

# **POLITICAL PARTIES SHAPE DEMOCRACY**

**Their role, performance, and  
organisation from a global  
perspective**

**WILHELM HOFMEISTER**



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# Preface

Democracy without political parties is near impossible today. Anyone interested in the concept and practice of democracy needs to know what political parties are, what they do, especially in a democracy, where they can do better, and how they affect the society they are part of. This is what this book is about. On the one hand, it aims to contribute to the understanding of political parties by presenting the situation and development of parties and party systems from a global perspective, looking at party development in all continents. On the other hand, it contains many pointers about party practices. Every party needs committed members who work for its political goals, but who should also know how parties function and what they can do to participate successfully in political competition.

This has become topical because the democracies of many countries around the world are under siege. Political parties are affected by and have a role to play in this state of affairs. They are victims of both the threats to and the decline of democracy, but in many cases they are also the direct or indirect cause of the problems. Above all, however, they are part of the solution. For democracies to rise again, parties must change. To do this, political parties, their members, and above all, their party leaders must meet two requirements. First, they must be genuinely committed to maintaining and strengthening democracy in their country whilst also respecting and defending the fundamental principles and procedures of democratic order. The introduction to this book therefore summarises what democracy means in the 21st century, what advantages it offers, and what challenges it is exposed to. Second, the parties must be able to shape the political and social developments of their countries whilst maintaining democratic order. This requires the will to gain political power, empathy for the concerns of the people, and the ideas to politically shape a community. What is also required is knowledge of the various elements that make up the essence of a political party: its role and functions

in the political process, the importance of party and election programmes, the establishment of an efficient organisational structure, the participation of members in internal party debates and decision-making, transparent financing, its interaction with other social groups and actors, the efficient handling of modern and traditional forms of political communication, and, last but not least, its successful participation in elections. Above all, parties need leaders who possess political expertise and meet high ethical standards.

By dealing with these topics and formulating recommendations for practical political party work, I draw on academic research on political parties as well as my own experience as a member of a political party and, not least, from working with political parties in many countries through the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS). This is the basis for my argument in favour of a type of party that is characterised by a broad and permanent organisation, a coherent programme, and a solid membership base with the lively intra-party participation of members that are active both during and outside election campaigns. However, many parties do not correspond to this ideal. Most importantly, many parties are inadequately performing their expected functions. That is the case in countries where democracy is under severe strains and face serious threats. How they fulfil their tasks and what characterises the development of parties and party systems in individual regions are outlined in the sections on party development in “young democracies” and in Western Europe.

Because it is not enough to merely complain about the poor performance and reputation of many parties, my second argument is for active membership and cooperation in a party. Being a party member can be stressful and frustrating at times, but it is a personal contribution to the democracy of a country that should be made by many more citizens if possible. All parties would benefit from having more committed and informed members in their ranks. However, in many countries there are limited and unequal opportunities for young people to get involved in political parties. In Europe and North America, elections to local parliaments and local representative bodies offer more opportunities to engage in political practice at an earlier stage than in Africa, Asia, or Latin America, where the city councils or local parliaments usually remain closed to young people and the parties give their youth organisations little room for manoeuvring on their own. In addition, few countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America offer opportunities for political education in or outside schools that allow young people to familiarise themselves with the principles

and procedures of democracy. That does not necessarily mean there are no barriers elsewhere. Some European parties have rigid structures that make it difficult, especially for younger members, to contribute their ideas and time. This discourages young people from getting involved and, as a result, political parties lose a significant amount of talent. Hence, it is imperative for political parties to intensify their efforts at attracting new and especially young members. In addition to the usual participation in party committees, it is advisable to let young members carry out their own political projects to reinforce their enthusiasm and political commitment. What is meant by this and how it can be organised is explained in a section of this book.

Political commitment requires idealism and the willingness to take on responsibilities and political office, which includes painstakingly familiarising oneself with substantive issues. Without a quorum of idealists among its members and leading representatives, no political party will be able to defend the principles of democracy credibly and effectively. Those who seek their own economic or financial benefits in politics face the risk of ending up in the swamp of corruption. Political engagement is first and foremost a service to the community requiring personal commitment that cannot necessarily be rewarded in monetary terms. That being said, democracy is not for free. Political work must be adequately remunerated, especially if it is carried out full time. Therefore, parties and politicians must be financed and paid appropriately. That is why the subject of party financing is dealt with in one chapter of this book.

The recommendations for practical party work, which are formulated in some parts of this book, are not meant to be blueprints, but rather suggestions on how to deal with the issues addressed in the debate on reforming party organisations. Each party must decide for itself what is most relevant. The questions at the end of each chapter are intended to invite the reader to reflect on how the individual issues are presented in their country and its parties and where there may be a need for change and reform.

To improve upon the readability of this book, footnotes are dispensed with and references are kept brief.

My sincere thanks for the critical reading of earlier versions of the manuscript and important comments and suggestions are due to Prof. Thomas Pogntke, from the University of Düsseldorf in Germany; Prof. Adriaan Kühn, Universidad Francisco de Vitoria; Prof. Mario Kölling, Universidad Nacional de

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Wilhelm Hofmeister

Madrid, April 2021

# 1

## Democracy in the 21st Century

Today, at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century, democracy is the most common system of government all over the world. However, many democracies around the world are facing serious challenges. For several years now, abundant analyses have lamented that the “third wave of democracy” that began in the mid-1970s, which led to numerous regime changes around the world (Huntington 1991), has collapsed and that, after a “democratic recession”, many of them are experiencing the erosion or “decay” of democracy (e.g., Diamond and Plattner 2015; Diamond 2019; Graf and Meier 2018; Runciman 2018). This is illustrated in several “young” democracies where there is the lack of the separation of powers and checks and balances, the curtailment of civil liberties such as the freedom of expression, assembly, and association, the tainting of the judiciary and, finally, the control of independent media and civil society organisations. More recent surveys confirm such tendencies along with the difficulties in developing and consolidating democracy worldwide (IDEA 2019; EIU 2020; V-DEM 2020). Even supposedly advanced democracies in Africa and Latin America have experienced setbacks in recent years that threaten or question the democratic character of their systems of government.

Nevertheless, depending on the assessment criteria, these surveys still describe almost half to three-fifths of the countries worldwide as democracies.

Some strong pro-democratic movements led by civil society and the progress made in democratisation by countries such as Armenia, Gambia, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, and Sudan should also be positively acknowledged. This cautiously optimistic view is supported by some important events. For weeks in 2020 in Belarus, thousands of people – led by courageous women – protested fraudulent presidential elections and the continuation of the authoritarian government. Equally courageous schoolchildren and university students in Thailand demonstrated for more accountability and transparency as well as a return to a democratic order. A year earlier, the local elections in Hong Kong were a strong signal of the continued appeal of democracy, though the territory has now largely lost its right to self-determination. In Russia, before the local elections in 2019, people had campaigned for a more open and transparent, if not “more democratic”, election. Despite the arrest and intimidation of opposition candidates, losses were experienced by many pro-Kremlin candidates. Some recent developments in several Middle Eastern and Southern Mediterranean countries suggest that the medium- and long-term effects of the so-called “Arab Spring” of 2011 should not be underestimated. Although expectations of rapid and sustained political change for most of the countries in this region have not materialised, surveys show that the youth in these countries are striving for a different type of society. Surveys suggest that the youth aspire for a democratic society that is open, tolerant, has independent news sources, and is free of non-progressive religious concepts (ASDA’A BCW 2019). These examples show that the democracy remains desirable.

## WHAT DOES DEMOCRACY MEAN?

Despite the concerns about recent developments, one point should be kept in mind: democracy is a relatively new form of government. It originated in ancient Greece with the election of the governments of some city-states by their citizens, who were also involved in deliberations and decisions on public affairs, and who controlled their executives. Despite these first experiences with democracy, other forms of government existed around the world for centuries. Our current understanding of democracy is still based on the procedures introduced in ancient Greece but differs from them in important ways.



Of course, democracy is, first and foremost, according to US President Abraham Lincoln (1809-65), a “government of the people, by the people and for the people”. Lincoln here is instructive by emphasising two aspects of democracy: the ability of the people to choose a government, and the accountability of an elected government to the people. In the time of Lincoln, like in ancient Greece, the electorate was more homogenous than now as it consisted only of a group of white and wealthy men. Despite emancipation in 1863, political and social rights and freedoms were not fully extended to former slaves. Women did not get the right to vote in the United States until 1920 and African Americans only won the fight for their right to vote in 1965 after Bloody Sunday in Selma, Alabama – a little over 50 years ago. For other (Western) democracies, the right to vote was granted to women very gradually over the course of the 20th century. Even Switzerland – sometimes referred to as a model for democratic procedures because of its “direct democracy” approach with many referendums – did not give women the right to vote until 1971.

