

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH DESIGN<sup>1</sup>

“Political parties have created political identities, framed electoral choices, recruited candidates, organised elections, defined the structure of legislative politics, and determined the outputs of government. Indeed, to most of us, democracy without political parties is unthinkable”

(Dalton and Wattenberg 2000: 260).

As outlined in the above assessment by Russell Dalton and Martin Wattenberg, political parties play an eminent role in (Western) democracies. Without them, democracy would be “a highly chaotic affair”, to borrow from one of the pioneers of international party research, Giovanni Sartori (Sartori 1997: 316; see also Lipset 2000). Whether in young or in established democracies, political parties perform functions which cannot be fulfilled by other organisations. Parties aggregate societal demands and express them to state authorities. They act as vehicles of political participation, provided the basic principles of democracy, such as freedom of speech or the freedom to form political associations, are laid down in a constitution and can be exercised in practice. Parties are sites of political integration and socialisation on the basis of values or ideologies, thereby organising the electoral market of formerly free-floating voters (Lipset/Rokkan 1967).

While this may contribute to both electoral and political stabilisation, the *differentia specifica* that distinguishes parties from other political associations is electoral competition. Parties and their candidates are the only actors which compete for electoral support to attain public office. To secure their election, parties and their candidates usually offer political programmes which may acquire universal validity, at

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least in part, by being translated into law once a party has won a legislative majority or executive power. Finally, political parties, more than any other political organisation, train and recruit political candidates who, in case of electoral success, occupy key positions in the executive and legislative institutions of a state as well as in public administration and the media. Therefore, it seems appropriate to conclude that political parties provide an important link between civil society and the institutions of the state (Korte 2006).

Are these party functions universal? Are they meaningful or useful outside the consolidated democracies of the Western world? What would be the implications for those countries and parties, for instance, where only an infinitesimal part of policy-making is handled by political parties, while the rest lies in the hands of the executive, civil society, and the media? The structures of parties and party systems in Western Europe differ fundamentally from those in non-European states. There, we may find insignificant ideological differences, weak organisational structures, personalism and clientelism, inadequate societal integration and institutionalisation, and a high proportion of informal rather than formal relationships.

With this volume, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) and the Research Group on Governance at Duisburg-Essen University pursue two objectives. First, by looking at the development of a worldwide sample of parties and party systems we wish to offer information to international party researchers and scholars from organisations of international democracy promotion. The global network of offices abroad enables the KAS to gather information which it then communicates to the public. Some studies, specifically those on Ghana and the Democratic Republic of Congo in Africa and Serbia in Eastern Europe, may even claim to be pioneers in the field since those countries were not in the focus of international research before. Second, this joint study by the KAS and the Research Group on Governance provides the former with a point of departure for the sustainable promotion of democracy and political parties. The case studies help to identify deficits in party-system consolidation and intra-party work. These deficits, identified by scientists and the representatives of KAS abroad, may be used by the KAS as a starting point for its activities in capacity building, political education, and consultation for basically democratic parties. The mission of the KAS accords this aspect priority within the framework of the Democracy Report.

### **Parties in democracy research**

Despite their importance for democratic developments, the investigation of parties, party systems, and party promotion has so far

remained marginal in democracy and transformation research. The 'Democracy' status index of the *Bertelsmann Transformation Index* names 'political participation' and the complex of 'political and societal integration' as two of five key fields of research in democracy measurement (Bertelsmann Foundation 2006). 18 questions serve to evaluate each of these five categories. If we analyse the questions asked in this survey, we find that there is only one that relates to parties and party systems in concrete terms. Thus, 'political and societal integration' through stronger ties between the parties and the state forms only one among many democracy indicators next to 'statehood', 'political participation', 'rule of law', and 'stability of democratic institutions'.

The annual *Freedom in the World* report, published by Freedom House (2006) is no different. Its approach devotes only limited attention to parties and party systems as a field of research. No more than two of 22 questions address this subject, the consequence being that the investigation of party systems and party-mediated civic participation remains restricted to a few basic categories. Generally speaking, we may say that those indices that are used most frequently focus on economic development and institutional stability, whereas party-mediated participation and democratisation are to be found much more rarely in the focus of research in comparative democracy measurement.

