.

Interest groups are characterized by specific organizational and functional characteristics and specific patterns of relationships with other actors in the political system, state institutions, the media and, last but not least, the political parties.

Even if interest groups perform some of the functions of parties they can be distinguished from parties by three major features:

- They do not involve themselves in political competition for parliamentary seats.
- Their missions, objectives, programmes, activities and areas of interest are usually limited to specific issues or concerns of particular social groups, while parties generally aim for a more general design and the functions of the representation or integration of different social groups.
- They are more connected with the groups whose interests they represent. For example, business organizations are guided by the interests of its member corporations and their representatives; trade unions represent workers' interests in the forefront of their actions, which concern mainly the areas of wage-bargaining and working conditions; other organisations focus on social or cultural issues or environmental issues, like welfare associations which focus on the production of social services.

Interest groups are thus by no means homogeneous, but differ not only according to their areas of interest, but also upon their size, structure, power bases, potential impact, strategies etc.

The political relevance of interest groups is as varied as the range of associations. However, within certain associations the attempt to influence policy debates and decisions is a key part of their purpose. Generally, associations try to influence certain parties, political debates and decisions in their favour. This may be legitimate in principle, but it can especially stress the balancing of interest of the society as a whole with sectoral interests, especially in such cases when powerful interest groups employ their resources—money or the ability to mobilize large masses—to influence political decisions in their favour

Parties are usually permanently addressed in associations organized interest claims (especially when they participate in government). At the

same time they themselves act as stakeholders in policy-making process of other parties. By exercising different functions, parties and associations are, in a certain way, subject to common conditions of action. The relationship between associations and political parties depends on the role an individual party is playing in its political system.

Between the parties and interest associations exists a relationship of mutual dependency. The associations need access to the parties to get a direct link to the policy formulation process, while the parties are supported by the associations in elections. In addition, the associations have the opportunity, quite early in the legislative process, to influence the ministerial bureaucracy, which in turn by itself depends on information from the associations. Also, in this regard, there are mutual ways of interdependence.

The possibility of achieving significance is determined for associations not just by their own organizational capacity but substantially by their ability to represent interests also through conflicts. They can organize strikes, for example, or exercise



or exercise other forms of pressure. The effectiveness of such threats is subject to certain constellations in the political system. For example, if a change of party preference in a narrow majority in parliament can be threatened, this increase the influence of interest groups.

The influence of the associations on political decision-making processes must be monitored closely and is a continuing topic of political science analysis. In Germany, for example, where a large number of associations exist, many fear that the "power of the associations" means a threat to the sovereignty of the state. These fears turn out to be largely unfounded. Empirical studies on the formation of certain laws came to the conclusion that in the legislative process there was no evidence of the influence of any single dominant individual interest group. Nevertheless, in Germany, as in many other countries, the legislative process is directly affected by

the influence of individual associations in their respective policy areas. In many cases, big business associations exercise more influence than smaller ones.

Politicians should be aware of this issue. Because of the special relationship between political parties and associations, there is always the problem that sectoral interest may overwhelm societal interests. By organizing politics and the political system, the relevant rules concerning the actions of associations should observe strictly the demand for transparency.<sup>12</sup>



**Political  
Parties in  
Parliament  
and  
Government**



**4**

A political party has achieved its primary goal when it gains parliamentary representation, or even participation in the government. It has almost

“made it”: its representatives are sitting in parliament, possibly even exercising governance; for a fixed term the party exercises power, enjoys the privileges linked to political power and may finally distribute favour to its clients. From a policy-oriented perspective, however, only with the successful entry into parliament does the “real” work start. Depending on how many parliamentary seats a party wins, it is now about to forge coalitions, coalition agreements or arrangements, work out a government programme and face countless problems and at least solve a substantial part of these.

Elections decide how the parties are represented in the national parliament, in the regional parliaments and in the local chambers respectively. At least in principle, the faction (parliamentary group) tries

to carry through parliament whatever a party proclaims to represent. The success of these efforts is very much dependent on how big the faction of a party is in parliament, and therefore, how high its proportion of mandates is and whether it constitutes the government or opposition.