Although democracy existed for a certain period in antiquity, our current understanding of it only emerged after the Second World War. By then, consolidated democracies had emerged mainly in the United States, Great Britain, and the Scandinavian countries, whilst in other countries in Europe and the Americas, the introduction of stable democratic orders had failed, sometimes on multiple occasions. In Germany, for example, the democracy of the Weimar Republic (1919-33) ended when the National Socialists came to power. For most parts of the world, the design of the new democracies after 1945 was based on the experiences of parliamentary democracy in Great Britain and presidential democracy in the United States.

Yet, democracy did not gain acceptance as a form of government in more countries until the mid-1970s, first in southern Europe, then in Latin America in the 1980s with the end of military governments, as well as in some Asian countries with the end of authoritarian governments in the Philippines, Indonesia, South Korea, and Taiwan. Sub-Saharan Africa was especially swept by the “third wave of democratisation” from the 1990s onwards, along with the former communist states in Eastern, Central, and Southeastern Europe. In North Africa and the Middle East, despite the frustrations of the Arab Spring, many young people at least hope their countries will one day also transform themselves into democracies. From a global perspective, democracy is understandably a very new concept of government.

Though governments are organised differently around the world, they must fulfil certain principles to be considered democracies. At its core, a democracy must have free and fair elections for government by the citizens whilst the government must be accountable to its electorate. To ensure this, further elements are essential:

Real and pronounced competition at regular intervals and without the use of force between individuals and groups (especially political parties) for all important government positions; a high level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, not least through regular and fair elections, so that no larger social group of adults is excluded; and a level of civil and political freedoms – freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organisations – which must be sufficiently strong to ensure the continuity of political competition and political participation. (Linz, Diamond and Lipset 1988: xvi)

Furthermore, political opposition and an independent judiciary are also essential, because they can collectively guarantee compliance with the democratic rules of the game as well as the rule of law and change of government. Above all, the existence of a (real) opposition party is a decisive characteristic of democracy; its absence is “evidence, if not confirmation, of the non-existence of democracy” (Dahl 1971: 8).

Because political competition and participation (i.e., the right of every citizen to take part in political competition) are the cornerstones of a democracy, political parties play a decisive role in this form of government. It is they who represent and compete. Only in rare cases, mostly at the local level, can citizens independently compete politically. As a rule, individuals form associations with other like-minded people to take part in the political debate. The associations evolve into political parties.

Democracy is not limited to holding elections or the “vertical accountability” of the rulers to the ruled. “Vertical” refers to a situation where rulers inform the public but decide for themselves what and how extensively they inform, without the possibility of critical inquiries or checks. Our current understanding goes beyond such one-sided communication. We expect, for example, that public officials also comply with “horizontal accountability”, i.e., regulations at

the state level determining how a state has formal authority to make and implement certain decisions and is also required to explain when and why the state may punish its citizens for offences against public order. All in all, there is an expectation of those in power to justify their decisions. On the one hand, this concerns internal controls and supervisory processes, i.e., decisions must follow rules and are subject to a system of checks and balances. On the other hand, there is an obligation to provide the media and citizens with both comprehensive information regarding the case as well as justification for actions taken by the government. In many countries, this obligation to provide information has been expanded over the past few decades by requiring government agencies to provide documents considered previously as confidential when requested by the media.

Democracy does not mean that certain rights or claims must be uniformly regulated in all societies. Hugely different norms can apply to areas such as criminal law, the social and economic order, or civil rights. Worldwide, there are quite different regulations on the death penalty, abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, data protection and video surveillance, certain freedoms, and the criticism of particular religions and religious communities. There are different rules even for the freedom of expression and the freedom of the press. For example, in Germany, the dissemination of National Socialist ideas and writings is prohibited whilst this is not the case in some neighbouring European countries or in the United States. In any case, the right to freedom of expression in the United States is much broader than in many other democracies. With all such issues, it is important that the principles of democracy are preserved when they are agreed upon and decisions about them are made using democratic procedures, and that they in no way impair political competition or government authority. With the global outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020, many democratic states suspended fundamental rights and freedoms. These included the freedom of movement, the freedom of assembly, the inviolability of homes, and even personal freedom. These are extraordinary decisions only possible in extreme situations. Democratic governments obtained parliamentary approval for this – an approval with a time limit that requires further approval by parliament if it is to be extended. This process of reconfirmation gives these decisions democratic legitimacy. With regard to the inalienability of certain liberties, this is very problematic. Inalienability means that, in a liberal democracy, every person has their own rights,

which he or she cannot voluntarily transfer to other persons or institutions. In this respect, the restriction of personal freedom rights, whether during the pandemic or for any other reason, is a serious act that directly affects the basic principles of a liberal democracy. Respecting these basic principles must be a central goal of state action.

Democracy is a political rather than an economic or social order. In principle, every citizen has the same rights, but neither democracy nor other forms of government can guarantee equality for all citizens. Political parties repeatedly demand more equality because great inequality in income, education, and health undermines the ability of poor and disadvantaged groups in the population to participate meaningfully in the political process (Dahl 1989: 12). Undoubtedly, citizens that are well informed and are economically more or less equal can participate in the political process on an equal footing. In fact, surveys (such as the *Latinobárometro* in Latin America) show that, if poverty and inequality persist, support for democracy declines because of a perception of the inadequate performance of the state and the political parties they support (Latinobarómetro 2018). Interestingly, many democracies function in accordance with their basic principles even with persistently high inequality. This is evident not only in countries like India or Brazil but also in some European democracies and the United States. Nevertheless, countries with greater domestic socio-economic differences are facing more questions regarding their respective democratic processes.

The short discussion here illustrates how the concept of democracy is complex and involves many more issues than can be captured with a brief definition. For this book, however, it may be sufficient to limit ourselves to a few principles that can be summarised by a few key issues. These are free and fair elections, a responsible government and its restraints, the participation of adult citizens through active and passive suffrage, the guarantee of political and civil rights, and the safeguarding of the rule of law through an independent judiciary ensuring the preservation of the other principles. The following figure shows these principles as the cornerstones of democracy.

Figure 1: The Cornerstones of Democracy.

Democracy				
<p><b>Free and Fair Elections</b></p> <p>(for parliament or president leading to a democratic government by a process which is secret, free, fair, held regularly and without electoral fraud)</p>	<p><b>Responsible Government</b></p> <p>(with transparent and rules-based decisions and subject to review by the judiciary and the public)</p>	<p><b>Equal political participation of all citizens</b></p> <p>(who can participate in the political process, take part in elections, and be elected to a political office without discrimination and with few restrictions)</p>	<p><b>Respect for political and civil liberties</b></p> <p>(including the respect for human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly)</p>	<p><b>Rule of law and independence of the judiciary</b></p> <p>(upholding and strengthening the cornerstones of democracy)</p>

Political parties make a decisive contribution to these cornerstones of democracy in the following ways:

- They embody and shape political competition and are the most important, and often the only, actors in elections;
- They constitute or play a key role in government; they take part in the legislative process and the control of the government in parliament;
- They inform, socialise, and mobilise citizens to participate politically and nominate citizens as candidates for elections;
- They work in government and parliament for the preservation and possibly also the expansion of basic political freedoms – freedoms upon which their own existence also depends;
- Through their work in government and parliament and in the context of their other political activities, they guarantee compliance with the law and the independence of the judiciary.

The democratic order is threatened when influential political parties help weaken one or more of these cornerstones of democracy.

Those who are involved in political parties and thus contribute to the vitality of democracy should know these basic pillars of democracy. Around the world, there are governments and political systems describing themselves as democratic but that may actually violate one or more of the attributes of a

democracy. This includes, not least, the so-called performative democracies where elections are held at regular intervals but citizens are denied political freedoms, and where the checks and balances demanded of different branches of government do not operate.