### **Method and case selection**

This study constitutes the third survey within the KAS Democracy Report. After volume I, Media and Democracy (2005), and volume II, Rule of Law (2006), this year's report concentrates on political parties and their contribution to democratic stabilisation. In addition, problems with the institutionalisation of democratic parties and party systems will be presented. As mentioned above, this subject has not been a key item of research in comparative democracy measurement so far (Lauth 2004). Closing this gap in research is one of the objectives of this study, which was scientifically supported and evaluated by the Research Group on Governance at Duisburg-Essen University (see Chapter 3 in this volume).

At present, the KAS maintains 69 offices abroad as a basis for running democracy-promotion projects in more than 100 countries worldwide. Through operating this global network of political development cooperation KAS has acquired extensive knowledge about the opportunities and problems of democracy propagation. It is one of the objectives of this year's Democracy Report to pool the knowledge about democracy development amassed by the KAS-offices abroad and render it accessible to systematic benchmarking. By evaluating this

survey, existing consultation competences and information potentials may be translated into new points of departure for political development cooperation and party promotion in the future. To achieve this end, it will be necessary to identify general trends in the development of parties and party systems and to relate these trends to the political, economic, and historical context of the states investigated.

Measuring the degree of party-system institutionalisation and party-mediated civic participation presents a complex challenge. Developing qualitative methods and defining indicators is especially difficult. The drawback of opinion polls, be they quantitative or qualitative, is that citizens measure their satisfaction by their expectations. If a population expects great things of their parties and their party system (which then fail to materialise), the party system may be rated badly although it contributes more towards civic participation in the political process than that of a neighbouring country with a less demanding population. This being so, comparability is predicated on certain conditions whenever opinion polls are included in the study of a country: Any comparative study must cope with the conflicting objectives of producing generalisable results (scope) and empirical depth. A wider scope is always associated with reduced complexity, meaning that only limited consideration may be given to the historical, economic, or political framework conditions of the cases under investigation. Yet the practical relevance of the results of a study often crucially depends upon precisely these framework conditions. Conversely, while case studies may well do justice to the complexities found in a country, a price will have to be paid for this in terms of comparability with developments in other states. The scope of case studies is too limited to permit drawing general conclusions for enhancing the effectiveness of political development cooperation.

The path chosen for this study runs in the middle: Based on 16 case studies, hypotheses were developed about trends and the institutionalisation of parties and party systems in developing and transforming states on four continents.

The key questions for research were these: On what does the degree of party-system institutionalisation depend? Is it possible to form regional generalisations or even more far-reaching explanatory clusters? What deficits exist in the development and institutionalisation of democratic parties? As mentioned before, the answers to these questions will form the basis on which the KAS will decide where consultation should begin so that its goal in international party cooperation and promotion, which is to contribute to the consolidation of democratic parties and pluralist party systems, can be permanently attained.

In accordance with the study's aim, that cases were selected from among those countries in which the KAS maintains offices, where it possesses years of experience in political development cooperation. The study is based on a sample survey whose case studies cover a wide range of states with different levels of democratisation or transformation, different cultures, and highly diverse political and economic backgrounds, as illustrated by the wide range over which the states investigated are scattered in the *Human Development Index* of the United Nations.

Among the states investigated, we find emerging countries in Latin America and Asia as well as post-communist transforming states in Europe, developing and transforming countries in Africa, and countries with a fully consolidated democracy, such as Israel or Chile. The sample represents the entire bandwidth of countries in which the KAS carries out political education and dialogue programmes. A maximum of four states with a comparable geographical or historical background were analysed in each region. In this way, the features that unite and divide these countries were registered on a smaller geographical scale, so that the specific peculiarities and problems of each region could be highlighted. In sum, the number of case studies, which is high for a qualitative investigation, conforms to the criterion of maximum variation. This being so, the empirical evidence furnished by the generalised results is weighty, and although it cannot claim to be representative on a global scale, it does form a solid grounding for a deductive analysis involving a large number of cases and a wide scope. To be sure, we must add by way of qualification that not all research questions can be answered by a quantitative survey – a fact which again emphasises the benefits of a qualitative approach. Thus, it is precisely this qualitative approach which constitutes the advantage of this study: Unlike other well-known democracy indices, it is capable of registering the degree to which parties and party systems are institutionalised more precisely than purely quantitative surveys. What is more, by restricting the cognitive interest of the study it became possible to pay more attention to specific national framework conditions and to furnish adequate descriptions of the degree of institutionalisation of the political parties and of their contribution towards democratisation in each case history.