The government needs a parliamentary majority and that is why the government and the joint forces of parties in a government coalition work closely together. In contrast, the opposition parties keep a check on the government and present constructive alternatives to the projects of the government and the government parties.

In the classical model of separation of powers, there is a clear distinction between the executive (government) and the legislature (parliament). In practice, however, this model does not function in terms of a strict separation of both organs, but rather in the sense of an interleave or a



separation of tasks. This is especially valid for parliamentary governmental systems, where the executive branch depends highly on the support in parliament. Between government and parliament, which means the majority of government supporters in the parliament, there is a mutual interdependence, which also forces a high level of consent and unity. Without this unity, it is nearly impossible to have effective governance. Every government must therefore strive to achieve a broad and stable majority in parliament, usually in both chambers of parliament, if there is a bi-cameral system. This also applies to the governments of regional or local assemblies.

Only the parliamentary opposition has an interest to corner the government. A governing party in contrast usually refrains from criticism towards "its" government or expresses criticism on questions of detail and in the context of discussions on pending projects. In most countries, there are regular coordination meetings between the floor leaders of the governing parties, the chief of government and members of cabinet for coordination between government and parliamentary factions and for the preparation of voting procedures in the parliament. Parliamentarians of governing parties are often better informed on ongoing projects by their informal contacts with members of the government.

#### 4. 1. Parliamentary groups (factions)

The representatives of the respective parties constitute the factions in parliament. Party and faction leaders usually form a tight-knit group and are united through fundamental political convictions. Although tensions can occur, the factions usually are assertive to bear up to any contrasting party opinions. Sustained conflicts between a party and its faction occur only in rare cases. The floor leaders (leaders of a parliamentary group or faction) usually have a major influence in their party. Beside their parliamentary tasks, they also have to contribute to mitigating tensions between the party and its parliamentary faction.

Solidarity and discipline within a faction are necessary and legitimate. However, a permanent obligation for all the parliamentarians of a party to obey their party whip cannot be exercised. Most democratic constitutions in the world guarantee the "free mandate" of the parliamentarians. Likewise line whips, "orders" or "instructions" from a party to its parliamentarians

are unconstitutional. In the past and until today, it is mainly communist parties that have exercised such coercive measures towards their members of parliaments. In these cases the parliamentarians are the real "soldiers" of their party.

Yet, the limits between discipline in a faction and coercive measures are rather blurred, even in democratic parties. If a parliamentarian aspires to stand again as a candidate in parliament, he will support the course of the faction in order to be considered in the candidates list and to be supported by the party in his campaign. The work of the parliamentarians in the plenary assembly, in the committees and in other panels of parliament is in most countries essentially characterised by the political orientation of a party.





**Political  
Leadership**

**5**

## Political parties need strong political leaders.

Besides all the efforts regarding their organisation, political strategies, communication and programmes, indispensable for lasting success, political parties need to have appropriate political leaders to be attractive for the population and the voters. Political leaders guide the process of forming political opinion and decision-making and provide these decisions with legitimacy.

Since ancient times, political thinkers are concerned with the question of the necessary qualities of a “good” political leader. These ideas evolved from Plato’s “philosopher kings”, to Machiavelli’s pragmatism (all is acceptable that serves to win and retain power), to modern theories on elites and concurrence, developed by the so-called Italian school of sociologists like Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, which arose with the advent of mass politics. Here, these different perceptions of political leaders can only be mentioned but not explained in a broader form.



In democracies, political leaders are empowered through elections to conduct the process of political opinion-building and decision-making. To what extent they are able to use these capacities depends on the political circumstances. The governing system matters, (if it is a presidential or parliamentary system), as does the character of the government, whether it is sustained by one party or by a coalition of parties, or the form of the state, whether it is a unitarian or a federal state etc. Also, the strength (or weakness) of interest groups such as trade unions or employers' associations and the role of the military are factors that influence the form and capacities of political leadership. Regardless of these circumstances, political leaders should, ideally, demonstrate certain capacities. Some of them are listed below.