### Separation of powers

The separation of powers is a system of checks and balances of powers to assure and guarantee the protection of individual rights and the political freedom of citizens. Through the separation of powers, state power is divided among several institutions that are largely independent in terms of their legitimacy and their competences. Traditionally, a distinction is made between three institutions: the legislature (parliament), the executive (government), and the judiciary (law). In federal or federally organised political systems, there are also balances between vertical powers in addition to these three horizontal ones. In such a federal system, the central state (the Federation), the federal units (regions, states, or states), and the municipalities keep each other in check. In addition, in free societies, the media are often referred to as the “fourth power” because they also exercise a function of performing checks on the other institutions.

Ideally, the relationship between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches is equal and balanced. However, a strict separation, between government and parliament, does not always work in practice. Instead, there is a division of responsibilities. A functioning government requires the support of a majority of elected officials in parliament to pass bills. There is therefore a mutual dependence between the executive and the legislature. Governance is impossible in many countries without this interdependent relationship in place. Hence, every government must strive for a broad and stable majority in parliament. In cases where there are two parliamentary chambers, the government must seek a majority in both chambers of parliament. Similar procedures apply to state and local governments.

In both a presidential and a parliamentary system, the government requires a parliamentary majority. In parliamentarism, the government

itself depends on a parliamentary majority; in the presidential system, it is only necessary for legislation. That is why a government coordinates closely with members of its party (or parties, in the case of a coalition government). Governing parties make use of informal contacts and controls that are largely carried out outside the public domain. As a rule, there are regular coordination meetings between the parliamentary group leaders of the governing parties, the head of government, and other cabinet members. In such a system, there is only limited parliamentary oversight. Instead, the task of oversight – a task which is key to the functioning of a democracy – falls to the opposition parties. Opposition parties in countries cognisant of their important role are often accorded staff support and resources to better perform their duties. In addition, they may even hold the leadership of important parliamentary committees to ensure oversight of the government.

## Democracy is possible anywhere

Can democracy, as described here, be realised everywhere? Or do we have to accept limited forms of democracy in certain countries and regions due to differences in economic and social development or because of their cultures and traditions? This question has been asked since democracy started gaining traction around the world after the end of the Second World War (Lipset 1959, Zakaria 1994). For a long time, the prevailing view was that democracy was clearly the result of growing economic prosperity. According to this view, poor countries would have no chance at establishing a democracy. However, this view lacks support by empirical reality.

Various democracy indices show that stable full-fledged democracies are often economically successful countries. The examples of India or Botswana, however, indicate that the basic principles of democratic order, such as free elections and the division of powers, can be realised even in countries with comparatively low average income and high poverty rates. The experiences of many other countries show that economic development is not a prerequisite for democracy (Diamond 1992: 127). In addition, high incomes do not neces-

sarily equate to demands for more democracy. On the contrary, after the upheaval of the international system with the end of the Cold War, and after the bitter experience of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, many countries in Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America hoped that a democratic political order would end underdevelopment and usher in sustainable economic growth along with social justice (Hofmeister and Thesing 1996). In many of these countries, it was not economic development but economic and social decline that drove the call for political transformation. Thus, democracy is not a guarantee for economic development just as economic development is not a prerequisite for democracy.

Objections that claimed that democracy is a “Western” concept that cannot be transferred to other regions due to their specific national or regional traditions and cultures proved to be unfounded given that democracy has taken a foothold in many countries with vastly different cultural backgrounds. Yet, this argument has often been deployed by authoritarian regimes to suppress growing demands for democracy. The People’s Republic of China is currently the most striking example of this rhetorical tack. Of course, one must not expect the same form of democracy to emerge everywhere. What is crucial is that basic principles are respected, and this is possible everywhere if we look at countries with such different cultures as Botswana, Brazil, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Japan, Peru, Portugal, Sweden, and Taiwan.

Most important in all these states is the existence of institutions that make the development and consolidation of democracy possible in the first place and protect them from short- and medium-term authoritarian setbacks. Their stability, efficiency, and legitimacy depend on how well the institutions fulfil their functions (Linz and Stepan 1996, Merkel 1996). The political parties are of particular importance here, as their shortcomings constitute a major handicap for any democracy regardless of how long it has existed.

## WHAT IS DAMAGING DEMOCRACY?

Surveys around the world show time and again that many people – probably most of the world’s population – are convinced of the advantages of democracy and affirm this broad model of governance. Yet, ironically, many peo-



ple in several countries are disappointed not only with their democratically elected governments, but also with the way their democracy works. The reasons for this include poor state performance in steering the economy, high levels of unemployment, lack of social benefits, and fear of the future, coupled at times with mismanagement and corruption of governments and political parties. Faced with these issues, people then vote for a different party and government in the next election in the hope that the situation will improve. Unfortunately, some will vote for politicians and political parties who promise improvement but disregard the principles of democracy. This creates opportunities for populists.

Populism is a method of attaining and maintaining political power through the slow erosion and eventual elimination of the fundamental principles of democracy (Müller 2016). It also arises from lack of representation of the established political parties. If political parties do not react in time to the rise of populist parties or leaders and win back the trust of a larger electorate, populism can unleash its destructive effects. Populists claim to speak for “the real people” whilst constructing the image of a “corrupt elite” and a “lying press” who betray the interests of the “real people”. They reduce complex political issues to a clash between “us down here” and “them up there”. They deny the heterogeneity and pluralism of a society and paint instead a portrait of a homogenous society with a common will. With such claims they have achieved electoral successes and even won majorities. Populists can come from the political left or right. When faced with criticism or declining support, populists turn to the manipulation of elections and other illegal measures to retain power. Indeed, for several years now, political leaders and political parties of various stripes have been trying to win elections with a populist *modus operandi* – sometimes with remarkable success.

The rise of populist movements is not limited to young and supposedly still weak democracies. Even the United States, a mature democracy, experienced President Donald Trump’s populist style of government that called into question the traditional procedures and rules of the democratic game. Europe, too, is affected by this trend. In Poland, the ruling party, *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS, Law and Justice), is striving to disempower the judiciary by restricting its independence. In 2014, Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán officially announced his intention to establish an “illiberal democracy” in his country. In the past 15 years, populist parties in many European states have made significant inroads

in both national and European elections. Right-wing nationalist propaganda is employed in countries like France, Germany, and Italy (Hofmeister 2020). In other countries like Greece and Spain, left-wing populism has emerged. For the European Union, it is a new experience to see that the crisis of democracy has arrived on its own shores.

Such developments are exacerbated through the thoughtless and careless regard of democratic principles and rules. Democracy was and always will be a sensitive and vulnerable system of government that is open to manipulation from the inside and intimidation from the outside. This was applicable to ancient Greece just as much as it applies to the present day. Problems arise even when certain institutional regulations work relatively well, in some cases even over many years and decades, but at the same time there is a tendency to undermine the institutions and processes of democracy. This can lead to their destruction, which is already quite evident in the example of Turkey or Venezuela. Their governments restricted the freedom of expression and the media, undermined the justice system, and imprisoned dissidents. Most of the time, such developments go hand in hand with a restriction of the scope of action of civil society organisations through new registration regulations or other forms of harassment. This restricts democratic freedoms and hinders the checks and balances of a government – a situation that becomes particularly serious in cases where political parties do not exercise this function or do so to a limited extent. It has been observed that, in countries which are deviating from the path of democracy, the government or its allies takes control of the main media in what is in fact an assault on the freedom of expression. Where such governments already dominate the parliament and the judiciary, the “attack” on the media can hardly be prevented effectively.

Such shocks to democracy are also promoted by the practically undisguised support for populist, anti-democratic movements by external actors like Russia and China. Their authoritarian rulers feel threatened by growing demands for freedom and democracy in Hong Kong, Moscow, Belarus, and Ukraine, as well as in other parts of the world. In response, they engage in global disinformation campaigns to undermine the democratic debate, to exacerbate social polarisation, and to improve their own image.

Digitisation itself has a profound impact on social life. While modern information technology (IT), such as the Internet, social media, and increasingly new forms of surveillance and artificial intelligence, provides additional op-

tions for communication, interaction, and participation in social and political processes, it can also lead to new and subtle forms of manipulation and restriction of democratic freedoms (Runciman 2018: 120 ff.). To protect democratic freedoms, it pays to remain vigilant, if not through the regulation of the IT providers, then at least by teaching citizens the appropriate use of technology. This also requires raising the awareness and knowledge of the people and especially the youth on how to use and handle social media.