The survey method chosen by the KAS and the Research Group on Governance was a qualitative expert survey using a standardised semi-open questionnaire and ordinal scaling. Analyses were conducted by experts on each country. In addition to describing the legal conditions that frame party action, the chapters address the standard indicators of party research, i.e. the structure of the national party system, the ideological position of the parties, their internal affairs, and their organisation. In order to give an overview of the electoral strength of

the parties under examination and their position in the political system, the electoral data of the last two or three elections are quoted in each chapter.

### **Main indicators**

To measure the degree of party-system institutionalisation and party-mediated democratic participation in developing and transforming countries, four main indicators are used which represent the most important conditions applying to parties and party systems in processes of democratisation.

#### **I. General conditions**

The *political system* indicator serves to analyse the general importance of parties in political decision-making in the states selected. Questions relate to the expression of systemic framework conditions: In different governmental systems, such as those organised on a parliamentary or presidential basis, the potential influence of the political parties differs because of the specific interaction between parliament and government. The structure of the party system provides information about the way in which conflict lines and interests are represented (Korte 2006). Finally, the general framework conditions include a number of other indicators, such as

- *the electoral system* which may greatly influence the structure of a party system. Next to the legal provisions that relate to elections in general, particular items of interest include democratic standards, electoral thresholds and, where applicable, group privileges (Weissenbach/Korte 2006, Korte 2005).
- *The legal regulation of party organisation and party action:* Interest in this case focuses on the scope of action which the law grants the political parties to advance the process of democratisation and contribute towards strengthening civic participation in the political process in each country investigated. The *party legislation* indicator serves first of all to measure how wide – or how narrow – the legal framework for party action is in each country. What legal options are there to promote political participation with the aid of legal regulations covering, for example, the foundation of political parties, their functions, organisation, and constitution, and the internal formulation of opinions? Another purpose of this question is to analyse the way in which the formal framework is handled in practice.

- *Party funding*: This complex of questions addresses the framework conditions and transparency of party funding. How extensive are the legal regulations that cover the funding of parties, and how great is their financial dependence in point of fact? Can the parties gain the trust of the general public by disclosing their revenues, expenditures, and wealth?

### **II. Types of political parties and structure of the party system**

Although there is a consensus about their basic functions, different types of political parties may be identified. The study's *party typology* provides information about the extent to which a party actually functions as a transmission belt between citizens and governmental structures. With the aid of semantic profiles covering the political and ideological orientation of the party, its attitude towards the political system, its organisational structure, and the social background of its members and voters, the questionnaire creates a typology matrix. This indicator permits drawing conclusions about the extent to which values, ideologies, policies, or ethnic considerations govern the structure of party systems.

### **III. Parties and parliamentary representation**

This section concentrates on the relationship between the party organisations outside of parliament and the respective parliamentary party groups. Knowing the relationship between these two levels permits, for example, drawing conclusions about the nature of a party as well as about the democratic process inside the party itself. Indicators include the degree to which members and/or parliamentary parties are independent of their respective 'mother party' as well as the rigidity of the discipline within parliamentary party groups.

### **IV. Internal organization and decision-making**

By analysing *party organisations and intra-party decision-making*, the study investigates three levels of a party's structure:

- Vertical structure: What is the configuration of a party's structure between the grass-roots level and its leadership? How are competences distributed?
- Functional structure: What process serves to appoint the members of the executive bodies of a party, and how is their accountability towards the lower levels defined?
- Regional structure: What are the regional levels on which a party is organised, and how are competences distributed?

In this study, 44 questions were asked to determine the role played by the parties, focussing on their organisation, the intra-party decision-making process, their place in the party system, and their contribution towards the development of democracy and civic participation. On that basis, trends may be identified to close the gap that exists in research with regard to the contribution of the parties towards advancing democratisation and civic participation in the political process. Together with the results published in the preceding volumes of the KAS Democracy Report, this permits drawing a differentiated picture of the democratisation process in the states investigated.

At the same time, the KAS stands to benefit from this study in practice inasmuch as it may use the scientific insights about the development of democratic parties in its international political development cooperation to enhance the efficiency and sustainability of its efforts to promote democratic party structures and political-participation opportunities particularly in developing and transforming states.

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