### **Capacities of political leaders**

- Ethical and moral principles, as well as clear political targets that lead their actions (and which have to be transparent in a democracy). Honesty and credibility are two main characteristics for leadership as is responsibility to the citizens.
- Political expertise to be able to assess and evaluate political issues important for the political process and its political and social consequences.
- Management capacity in order to lead a big organisation and a clear understanding of prevailing circumstances so as to be able to adapt properly to face new challenges (even better is the capacity to anticipate changes).
- Empathy, and in the best case charisma, in order to convince and gather the support of the people for political decisions that are in the process of implementation or have already been made.
- Personal factors also play a role, such as knowledge of human nature, practical reasoning, personal contacts, communicational skills and a strategic approach, ability to take quick action and being patient etc.

These characteristics are the main requirements to lead internally—this means the own party—as well as externally—to gain the support of the citizens and voters and to execute political power.

Political leadership includes much more than knowledge and functional control over the legislative procedure; in particular political leaders need to exercise the “continuous and long-term pursuit of political concepts on the one hand and the integration and conviction of political institutions and citizens on the other.”<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, political leadership requires flexible adaptability to complex “voting markets”.<sup>14</sup> The strategic margin for the parties has increased, as various groups of voters have to be approached. As a result of this, political leaders are required to be flexible with regard to political contents—but without giving up the core positions of their party, as this may deter its traditional voters.

The issue of political leadership reappears time and again—not least in times of globalisation, which has considerable effects on the organisation of national politics and therefore also on national political leaders. In general, one can observe that the need for leadership has apparently increased internationally. This is a consequence of the diverse pressure of problems that liberal, representative democracy is exposed to. This has proven itself once again during the economic crisis of 2008/09. In such situations political leadership is required to take decisions with democratic responsibility.

However, it is not only the increase of political, social and economic pressure that resurrects the call for political leadership. Through its effect of personalisation, the mass media also contributes significantly to the evaluation of individuals in possession of top positions in the party or government, which they portray as the main decision-making actors.



The media's interest in personalisation benefits from the evaluation of individuals in possession of top executive political positions. This is particularly related to the increased need for coordination among the executive in sectoral politics. Externally, it is mainly due to the formation of a system of international summit diplomacy.

## 5. 1. The dilemma of political leadership

The role of political leaders has been discussed over and over again in philosophy, political science and historiography of very different cultural backgrounds. The sociologist Max Weber, who studied this topic in detail, especially focused on the ethical dilemma between the "ethics of ultimate ends" and the "ethics of responsibility" that political leaders face time after time. The "ethics of ultimate ends" refers to a political behaviour which concentrates exclusively on the ethical and moral positions of the actor, without taking into consideration the consequences of political actions based on such a behaviour. In contrast, the "ethics of responsibility" considers a political decision also with regard to its ethic and moral consequences. Max Weber comes to the conclusion that the modern democratic political leader shall not be guided by the "ethics of ultimate ends" but by the ethics of responsibility. Responsible politics require an instinct for power and a sense of responsibility and proportion, but also passionate dedication to a self-imposed supra-personal matter and, furthermore, the charisma to be able to satisfy the emotional needs of the followers.

"Politics is a strong and slow boring of hard boards. It takes both passion and perspective. Certainly all historical experience confirms the truth—that man would not have attained the possible unless time and again he had reached out for the impossible. But to do that a man must be a leader, and not only a leader but a hero as well, in a very sober sense of the word. And even those who are neither leaders nor heroes must arm themselves with that steadfastness of heart which can brave even the crumbling of all hopes. This is necessary right now, or else men will not be able to attain even that which is possible today. Only he has the calling for politics who is sure that he shall not crumble when the world from his point of view is too stupid or too base for what he wants to offer. Only he who in the face of all this can say 'In spite of all!' has the calling for politics." (Max Weber in his famous essay on "Politics as a Vocation").<sup>15</sup>

## Nelson Mandela's Lessons of Leadership

Nelson Mandela was a prominent militant against the apartheid regime in South Africa and therefore had to spend 27 years in prison. After his release in 1990 he was elected president of the Republic of South Africa (1994 to 1999). His experience as a political leader has led to some lessons, which has been collected as "Mandela's 8 Lessons of Leadership":<sup>16</sup>



### *1. Courage is not the absence of fear—it's inspiring others to move beyond it.*

A leader can't pretend that he's brave, but he cannot let people know of his fears. He "must put up a front". Through the act of appearing fearless, Mandela inspired others. Knowing he was a model for others gave Mandela the strength to triumph over his own fear.