Alongside these new, subtle forms of undermining of democracy, the more obvious and brutal traditional methods have by no means disappeared. Military interventions do not only take place in African countries and in Arab states. In Myanmar, the military took power again in a coup in February 2021, ending the very arduous and slow democratisation process that had begun in the country ten years earlier. The coup was apparently triggered by the military leaders' disappointment that a very large majority of the population had voted for the party of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi even though her government had made very slow progress in solving the country's many problems since 2016. Nevertheless, the country's citizens did not vote for the party favoured by the military. A few years before that, in 2014, the military had also usurped power again in Thailand. In Latin America, the military is also suddenly back on the political stage again. Venezuela is not the only authoritarian regime there that is supported by the armed forces. In Bolivia, too, the military "suggested" that President Evo Morales resign in 2019. In Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru, the democratic governments called upon the military to defend the public order against unrest, which had been provoked in part by frustration over poor government performance and corruption. In Mali, the military took over power in August 2020 following months of protests and calls for the civilian president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, to resign for violating the law and mismanagement of his government, and after the crisis could not be resolved through democratic procedures. Although the military ruler, Assimi Goita, promised to hold democratic elections, he does not seem likely to hand over political power very soon.

Whenever the democratic order in a country is at risk, the role of political parties must be questioned. In some countries, it may be a weakness that causes them to fail at defending the democratic order. In others, political parties may play an active role in driving the process of deterioration. In any case, political parties are always decisive protagonists of democracy.

### Questions to the reader for critical evaluation

- How long has democracy existed in your country of origin and what are its main characteristics?
- What roles do the pillars of democracy mentioned above play and how do they contribute to the stability of democracy?
- How do the “checks and balances”, the separation of powers, and the mutual control of state authorities work?
- What roles do the media play?
- Which factors exist that threaten democracy?
- What is being done to protect and strengthen democracy?
- What kind of political education is being taught in schools and in the non-formal education area?

# 2

## Political Parties and Party Systems

Political parties are associations of people who take part in the process of political competition and in elections to fill political offices and exert influence on political decisions.<sup>1</sup> The members of a party pursue common political goals that are based on a programme and common principles for shaping the social order. In most countries today, as a rule, only citizens can be members of a party. Until a few decades ago – especially in working class parties – social organisations such as trade unions were also party members. The political parties represented in the European Parliament, for example, are associations of national organisations without individual membership. In Britain, this is still the case with the Labour Party. In the following section, we will focus largely on national parties.

Political parties exist within the borders of a state as national parties that participate in elections throughout the country, or as regional or local parties

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<sup>1</sup> With this description, I am summarising several definitions that are as numerous in party research as the analyses of their role in democracy, their functions and organisation, etc. In the following sections, only isolated and summary references are made to fundamental works or other publications that have been consulted. The discussion of academic studies is not the aim of this book. Therefore, we only recommend some relevant works for further reading: Duverger 1963; Lipset 1959; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Panebianco 1988; Lijphart 1999; Katz and Mair 1994; Katz and Mair 1995; Diamond and Gunther 2001; Sartori 2005; Scarrow, Webb and Poguntke 2017.

that participate in political competition only in individual regions or localities with their own lists or candidates. The political parties and groupings represented in the European Parliament, such as the European People's Party and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, are associations of national party organisations without individual membership of natural persons.

Political parties and modern democracy are inextricably linked. Strictly speaking, the founding of political parties preceded democracy as, by the 17th century, British parliamentarians had laid the first party foundations by pursuing shared interests (Katz 2020: 2016). However, the parliamentary system of government at the time was not a democracy. Only political parties founded outside of parliaments during the 19th century demanding political representation from broader sections of the population exemplify the close connection between political parties and democracy.

Other social associations such as associations and clubs also pursue political goals and try to influence political decisions. However, only political parties taking part in elections and occupying decisive political positions at various state levels can be considered political parties. Through their participation in the democratic process, these political parties forward their ideas about the organisation of the community and the solution for specific problems. In Europe, political parties also hold the most important offices in the European Union through their representatives.

Typical for political parties is their fighting character, i.e., the will to debate and take political action along with the ability to take over and maintain government power. The aim of political competition is to gain political power. The attainment of political power is the prerequisite for implementing one's own ideas and programmes in government – be it at the municipal or national level. The ability to lead the government and shape policy is an essential incentive to participate in parties and makes them particularly attractive if they are involved in a government. The will to obtain political power is an essential characteristic distinguishing political parties from civil society organisations.

## Power

Power is a key concept in politics. It describes a relationship of dependency or superiority. Power is the possibility of realising one's own goals regardless of the resistance of others (Max Weber). Power can be exercised by people, groups, organisations (parties, associations, authorities), or the state, or it can come from social structures (economic, technical, legal, cultural, and religious). Accordingly, a distinction must be made between personal and social power and structural power. Because power is omnipresent, care must be taken to prevent its abuse. This is a continuous task. The abuse of political power can be prevented (or at least restricted) in democratic systems through various procedures. These include: a) institutional restrictions such as the separation of powers, the legal system, and time limits on offices connected with the exercise of power; b) procedures that neutralise the exercise of power by promoting the formation of a counter-power that create checks and balances and transparency in action and information; and c) voluntary contractual agreements obliging all actors to comply with rules.

Democracies and parties have changed significantly over the past two centuries, with both the form and pace of change varying with time and place. To understand these changes, we will take a closer look at the parties in this chapter to understand: why parties exist; what motivates their formation in different parts of the world; what functions they (should) fulfil for democracy; whether they meet these expectations; and how they meet these expectations. This also leads to the questions of how the parties themselves have changed, which types of parties characterise the party systems, and whether individual party types and a certain composition of parties in a system tend to favour or burden democracy. A brief overview of the development of parties in different regions of the world allows for comparisons that reveal some commonality.

### What is politics?

Parties make politics. But what exactly is politics? Put simply, politics is the way to organise how people live together in society. Humans in general are not solitary. That is why the Greek philosopher Aristotle called human beings *zoon politikon* – a political animal. This coexistence must be organised, and rules developed for smooth coexistence. In a democracy, citizens are the ones who collectively decide on these rules of coexistence. This collective rulemaking through a process of debate and decisions is the essence of democratic politics. It has many dimensions and addresses mainly the norms of a community, the balance of differing interests, forms of participation, equality of citizens, the struggle for power, and the exercise of rule. The most important rules of coexistence are made in the form of laws by the representatives of political parties in parliaments.

## WHY DO POLITICAL PARTIES EXIST?

In every society, people differ in their opinions, needs, expectations, and ideas about mundane things as well as on their positions on the “big” questions affecting living together. Of course, these differences of opinion on substantive matters are also held by politicians and representatives of a state. Even where freedom of expression is suppressed, there are different views and opinions on political issues as there is neither a general popular will nor a predetermined common good.

On the contrary, there are competing interests in every society that often clash. In dictatorships, dissenting opinions are suppressed and opposition members are silenced, imprisoned, or driven out. In a democracy, this is neither constitutionally possible nor ideologically desirable. Rather, one of its characteristics is that democracy permits and even encourages open expressions of opinion to ensure that political decisions are made transparently through substantive debates. This exchange requires a minimum of common



beliefs. This is the basic democratic consensus that holds the right of expression in a marketplace of ideas. In most countries, this basic consensus is laid down in the constitution, which defines the relevant norms and principles of the democratic order.

The recognition of the different interests in a society and their basic justification is referred to as the “competition theory of democracy”. Because there is a competition of ideas, the formation of a consensus in a pluralistic society should take place through an open process of contestation between a multiplicity of ideas and interests. Owing to the diversity of opinions and social friction, there cannot be an absolute truth. With no absolute truth, decisions are customarily taken through the majority rule. However, there must be no tyranny of the majority following such a process. No decision, even if supported by the majority, should encroach on the rules on the way democracy operates or violate inalienable rights. The explicit protection of minorities is therefore a constitutive component of this understanding of democracy.

Political parties are organisations representing differing opinions in the marketplace of ideas. No party can represent all opinions and interests in any given society. Indeed, the etymological roots of the word “party” lie in the Latin word *pars*, which means “part”. A plurality of parties representing the widest possible range of opinions ensures that all views will be represented in public debates. Therefore, citizens must have the right to form a party, to belong to a party, and to be unencumbered in their participation. Likewise, no one should be compelled to join a particular party or to remain in it against their will – an unfortunate situation still prevalent in some states.

