

Patrick Köllner: The Institutionalisation of Political Parties in Extra-European Regions: Introducing this Issue and its Subject

In democratic political systems, political parties play a major role: On the one hand, they represent and mobilise the population, and on the other, they are in democratically legitimised control. As organisational links between the state and society, political parties are still without an alternative. Next to internal democracy, the institutionalisation of political parties and entire party systems is indispensable in consolidating young democracies.

The institutionalisation of political parties in 2005/2006 was the subject of a study conducted by the party research group of the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), which concentrated on extra-European regions investigated by the Institute – Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. In June 2006, the salient features of the study's results were presented at a joint meeting of the research group and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Berlin. In this issue, most of the papers presented at the meeting are published.

Scientific studies of the development processes within political parties have a long tradition in party research, their conceptual approaches having been taken over from the methodology used in sociological organisation and political development research. At the end of the forties, Philip Selznick began to concern himself with the institutionalisation of organisations and processes. Together with Broom, he defined institutionalisation as 'the development of organised, stable, socially integrating patterns from unstable, loosely organised or restricted technical activities'.

For Selznick, the aspect of 'value infusion' plays a central role. Independently of achieving their own goals, members must be interested in preserving an organisation and/or process, so that in this context, 'value infusion' may imply appreciation. Samuel Huntington, on the other hand, regards institutionalisation as a process from which organisations and processes receive their value and stability. Thus, a high degree of institutionalisation means that these organisations and processes are highly adaptable, complex, autonomous, and coherent. Kenneth Janda understands an institutionalised party as one 'that is reified in the public awareness, so that [it] exists as a social organisation showing recurrent patterns of behaviour that are esteemed by persons who identify with it'. Finally, Steven Levitsky calls for separating appreciation on the one hand from stability and routinisation on the other. Argentina's Peronist party, to his mind, proved that appreciating a political party does not mean that its organisational structure is highly stable, or that the behaviour patterns within the party are routinised.

Levitsky is certainly right in addressing the diverse aspects of institutionalisation separately. First off, he distinguishes between the appreciation members and leaders show towards their parties and the appreciation the parties receive from the population. Furthermore, he distinguishes other aspects, such as stability and routinisation, adaptability, complexity, autonomy, and coherence.

The GIGA party research group pursued two goals: On the one hand, it intended to develop an analytical framework to investigate the degree of institutionalisation of political parties on the supraregional level; on the other, it needed an empirical overview of the institutionalisation of the political parties in the regions investigated. Being especially interested in the parties' current degree of institutionalisation, the research group studies the process of institutionalisation as such only marginally. In this study, those parties are regarded as institutionalised which that are deeply rooted in society but act independently of societal groups outside the political parties, have a differentiated bureaucratic apparatus, and appear as a single unit without trying to discipline dissenters.

Accordingly, the institutionalisation of political parties may be analysed on the basis of certain features, namely 'societal integration and appreciation', 'autonomy', 'level of organisation', and 'coherence/cohesion'. The research group did develop an analysis matrix, but it must be said that there neither is an ideal combination of the different institutionalisation characteristics nor a recipe for attaining it. Rather, variations in individual characteristics lead to an institutionalisation profile that is unique to each party.

From this, the following premises may be derived for analysing the institutionalisation of political parties: Institutionalisation may certainly not be equated with a party's internal democracy, since it focusses on integration and appreciation, decision-making autonomy, complexity, and cohesion (1). We may assume that the relationship between the institutionalisation of political parties and the degree to which they perform their function of political representation is described by a curve (2). The degree of institutionalisation of the political parties within one and the same party system does not have to be equally high or low (3). Adaptability does not rank among the structural characteristics of the institutionalisation of political parties (4). Relations between the different features of party institutionalisation may not be determined a priori (5). Good performance in the relevant characteristics increases a party's chances of survival but cannot guarantee it (6). And finally, the causes and effects of party institutionalisation are not identical in each case (7).

According to Randall, the degree to which political parties in the so-called third world are institutionalised is low – a statement which stands on a weak empirical foundation. Trying to gain its own overview of the degree of institutionalisation of the political parties in the regions investigated, the GIGA research group generated diagrams of selected regional and national cases that show the extent to which the relevant institutionalisation characteristics of each party were developed: In their article on the situation in anglophone Africa, for example, Matthias Basedau, Alexander Stroh and Gero Erdmann present an index used to measure the institutionalisation of political parties, demonstrating a correlation between the institutionalisation of the political parties investigated and the degree to which democracy is developed in their respective countries. Investigating the institutionalisation of political parties in Asian countries, such as Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, Andreas Ufen discovered that there are different institutionalisation patterns dominant in the region – most political parties in Indonesia show a higher degree of institutionalisation, while that of the Thai and Philippine parties is lower. Joachim Betz found out that, although the degree of institutionalisation of the party system in India is comparatively high, that of the individual parties is not. Detlef Nolte, on the other hand, speaks out against sweeping statements about the institutionalisation of political parties in Latin America. He arrives at the conclusion that Latin America's political parties – despite all national peculiarities – are generally not very highly esteemed by the public. However, the results of his survey disprove the widespread assumption that most Latin American political parties are loosely organised election clubs.

Should the development of political parties be promoted from outside? Should the institutionalisation of political parties be promoted at all? The question of party assistance was addressed in the last part of the GIGA workshop, with Gero Erdmann presenting the most important players and party-assistance approaches so far. In concrete terms, it was all about the promotion on the part of the German political foundations that are by no means free of organisational and conceptual deficits – this is the burden of the paper. However, a systematic and strategic orientation of party assistance certainly makes sense – irrespective of all its problems and difficulties. According to Erdmann, this would be the only way to make party assistance more effective at last.