### *2. Lead from the front—but don't leave your base behind*

A leader takes his support base along with him and once he arrives at the beachhead, allows people to move on.

### *3. Lead from the back—and let others believe they are in front*

The trick of leadership is allowing yourself to be led too. Mandela said it is wise to persuade people to do things and make them think it was their own idea.

### *4. Know your enemy—and learn about his favourite sport*

A leader understands his enemies' strengths and weaknesses, and formulates his tactics accordingly. He ingratiate himself with his enemy.

### *5. Keep your friends close—and your rivals even closer*

Mandela cherished loyalty, but was never obsessed by it, saying, "people act in their own interest". Mandela believed that embracing his rivals was a way of controlling them; they were more dangerous on their own than within his circle of influence. He recognized that the way to deal with those he didn't trust was to neutralize them with charm.

### **6. *Appearances matter—and remember to smile***

Mandela understood how his appearance could advance his cause. His lawyer remembers him as the first black South African he had ever seen being fitted for a suit. Though not a great public speaker, he always did the *toyi-toyi* township dance that was an emblem of the struggle. His dazzling, beatific, all-inclusive smile “was the message”: to white South Africans, his lack of bitterness; to black voters that he is a happy warrior and that he will triumph.

### **7. *Nothing is black or white***

Life is never “either/or”. Decisions are complex and there are always competing factors. Looking for simple explanations is the bias of the human brain, but it does not correspond to reality. Nothing is ever as straightforward as it appears. Mandela is comfortable with contradictions and as a politician was a pragmatist who saw the world as infinitely nuanced. His calculus was always “What is the end that I seek?” and “What is the most practical way to get there?”

### **8. *Quitting is leading too***

Mandela accepted with humility that knowing how to abandon a failed idea, task or relationship is often the most difficult decision a leader has to make. His greatest legacy as president of South Africa was the way he chose to leave it. The man who gave birth to his country refused to hold it hostage. “His job was to set the course, not to steer the ship.” He knew that leaders lead as much by what they choose not to do as what they do.

## **Rudy Giuliani’s principles of leadership**

Rudy Giuliani has been a successful mayor of New York (1994-2001) and got internationally known for his crisis management skills after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. He also achieved the improvement of the image of the city, which had been characterized as ungovernable because of its economic problems and criminal violence. Even though he did not succeed with his presidential candidacy in 2008, he has formulated several principles for political leadership that may be considered by political leaders. The following principals have been deducted from Rudi Guliani ‘s book “ Leadership”:

*1. Know what you believe in, what you stand for, what's important to you, what your purpose is.*

*2. To be a leader you have to be an optimist*

You have to know the problem and know how to get through it with optimism. You have to be able to “dream” of a better situation to make it that way. Lead people with hope and give people hope that what they’re doing now can become real. Become the calmest person in the room when in an emergency. This helps you figure out the best solution in the situation.



Rudy Giuliani, Mayor of New York City 1994-2001.

*3. To be a leader you have to have courage, to take the risk*

*4. Relentless preparation—minimizes the risk*

Always anticipate possible scenarios, although no matter how you prepare and anticipate, there will always be something that may happen for which you did not prepare. Crisis management is very important because it helps reduce the things you did not prepare for.

*5. Teamwork*

One of the great mistakes that a leader can make is thinking that he or she is infallible. What are my weaknesses? How can I find people who can help me make up for my weaknesses?