No matter how great the differences of opinion on certain political issues may be, it is only when the opposing interests are openly expressed and the parties mutually concede the right to represent particular interests, i.e., when they agree on this principle, that the way is cleared for a regulated settlement of conflicts in a society and thus for the formation of compromises in the political sphere.

The concept of competition in democracy is antithetical to the idea of homogeneity and the idea of a popular will. The conception of the popular will is traced back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78), who believed in the existence of a “popular will”, which every citizen had to submit to through a kind of a social contract. According to Rousseau, compliance with the popular will guarantees a lawful, orderly coexistence. Following this idea, an individual citizen

has no individual freedom of expression or action but must submit to the state authority executing the popular will. There is no room for political parties in this concept. They are not considered to be legitimate because, by representing specific interests, they would muddy/bias the popular will. However, the questions remain as to who determines the popular will and how. It is obvious that this concept can legitimise totalitarian rule and the dominance of unitary parties. Various real-life manifestations of this type of totalitarian mass rule include the Jacobinism of the French Revolution, Stalinism, and National Socialism, inarguably some of the darkest chapters in (early) modern human history.

The reference to these two different ideas of democracy – competition versus concordance – is not an abstract theory. On the contrary, the idea of an alleged homogeneity of the will of the people – as defended by the theory of concordance – surfaces repeatedly. On the one hand, there are still states where the diversity of parties is prohibited, and a small ruling clique determines the popular will. These are both countries ruled by a communist “unity party” as well as states where religious parties dominate, claiming a representation of the will of god in politics. In any case, religious parties tend to reject the pluralism of opinion. On the other hand, the populist parties and movements of the present also reject social pluralism and claim to represent the will of the people, thus denying other parties the right to show alternative views of social reality and a pluralism of opinion. However, in reality modern societies are shaped by a variety of interests and worldviews. That is why they need different parties to represent this diversity of interests within the political system.

Competition between the parties creates a wealth of ideas and alternatives for political discussion. On the one hand, this motivates citizens to take part in elections and, on the other hand, it motivates political parties to be more convincing than their competitors, thus giving voters a buffet of choice. Because the parties must take into account the wishes and interests of the voters for their election success, they are forced to participate in a cycle of exchange between themselves and their supporters. In a democracy, elections are not just a ritual but ideally offer the opportunity for voters to choose between the options that most authentically articulate and represent their own interests.

## Social cleavages and other motives for the formation of parties

Opinions are shaped by the community to which one belongs. This is also reflected in attitudes towards politics and political parties. At the beginning of the development of modern democracy in Europe during the 19th century, social classes had a decisive influence on the emergence of the new mass political parties. With the American and French revolutions and the emergence of nationalism and industrialisation, new forms of social conflicts arose. These included conflicts between church and state, between urban centres and the periphery, between the urban and rural areas, and above all, between the new working class and those that owned the means of production. Political parties emerged representing each side of these conflicts (Lipset and Rokkan 1967: 23). Such conflicts were not only fought politically, in the form of a competition of ideas or debate in parliaments, but also manifested as violent conflicts over political participation and representation.

Such conflicts also existed outside of Europe during the phase of party formation. This was especially so in Latin America during the 19th century where differences between the urban and rural communities led to the formation of liberal and conservative parties, respectively. Radical parties emerged from the secularisation of the state, and with the onset of industrialisation, the socialist and communist parties emerged to represent the interests of the new working class. In Colombia, for example, conflicts between the liberal and conservative parties continued well into the second half of the 20th century. These political parties had longevity on the subcontinent and played a role in the democratic transition processes of the 1980s and 1990s after the end of military dictatorships. This applies to the radical parties in Argentina and Chile, for example.

In Africa and Asia, due to colonisation, the establishment of political parties was largely suppressed until the Second World War. As there was no industrialised workforce in these places until well into the 20th century, internal conflict was not based on class but rather communal differences. In Africa, ethnic-linguistic identity had a decisive influence on the founding of parties. The same can be said for ethnically, linguistically, and religiously heterogeneous Asian countries such as India, Malaysia, Myanmar, and the Philippines. In addition, anti-colonial, pro-independence movements were a central motive

for the establishment of parties in Asian countries. In some countries, such as India (*Indian National Congress Party*) and Indonesia (*Indonesian National Party*), these liberation movements had a more nationalistic character whilst in others, such as China and Vietnam, the desire to overcome class differences combined with anti-colonialism sentiments was the motive for the establishment of communist political parties inspired by the Marxist ideology. Communist parties were founded in many other countries on the Asian continent with the aim of overcoming poverty and social differences. Nonetheless, as there was no clearly defined or even organised labour force in Asia, the Marxist parties did not represent any particular social class, but rather the anti-establishment attitude of their largely urban middle-class leaders. As most of these parties were banned anyway and operated underground, the degree of support they received is unknown.

The cursory exploration of the emergence of political parties in different regions around the world reveals that social friction was a driver for the establishment of political parties at the genesis of modern democracy in Europe but not for the parties in other regions of the world. Social friction played an even smaller role in political party formation for states that were no longer part of the Eastern bloc after the end of the Cold War. For these states of Eastern Europe, the establishment of free democracy and opposition to the communist or socialist parties were the key driving forces behind the establishment of new political parties. For these Eastern European states, political and ideological differences – concerning, for example, the degree of social freedoms, the form of liberal economic model to take, and personal rivalries between political leaders who did not want to be corseted by party discipline – led to many parties being formed. Within such a scenario, the former communist and socialist parties lived on under new names.

Separately in Western Europe, post-modern attitudes and demands have led to the founding of new types of parties, for example, where Green parties have emphasised ecology and climate protection, or pirate parties have advocated for freedom on the Internet to achieve electoral success in some states as well as at the European level.

Parties of entrepreneurs or so-called business parties can be found in many regions nowadays. Founded by wealthy entrepreneurs or companies,

these parties tend to have little connection to a social class and either lack ideological or programmatic positions or hold only superficial ones. These parties essentially serve the interests of their “owner-chairman”, who personally selects the electoral candidates, among other things. This type of party is described in more detail later.

Many countries, especially in Europe and Latin America, have seen the emergence and, above all, the strengthening of right-wing populist parties that have eroded the basic democratic consensus and gradually gained importance with a neo-nationalist ideology and populist methods. The rise in support for these parties may be credited to a growing social divide between “cosmopolitans” and “communitarians” or globalisation “winners” and “losers” (Merkel 2017). Cosmopolitans are seen as being open-minded, proficient in many languages, open to the world, able to manoeuvre with ease within the international context, and, above all, as people who acknowledge that many social and political challenges can no longer be successfully met within the framework of the nation-state. Climate change, migration, terrorism, and international trade and financial flows are common examples of such challenges. People who accept and strive for supranational solutions may also be more open to foreign cultures and ready to step back from their own local identity.

Communitarians, on the other hand, tend to feel more frightened by the side effects of globalisation, are threatened by migrants, and are overwhelmed by the acceleration of everyday life. They take refuge in nationalism because right-wing populist parties promise to protect them from the unreasonable demands of globalisation. Such parties also benefit from the fact that “questions of identity” have gained a new meaning for many people who are unwilling to compromise on issues that affect their identity (Fukuyama 2018).

A wide range of motives for the founding of new parties can be identified around the world today. In almost every country where this is possible, the movement to found new parties, each with vastly different goals, remains unbroken. As an example, the following table shows the number of parties in individual countries. Most of them have little or no chance of winning a parliamentary seat. However, most share similar motives that led to their foundation, namely dissatisfaction with the established parties. This leads us to examine the functions of the parties and how the latter perceive them.

Table 1: Number of parties in selected countries.

Africa		Asia		Europe		Latin America	
Angola	>125 (6)	Bangladesh	28 (9)	Belgium	32 (12)	Argentina	56 (14)
Benin	>70 (2)	India	73 (36)	Bulgaria	20 (5)	Bolivia	9 (4)
Botswana	8 (5)	Indonesia	16 (9)	Germany	42 (7)	Brazil	35 (30)
Ivory Coast	38 (3)	Japan	11 (7)	Estonia	10 (5)	Chile	26 (16)
Ghana	24 (2)	Malaysia	37 (17)	France	(>20) (16)	Costa Rica	25 (7)
Cameroon	29 (7)	Mongolia	17 (4)	Italy	34 (13)	Ecuador	15 (7)
Namibia	15 (11)	Pakistan	85 (12)	Greece	19 (6)	Guatemala	26 (19)
Nigeria	91 (10)	Philippines	36+134 (21+51)	Poland	10 (6)	Colombia	75 (16)
South Africa	48 (14)	South Korea	39 (5)	Portugal	21 (9)	Mexico	9
Senegal	47 (14)	Taiwan	>20 (5)	Sweden	33 (8)	Peru	21 (9)

Source: Own illustration.