*6. To be a good leader you have to communicate*

Be both a teacher and motivator. It is not enough to know what to do but you must be able to communicate it as well. If you have a long-range goal, you must have benchmarks (statistics) to know if you are getting there. But statistics are not enough; you have to know how to take care of people.





# Challenges for Political Parties in Democratic Regimes



6

## Democracy has a different face in every country and in every society.

The concrete shape of democratic order depends on the national history, tradition and culture, social, ethnic and religious particularities of a society, its economic potential, the weight of regional factors, and more. Nevertheless, there are several basic elements that have to be present in each democratic system.

### Basic elements of democracy

- the governing bodies have to be occupied by elected authorities, who are accountable to the voters.
- free and fair elections have to take place regularly.
- all adults have to possess the right to vote and to be elected to political office.
- freedom of opinion has to reign without anybody being persecuted for freely expressing his opinion.
- free access to alternative and pluralistic sources of information should be guaranteed.
- the right to form independent associations, groups of interest and political parties must exist so that the previously mentioned rights can be executed.

Independently of its organisation in different countries, democracy needs institutions that ensure its consolidation, stability and projection and which protect “young” democracies from contestation or even major setbacks. The chance for stabilisation and consolidation of democracy highly depends on how the respective democratic orders are institutionalised, what level of potential is offered by the democratic institutions to meet the challenges of political and social change and how they provide legitimacy to the political system.

**No matter how democracy has been organised in any individual case, and in any political system, the political parties are the main institutions of democracy. Without parties, there can be no democracy.**

The basic functions of political parties have already been discussed. However, the parties do not have a monopoly in carrying out these functions and are nowadays—more than in the past—in competition with other organisations that also carry out these functions, at least in certain areas, and thereby compete with the parties. The essential differentiating characteristic of a party is and remains therefore its participation in elections.

Even though parties fulfil essential functions for the political system and democracy, they also face special challenges in modern democracies. Social change and the efficiency (or inefficiency) of dealing with the consequences of changing societies in the area of politics are the main reasons for these new challenges for political parties.

- A classic dilemma for political parties is the impossibility to meet all expectations directed at them at the same time. As they occupy the political decision-making instances, people expect concepts and decisions for problems and demands. Several groups, however, will always feel disadvantaged or develop new demands, which can usually never be completely satisfied. One just has to think of the expectation that the state should provide public goods at the same time as internal and external security, a well-developed road network, public schools, hospitals, and public housing or benefits, without increasing taxes or pushing up the national debt. Parties, therefore, are caught in a constant conflicting relationship between unfulfilled expectations and solutions perceived to be inadequate.

- New challenges has emerged from social change and the development of fragmented societies, which are characterised by the dissipation of traditional milieus, the erosion of previously stable value systems and the commitments based on it, a higher level of education, the pluralism of informative sources, as well as the individual organisation of personal relationships. “Shifting values”, “individualisation”, “event society”, and “fragmentation of interests” are notions to describe social phenomena that are directly reflected on the attitude of the citizens towards the parties. Where social relationships become lost, the commitment with political parties also gets weaker. Parties feel this effect not only in the form of decreasing memberships, but also in the decline of stable voter milieus and unpredictable election forecasts and election outcomes.
- The change in the mass media and the way of reporting, the growing competition for attention and audience, as well as the extension of “investigative” journalism have led to a new form of reporting about politics, in which ideas, values and results are less important than emotionalisation, moralisation, scandalisation and personalisation in the form of “infotainment”. Political scandals and personal behaviour and misbehaviour of politicians are known faster nowadays. This is certainly a gain in transparency and democratic control but it can also contribute to the disenchantment and sometimes also the trivialisation of politics and its players. The first to feel the negative consequences of that are the parties.
- The “modern” dilemma of political parties stems from globalisation. At a national level, globalisation and its consequences have reduced the room for political manoeuvres and have shifted decision-making power and management capabilities to supra-national or international players. Although citizens expect national political actors to decide on their demands and expectations, important issues cannot be resolved by national political decision makers. Consequently, political parties face a loss of confidence in their capacity to decide on important issues of national interest.

These developments have serious consequences for parties and party systems:

- party systems are nowadays much more prone to modifications and more fragmented.
- the time of big mass parties seems to be over. At the very least, although some parties can still maintain large memberships, it is today much more difficult to organise large mass rallies.
- the past virtual monopoly of the parties as the source and place of political information and reflection has been negated in the era of mass media, modern information techniques like the internet and alternative areas for political participation outside of the parties.
- parties find it very difficult to retain so-called loyal voters of certain milieus in the long term.
- the overall trust level of the population in the parties and in politicians has dropped and the willingness to engage politically has declined, especially among young people.
- Mass media publish more reports about political scandals and about the real or alleged shortcomings of parties and their top leaders' inability to manage and resolve problems. In the same way that the difficulties of political management have increased in the era of financial, political or ecological globalization, the technical possibilities for critical reporting has also increased. The increased competition among TV channels and print media has also contributed to the tendency to report more about real or alleged misbehaviour of politicians.
- The respective roles played in the past by the governing and opposition parties are not as clear anymore, as the big opposition parties do not necessarily benefit from voters' dissatisfaction, but instead also lose votes to small or newer protest parties.

However, it is not only the parties that are affected by the recent evolutions of society. In fact, there is even a general loss of confidence in other institutions and big social organisations such as labour unions. The changes are, however, especially perceived by the parties as they are the most exposed to public perception. These evolutions that involve the weakening of singular parties are not necessarily a crisis of democracy, but show the transition to another form of democracy, in which the parties can still fulfil the above-mentioned functions, but other social organisations as well as the media have more influence on the process of political opinion-building than in earlier periods of time.

In spite of this loss of influence to other players, an essential factor has not changed: Parties are still the institutions from which the concepts and solutions to address the problems of a society are expected as they occupy the political decision-making bodies. Parties are also the only institutions to participate in elections and whose representativity can be measured by electoral results.

The debilitation and fragmentation of party systems is in general terms problematic, because there is no alternative to the democratic party state. Associations, citizens' initiatives and social movements may have increased and their political influence may still rise. This is partly a



consolidation of democracy. Yet, with all the legitimacy of the concerns over such organisations, their growing influence also has problematic aspects because they cannot substantiate their own representativity and address all the demands of the public. Only parties can legitimise themselves through democratic elections.

The power of media may also continue to grow. However, given the consolidation among the press and television companies and the predominance of a few IT companies, this evolution has to be accompanied by an extension of democratic control and transparency, which is ultimately only possible within the context of the institutions of representative democracy.

Parties have to be continuously striving to perform their functions under changing social circumstances. Independent of the regional or national social peculiarities, or the electoral and government system, there are several criteria that every party should respect and fulfil, in order to participate successfully in the political competition.<sup>17</sup>

- A party needs a sufficient, identifiable electoral base. It needs to strive to root itself in the electoral and interest groups that it wants to represent, in alignment, obviously, with its basic values and its programmatic profile.
- A party has to build an extensive organisation in order to practise closeness to citizens and to be able to mobilise voters.
- A party has to build an open membership organisation. Membership is fundamental for the recruitment of its future leaders and should also be a relevant element for its financial basis. An active membership organisation, however, requires inner-party democracy, i.e., members who participate politically and who are able to determine the party leadership and set the course of the party.
- A party has to be communicative, both internally and externally. It needs a functional inner-party information system for all its rank and file on all levels and for its members. Furthermore, a constant link to the media is necessary. They are the “gatekeepers” of the political system in the developed media democracy, generating public awareness.
- A party has to develop its own programmatic profile, differentiating itself from others by formulating targets and ways of solution in keeping up to the real problems of the time. The objective of the programme work is to enable the party to integrate public expectations and demands and to promote identification with the party by the citizens.