Some of the data above are approximate values (due to lack of data). Number of parties that ran in national elections. In brackets: parties that won seats in the national parliament. Independent candidates were not considered. In the case of electoral alliances, the integrated parties were included in the data.

## FUNCTIONS OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Parties fulfil functions that are essential for a democracy:<sup>2</sup>

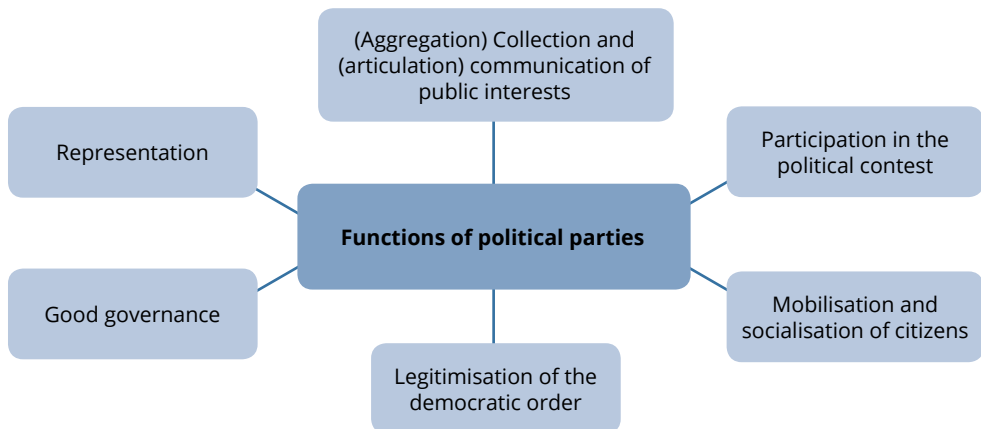
- they bundle and articulate social interests by formulating the expectations and demands of social groups on politics (aggregation and communication function);
- they represent social groups and interests as well as ideal or ideological positions in political competition (representation function);
- they promote the political participation of citizens and the connection between citizens and the state (mobilisation and socialisation function);
- they organise political competition, take part in elections, present programmes and candidates for political office, and seek approval from

<sup>2</sup> In the literature on parties, the functions are presented and bundled in different ways, but most analyses revolve around the functions enumerated and distinguished here, cf. the publications mentioned in footnote 1, furthermore, Hershey 2006 and Decker 2018: 37.

- the electorate; they recruit political personnel and promote young political talent (competitive function),
- they form and support the government, exercise government functions, and/or represent the opposition (executive function);
  - they make a significant contribution to the legitimacy of the political system in the consciousness of the citizens and social forces (legitimation function).

These functions are shown again in the following diagram.

Figure 2: Functions of political parties.



Source: Own illustration.

These functions can be divided into two different categories: representative (or “input”) functions, and procedural or institutional (or “output”) functions. The representative or “input” functions include the bundling and articulation of social interests, the representation of social groups, and the formulation of political programmes. The “output” functions include participation in political competition, holding political offices in government and parliaments, and legitimising the political system.

As important as the above-listed functions are for a democracy, many parties do not fulfil them or do so only inadequately. Where alternative institutions are missing or unable to perform at least some of the tasks of the parties,

the democratic order is put at risk. It is of particular concern when parties fail to adequately represent societal interests, failing to acknowledge growing social dissatisfaction which may lead to violent clashes between the state and its dissatisfied citizens. In Brazil, for example, sudden mass protests were staged across the country in protest against, inter alia, the building of expensive new stadiums before the 2014 World Cup. Similar mass rallies took place in Chile in 2019, accompanied by violent clashes between demonstrators and the police, triggered by increases in public transport fares. In Indonesia, sudden mass protests against a new labour law took place in 2020. Protests by women and social organisations against a tightening of the national abortion law took place in Poland in the same year. While in all these cases, mass protests were triggered by a single measure, the underlying reason for the eruption of violence was a smouldering dissatisfaction of the citizens with their respective political representatives. None of the parties in those countries had foreseen the conflict. In Europe, most of the parties recognised only in 2019 the potential of the issue of climate change to mobilise people when Greta Thunberg, a schoolgirl from Sweden, fuelled the “Fridays for Future” movement. These examples show that the parties did not properly fulfil their function of aggregating and representing social interests, as otherwise they may have detected the rising unrest and emerging protests earlier and reacted accordingly. This sheds an important light on the challenges and problems parties face in performing their functions.



## CHALLENGES FOR POLITICAL PARTIES

### Representativeness

Modern democracy is a representative democracy, and the parties are important institutions of representation. This can mean the representation of different things, for example:

- of certain personal or social interests of persons or groups. For example, ethnic, local/regional, workers, or business parties;
- of certain opinions, concepts, ideologies, or basic convictions. For example, economically liberal, Marxist, or religious parties;
- of certain group interests as a delegate or trustee of the voters; this is particularly clear with constituency representatives who represent the interests of their electorate. Even if the voters do not express a specific opinion on all issues, they trust that their delegate (e.g., the constituency member) has the interests of his constituency in mind when making decisions.

“The citizens in modern democracies are represented by parties” (Sartori 1976: 24). This sentence by a well-known party researcher was largely undisputed in the mid-1970s and is still valid today, as citizens primarily elect candidates from parties as their representatives in parliaments and governments. Yet whilst the parties generally fulfil all those “output” functions (such as organising election campaigns and forming a government), trust in the political parties’ ability to represent has been shaken since the 1990s. What this means is that the parties have lost the ability to recognise what is important to the citizens and then represent these interests in the political arena. Indicators of this representation problem include the persistently high levels of mistrust that the parties in many countries face, the increase in the formation of new parties, and the loss of membership in established parties.

Table 2: Trust in political parties: The example of selected countries in Europe, Latin America, and Africa.

<b>a) Countries in Europe.</b>					
Country	Trust in political parties	Distrust in political parties	Country	Trust in political parties	Distrust in political parties
	(%)	(%)		(%)	(%)
Belgium	18	82	Bulgaria	14	75
Czech Republic	11	89	Denmark	43	57
Germany	37	58	Estonia	18	82
Ireland	26	74	Greece	12	88
Spain	7	90	France	12	83
Croatia	12	86	Italy	16	80
Cyprus	9	88	Latvia	7	93
Lithuania	15	85	Luxembourg	31	69
Hungary	24	72	Malta	25	61
Netherlands	52	44	Austria	32	65
Poland	18	76	Portugal	15	85
Rumania	16	80	Slovenia	7	93
Slovakia	12	84	Finland	34	66
Sweden	39	60			

Source: Eurobarometer 2021.

<b>b) Countries in Latin America and Africa.</b>							
Country		Trust in political parties	Distrust in political parties			Trust in political parties	Distrust in political parties
		(%)	(%)			(%)	(%)
Brazil	2000	12	85	Benin	2016/2018	46	53
	2018	6	93	Botswana	2016/2018	52	45
Colombia	2000	17	81	Burkina Faso	2016/2018	59	38
	2018	16	82	Cameroon	2016/2018	36	64
Guatemala	2000	18	65	Ghana	2016/2018	62	34
	2018	11	84	Ivory Coast	2016/2018	48	47
Mexico	2000	34	64	Kenia	2016/2018	48	48
	2018	11	87	Mozambique	2016/2018	63	28
Peru	2000	19	77	Namibia	2016/2018	56	40
	2018	7	91	Nigeria	2016/2018	49	65
Chile	2000	21	75	Senegal	2016/2018	43	49
	2018	14	80	R South Africa	2016/2018	38	60

Source: Latinobarómetro 2018; Afrobarometer (R5: 2011/2013 & R7 2016/2018).

When seeking to understand the causes and manifestations of the loss of representativeness, various factors can be identified. First, the ties of many parties to certain social classes have either been diluted, no longer exist, or, as seen above, never existed in the first place. Connections to social classes that were weak to begin with have been further watered down by the progressive individualisation and pluralisation of lifestyles in many societies worldwide. Political parties are not exempted from the resulting changes or damages to traditional forms of coexistence. Many institutions, such as churches and religious communities, trade unions, and other associations (e.g., sport clubs), have lost their attraction and importance. Political parties have been affected by this trend insofar as they initially emerged from such social clusters and strata and were intricately connected to them. If these connections dissolve, the basis of such parties also becomes weak. This creates a problem of representativeness, which is demonstrated for instance by the loss of voters and decline of the once important social democratic or socialist parties, whose former decisive group of voters (the traditional industrial workers) no longer exists after the transformation of the modern industrial society.