- A party has to show a high degree of inner party governability. This is the capacity to balance between a unified appearance towards the public and the inner-party's controversial dialogue. Part of this governability is the selection and support of the younger generation of party members and party leaders.
- A party has to be capable of integration. This is the actual key to success and to the growth of a party. What is meant here is the constant strive to expand its electoral base, to win over new voters with different interests and young voters with other lifestyles and to establish a constant connection to these voters.
- A party must be capable of campaigning. It has to be able to present important topics and its own profile effectively in public and it must lead flawless election campaigns with few topics and a clear message for "focused communication".
- A party must be capable of forming coalitions. As it is difficult for a party, if not impossible, especially in the context of past-the-post voting systems, to obtain absolute majorities in parliament, a party has to be able to form stable coalitions with other parties to demonstrate governability. The problems of governability reflect directly on the reputation of the parties. In coalition formation it can be necessary to overcome deep programmatic and/or personal rifts. This is a moment where political leaders may show their competency.
- A party must prove its governability and capacity for solving problems at the local level. In all countries, the citizens should have the most direct contact with the parties and its representatives in local politics. Only if the parties can prove competency and citizen proximity at this level, can they can expect trust on a national level.

- A party must be capable of learning the expectations, and implementing political programmes that meet the demands within the society. Considering the increased significance of social non-governmental organisations and interest associations, the parties have to intensify their efforts to be in touch with these intermediate organisations, to understand the expectations of the people, and to translate them into policies.

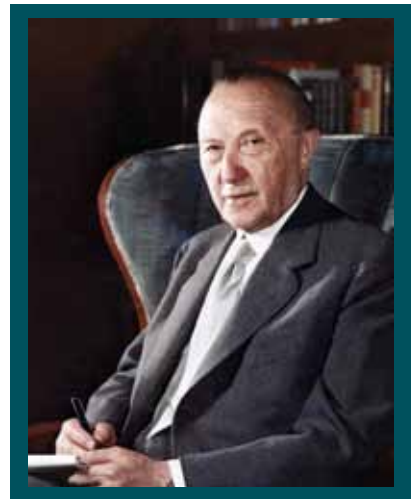
**Conclusion:  
There is no  
Democracy  
without Political  
Parties**

**7**

Despite all the weaknesses of parties and in spite of all the challenges that parties have to face, one thing remains certain: without parties, democracy cannot function. In a democracy the parties are still the most important connecting link between state and society. But indeed they have to adapt to the social changes so as to make sure they are not swallowed by them.

The formation of political opinion and consensus in mass democracy are an endlessly laborious, partly ungratifying and constantly endangered process involving the lacklustre everyday life of committees, commissions and assemblies. The formation of political opinion, consensus building and government for the benefit of the whole society cannot bypass or even be against the political parties, but can only involve them. As much as citizens' initiatives and social movements are necessary for political innovation, opposition and criticism, in the end, they depend very much on the parties to carry the responsibility in the long-term and the parties are the ones that therefore have to face the population at regular intervals in the context of elections.

Parties carry out a political leadership role that a modern democracy cannot do without. Especially in times of change this political leadership must be responsible and visible for the citizens and connected to the interests and demands of the citizens. As Konrad Adenauer, the first chancellor and prime minister of the Federal Republic of Germany after the Second World War has stated: "Each political party exists for the benefit of the people and not for itself. Political parties, their members and leaders are therefore more than ever required to face this responsibility."



# Notes and References

8

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 25.
- <sup>2</sup> Cf, for instance, Russell J. Dalton and Martin P. Wattenberg, "Unthinkable Democracy: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies", in *Parties without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, eds. Russell J. Dalton and Martin P. Wattenberg (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, v000), 3-18.
- <sup>3</sup> With more details cf. Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), Chapter 5.
- <sup>4</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992).
- <sup>5</sup> Figure based on Peter Lösche, *Parteiensystem der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2006), 27.
- <sup>6</sup> Gerd Langguth, *Machtmenschen. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag* (2009) 483ff.
- <sup>7</sup> Otfried Jarren and Patrick Donges, *Politische Kommunikation in der Mediengesellschaft: Eine Einführung* (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften 2. überarbeitete Auflage, 2006), S. 236.
- <sup>8</sup> Karl-Rudolf Korte and Manuel Fröhlich, *Politik und Regieren in Deutschland* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2. Aufl., 2006), S. 188.
- <sup>9</sup> Hans Mathias Kepplinger and Marcus Maurer *Abschied vom rationalen Wähler: Warum Wahlen im Fernsehen entschieden werden* (Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 2005), S. 188.
- <sup>10</sup> Robert Michels, *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1911/1989).
- <sup>11</sup> In this regard the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation has collected some useful information and tips in a manual: KAS (Hrsg.), *Handbuch Politische Kommunikation*, (Belgrad, 2006).
- <sup>12</sup> For additional reading on the issue of the relationship between political parties and interest groups, see Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy. Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999) and Ulrich U.A. Alemann, *Interessenverbände. Informationen zur Politischen Bildung* (Heft 253) (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1996).
- <sup>13</sup> Wolfgang Jäger, *Fernsehen und Demokratie. Scheinplebiszitäre Tendenzen und Repräsentation in den USA, Großbritannien, Frankreich und Deutschland* (München, 1992), S. 81
- <sup>14</sup> Karl-Rudolf Korte, "Wie Parteien auf komplexe Wählermärkte reagieren", in *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 6/2000, S. 707-716.
- <sup>15</sup> Politics as a Vocation, [http://www.ne.jp/asahi/moriyuki/abukuma/weber/lecture/politics\\_vocation.html](http://www.ne.jp/asahi/moriyuki/abukuma/weber/lecture/politics_vocation.html)
- <sup>16</sup> Richard Stengel, "Mandela: His 8 Lessons of Leadership", *Time Magazine*, July 9, 2008, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1821467,00.html>

<sup>17</sup> The list of the first eight of those eleven criteria is partially cited word-for-word in Hans-Joachim Veen, "Die Bedeutung politischer Parteien für Demokratie und Demokratisierung" ["The significance of political parties for democracy and democratization"] in *Parteien und Demokratie: Beiträge der Internationalen Fachkonferenz zum KAS-Demokratiereport* edited by Gerhard Wahlers and Karsten Grabow (Berlin-Sankt Augustin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung), 33f.

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## Photos

Page 8

Posters for the local elections and European Parliament elections held in Ireland on 5 June 2009.

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Euro-local\\_elections\\_2009\\_posters\\_Cork.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Euro-local_elections_2009_posters_Cork.jpg)

Page 11, Page 18, Page 30, Page 42, Page 73, Page 85

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/democraciacristiana/>

Page 22

Mr. Muhammad Hilman Bin Idham, Special Officer to the Deputy President of Parti Keadilan Rakyat

Page 34

Thomas Yu Kwun Wai

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Thomas\\_Yu.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Thomas_Yu.jpg)

Page 35

Petra Merkel MdB 2008

<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Petramerkel.jpg>

Page 43

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2257769423&v=wall>

Page 45, 53, 63, 66

Mr Sim Tzin , State Assemblyman of Penang

Page 48, 75

<http://www.cdu.de/>

Page 54

Burns Lake Aboriginal Day

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aboriginal\\_Day.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aboriginal_Day.jpg)

Page 61

Farmer land rights protest in Jakarta, Indonesia.

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jakarta\\_farmers\\_protest36.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jakarta_farmers_protest36.jpg)

Page 77

Outgoing South African president Nelson Mandela waves to supporters at the new Shanty clinic in Orlando, West Soweto 11 June 1999.

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Page 79

Picture of Rudy Giuliani

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rudy\\_Giuliani.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rudy_Giuliani.jpg)

Page 91

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POLITICAL PARTIES are the distinctive institutions of modern democracy. They articulate and aggregate social interests, develop political programmes and connect the society with the state. They recruit candidates for elections, select political leaders and organise governments. They promote political participation of the citizens. Furthermore they contribute to the legitimacy of the democratic political system.

In this book, political parties are presented as central institutions of a modern democracy. The characteristics and functions of parties, the basic elements of their organisation, their political and social context, as well as the problems of party democracy and the specific challenges faced by parties are the main topics. This is to convey fundamental information on the different facets of political parties. At the same time it is meant to raise interest in one's engagement in a political party.



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