In addition, the ideological differences that existed during the Cold War have since abated. Compared to previous decades, voters have become far less influenced by ideology. As a result, many political parties have found it difficult to retain voter support based on a shared ideology, and no longer commit to any particular ideology. Today, it tends to be the religious and, more recently, nationalist parties that still hold sway with voters owing to their ideological positions. A consequence of this trend has been high voter volatility in the sense that voting is no longer strictly consistent along party lines. Many surveys attest to this trend, revealing that voters no longer feel represented by one party and tend to decide how they will vote only at the last moment. All in all, this dealignment between party ideology and the customary voter support base will not be repaired easily.

Whilst many constituencies retain their traditional attitudes and beliefs, the choice of a particular party may not affect voting patterns. For example, blue-collar workers no longer automatically vote for social democratic or socialist parties. This increases the volatility of voting behaviour and makes it increasingly difficult for parties to know and predict where their support base lies and design their election campaigns and political programmes accordingly.

With the traditional bonds between voters and parties loosened, new parties have found some success in this electoral terrain (Deschouwer 2017). Some new parties (such as the Green parties in Europe as well as left- and right-wing populist parties in both Europe and Latin America) appear to have established themselves quite firmly. For example, in the European Parliament elections in 2019, the most successful Green parties attained impressive vote shares, with *Die Grünen* of Germany attaining 24.1 per cent, *Déi Gréng* of Luxembourg 18.9 per cent, *The Greens* of the UK 16.3 per cent, and *Vihreät - De Gröna* of Finland 16.0 per cent. Examples of left-wing populist parties in Europe include *Movimento 5 Stelle* in Italy, *Podemos* in Spain, and *Syriza* in Greece, and in Latin America include *Movimiento Regeneración Nacional* (MORENA) in Mexico, the *Partido Socialista Unido* in Venezuela, the *Movimiento por el Socialismo* in Bolivia, and *Alianza País* in Ecuador. Examples of national-conservative right-wing parties include the *Front National* (now known as *Rassemblement National*) from France, the *Lega* from Italy, and the *Alternative für Deutschland* from Germany. Many new parties attain prominence or at least temporary support with an anti-establishment discourse even if they do not present themselves as populist.

Overall, there is a clearly recognisable tendency in many countries for a large part of the electorate to support the opposition or newly founded parties over the ruling parties. Many voters do not feel represented by their current government and are therefore choosing alternatives. At the same time, many people no longer vote at all. Whilst there is no evidence of a general decline in voter turnout worldwide, regions such as Europe and North America have witnessed a significant downward trend in voter turnout. However, the polarisation ahead of the 2020 US elections led to a significantly higher voter turnout than previous elections. On the one hand, many citizens believe it makes no difference for whom they vote and therefore abstain from voting. On the other hand, those who have never or not voted for a long time are being mobilised by extremist parties for the first time. The impact of low voter turnout is significant to democracy as parliaments and consequently governments become less representative of the electorate – the representativeness of parliament alters if 70 or 80 per cent of the citizens voted in an election, or if an election has seen a voter turnout of only 50 per cent or less. Parliaments decide for the entire population even though the views of many are not represented. A low voter turnout can be a sign of citizens feeling alienated from

politicians – a development that can be exploited by opportunistic parties who seek to alter the system.

Support for political parties has also declined owing to the rise of direct communication channels between citizens and government that eschews the need for a political party to act as a conduit for communication. With social media, citizens can communicate directly with decision-makers in government with little need for a political party acting as an intermediary.

In addition to the impact of social media, the development of parties and party systems has recently also been very much influenced by socio-cultural aspects. Here, two poles are irreconcilably opposed to each other. A liberal pole emphasises tolerance, self-development, self-realisation, collective freedom, multicultural societies, emancipation, pacifism, minority rights, environmental protection, and cultural as well as political inclusion. The “Black Lives Matter” or “Me Too” movements, in addition to climate protection, had gained great political relevance prior to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. In contrast, the other, more authoritarian pole emphasises nationalism, internal and external security, cultural majority identities, conformity to traditional lifestyles, and a restrictive fight against crime. The conflicts between “integration versus separation”, “cosmopolitanism versus communitarianism” or “pluralism versus populism” can also be mapped onto this conflict axis. Polarisation has undoubtedly been favoured by the rise of populist parties, which applies to both left and right populist parties. What both have in common is their criticism of globalisation. Whilst left-wing populists emphasise social inequality as a result of increased competition between economies, right-wing populists fear the consequences for national and cultural identity due to migration promoted by globalisation. For democratic parties and party systems, both poles present a problem in that they are sceptical about social and political pluralism, or even reject it altogether. The so-called “cancel culture” is one such attack on social and political pluralism. Its supporters are often unaware that they are also questioning the basic pillars of democracy.

In addition, another development negatively affecting political parties as representatives of the electorate has been the shift of decision-making powers from national to supranational institutions, such as the European Union. Modern-day challenges such as combating climate change, terrorism, pandemics, migration flows, and the control of global corporations simply cannot be solved at the national level, thus hindering national political parties

from presenting and implementing robust solutions. As it currently stands, there are only a few supranational parties that exist, and they are politically insignificant. What are referred to as European parties within the EU like the Europeans Peoples' Party (EPP) are ultimately associations of national parties. Hence, national elections today revolve around challenges requiring decisions and actions beyond the scope of an individual state. National politicians run for office, but they do not gain real decision-making power on many issues. Voters are also aware of this.

Finally, the ability of political parties to represent and debate alternative views has been constrained by arguments for the need for expediency and necessity when states face specific issues. In Europe, this occurred during the European debt crisis in 2010/11 that led to far-reaching financial policy decisions being made without extensive debates within political parties and parliaments. Appeals for the need to move swiftly, however, can paralyse inter-party debate, promote the depolitisation of government actions, and contribute to the degradation of ties between parties and voters. Governments defend and legitimise their decisions by appealing to necessity or inevitability – sometimes even disregarding their own party programmes. By doing so, alternative positions become stifled and delegitimised whilst the capacity of political parties to represent the opinion of the electorate are also undermined. During the start of the coronavirus pandemic in spring 2020, most governments primarily followed the advice of medical experts and failed to include political debate in decision-making for policies. This strengthened the executive branch of government and limited the scope of political parties to formulate alternative policy proposals.

Another indicator of the weakened ability of many parties to represent is that they are too late to perceive certain issues that determine the social discourse and around which new conflicts arise. This applies, for example, to environmental policy in the 1980s as well as to today's policies around climate change, digitisation, and other issues that concern eating habits, gender, racism, and identity. It should also be mentioned here that, in many countries, people's expectations of government services are changing. Many parties find it difficult to recognise this change, let alone react to it.

The main beneficiaries from political parties being unable to fully represent the electorate have been the recently formed parties that profit from the disappointment with traditional parties. In several countries, new forms of

political parties and new models of party organisations have emerged, such as the “Internet parties” (e.g., the *Movimento 5 Stelle* in Italy), or the new populist parties, some with a more nationalist agenda and others with a more left-wing programme. Even several celebrities have founded political parties in recent years and successfully participated in elections in Guatemala, Italy, Slovenia, and Ukraine. Owing to the frustration with traditional political options, such new formations can achieve electoral success relatively quickly. However, the half-life of these new parties – at least in terms of their presence in a national parliament – is often short. Participation in government can be particularly fatal for the new parties. Once they fail to live up to the promises made during their election campaigns, they quickly encounter the accusation of being unresponsive to the demands of the electorate – accusations that they themselves had hurled at the traditional parties to get into office in the first place. The rise and fall of a new party are illustrated by the experience of the *Movimento 5 Stelle* in Italy. Hence, the rise of new parties is therefore more an indicator of the weaknesses of traditional political parties rather than an alternative.

Many parties try to avoid these trends through personalisation, where they push to the fore individual personalities as opposed to their party name or logo. Though candidates have always been of great importance for the visibility and perception of parties, this strategy is based on the belief that there is a need to have a more focused reference point for voters due to the proliferation of political parties. A person of flesh and blood can convey messages and win trust far better than a sober party apparatus. Unfortunately, personalisation and “presidentialisation” ultimately only intensify the anti-party effect (Poguntke and Webb 2005; Rahat and Kenig 2015). What the party stands for in the eyes of the electorate becomes obscured when these personalities no longer commit to their party platform.

In conclusion, all of these developments lead to a decrease in voter identification with parties, a loss of trust and membership, a lower turnout and, finally, the creation of new and anti-establishment parties of various types. In addition, with the rise of civil society organisations and direct communication channels, political parties now even face competition for the wells from where they have traditionally drawn support. An essential tool to counteract this dilemma is for the parties to strengthen their own organisation and gear it towards not only winning elections but also continuously maintaining and deepening contact with the citizens.

## Government formation

Worldwide, political parties serve a supply function as they are the only means by which political representatives are selected, election candidates are put forward, and the offices of governments and parliaments are filled. Some parties are set up solely for these purposes. Even people who have little interest in political issues or interacting with the electorate, or are going into politics after a career as a film actor, singer, sports star, comedian, or entrepreneur, join a political party (or start their own) to pursue their political ambitions. In democracies, there are no current or foreseeable future alternatives to the role political parties play in recruiting political leaders and organising governments. However, there have been some developments regarding the supply function of political parties that may pose problems and dangers to both parties themselves as well as the democratic order.

In general, to do justice to their supply functions, parties should demonstrate autonomy and coherence as key elements of their institutional integrity (Bartolini and Mair 2001: 340). On the one hand, this means that they should acquire political legitimacy by formulating and representing their own political positions. They should neither surrender their autonomy to the advice of experts, advisers, or commissions, nor shift their decision-making responsibility to referendums, interest groups, or even the judiciary. However, “lateral entrants” can certainly be an enrichment for parties by bringing additional knowledge and fresh experience, as well as opening up access to social groups that the parties did not reach before. In many countries, there exist associations that focus on certain issues, such as anti-racism, climate protection, a certain sexual identification, or even online gaming. Such groups often have more or less explicit expectations from politics. When parties accept representatives of such groups – provided their concerns are compatible with the party programme – and perhaps even give them a place on electoral lists, they also represent new issues with which they were not previously identified. However, the added value of such “lateral entrants” is limited if they only want to polish their political engagement with celebrity star power. As seen in many examples in Brazil, Indonesia, and the Philippines, the glamour of film or sports stars only temporarily increases the profile of parties. Even successful entrepreneurs by no means necessarily have the qualities and skills which are required for politics. When parties give such “lateral entrants” too much pub-



licity, they risk losing their autonomy and identity. Much more important than the publicity is therefore the serious work of building and expanding one's own party organisation.

Even when parties demonstrate autonomy and coherence, structural issues may make it difficult for them to perform their supply functions. The first difficulty is encountered when trying to form a government owing to the erosion of the party system. This affects both the parliamentary systems in Europe and some other regions as well as countries with presidential systems. In parliamentary systems with proportional representation, one-party governments have been rare in the past, and coalitions of two or three parties with overlapping programmes or politics have been more common. However, the ability to form a coalition of like-minded parties has become increasingly difficult and there has been a need to form coalitions between parties with quite different ideologies and political programmes. Often, the consensus necessary for cooperation and coalition cannot be attained as parties with a low vote share tend to stubbornly defend their positions. This leads to major problems of governance. In many European countries, the forging of alliances to form a coalition government can take a significant amount of time. Moreover, cohesion is often weak even when coalitions can be formed and it is not uncommon for coalitions to break apart again soon after. In Belgium in 2010/2011, there was no regular government for 535 days – almost a year and a half. In Sweden in 2018/2019, it took four months to form a government. In Italy in 2018, there was a coalition of the extreme left with the extreme right, which broke up after only a year. In Germany in 2017, the attempt at a new form of coalition formation initially failed before the new government came into being after negotiations lasting almost half a year. In Spain in 2019, it took two elections before Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez was elected at the beginning of 2020, and even with the support of ten parties, he was only able to form a minority coalition government that may not hold for the entire legislative period. In Israel in 2019/2020, three elections were necessary before a government with a precarious cohesion could be formed.

The problems of forming a government carry on even after a government is formed. Looking beyond once coalition partners have agreed to joint measures, it is often difficult or at least tedious to turn joint projects into specific laws and then to implement them. Where a government does not have a secure majority, this is almost impossible. In Great Britain, it took almost a year

and a new election before the House of Commons passed the Brexit bill. In the US, where the president has extensive executive powers, the mid-term elections in 2018 led to the two houses being held by different parties, a situation that delayed the enactment of legislation until after the presidential elections in November 2020 as there was no consensus on many issues. In Brazil, which has long been regarded as a model for the coalition presidentialism practised in many Latin American countries, President Bolsonaro was neither willing nor able to forge such a coalition. Similar processes can be observed in Chile and Peru.

These developments make political processes and decisions unpredictable, accidental, and even arbitrary. Decisions about key policy areas or reforms are not made or are endlessly delayed. The consequence of this is a further erosion of the parties' reputation in an area where they still have quasi-exclusive competence, namely governance. Populist saviours use such weaknesses in governments for their seductive messages.

## Clientelism and patrimonialism: Corruption and mismanagement

Clientelism and patrimonialism are not considered among the "classic" functions of political parties. However, many parties practise some form of clientelism and/or patrimonialism wherever they have access to government offices and benefices. The terms and the associated political practices are briefly discussed here. As corruption and mismanagement are closely related to clientelism and patrimonialism, politicians should know the acceptable limits/boundaries within a democratic framework.

Clientelism describes the relationship between a patron and a client that involves an exchange of material or non-material resources (Muno 2016). This form of relationship existed in antiquity where a *patronus* (patron) would represent a *clientela* (client) in public. With both the patron and the client inheriting their status, these networks existed for generations. Patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism are terms that are often employed today to describe such social relationships. They can essentially be used synonymously with the concept of clientelism. Other terms are used in some regions to describe such a relationship. In Latin America, the terms *caudillismo* and *caciquismo* (the latter especially in Mexico) are used, in the Philippines, *bossism* is used, in some

countries in Asia such as Myanmar, *cronyism* is used, and in Senegal, the term *marabout* is used. All of this involves the exchange of tangible and intangible goods between a person or group of people who have access to these goods and their distribution to another receiving person or group who provide something in return. These goods can be money, services, jobs, or protection, i.e., anything the client requires or wants. The client, for their part, is obliged to provide something in return, which can be labour, some form of service, or political support. Clientelism does not necessarily have to be political, because entrepreneurs, trade unions, and other groups sometimes behave as patrons.

In the field of politics, clientelism is common. Political clientelism involves the distribution of public resources such as offices, grants, investments, and jobs by people and institutions who have attained their offices through democratic means. These patrons often use their power not only to benefit their clientele from whom they then demand allegiance but also to invest and distribute large amounts of public resources in the private sector to gain permanent support. The term *patronage* is often used to describe the exchange of public goods for political support.

The boundaries between a (purely) programmatic and a non-programmatic (i.e., clientelist) relationship are sometimes difficult to draw. In a (purely) programmatic relationship, voters do not expect any special privileges and, above all, there are no formal relationships of allegiance or even dependency between patron and client. Citizens cannot be “punished” by a party if they withdraw their favour. Alternatively, in a clientelist, patrimonial, or neopatrimonial relationship, the allegiance and dependency is obvious. In countries such as Argentina and Mexico, for example, the Peronist party and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which have dominated for many years, have developed forms of clientelism that, skirting the edge of legality, ensure that residents of certain districts only receive certain social benefits or are awarded jobs if they support the relevant party. Such forms of clientelism are known to take place in many countries even though the withholding of public services from a legally entitled recipient for political allegiance reasons is illegal. Clientelism becomes problematic, even criminal, when parties violate or circumvent the rules of the game of democracy.

According to an international comparative study, affluent countries, especially in northern European countries and Canada, show a low level of clientelism (cited in Muno 2016: 656 f.). In countries such as Italy, Greece, Israel,

Japan, Korea, and the US, clientelism is in the low to medium range. In the post-communist states of Central Europe, clientelism is generally rated relatively low, with the exceptions of Bulgaria, Macedonia, Mongolia, and Romania. In Latin America, clientelism is comparatively low in Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay, but extremely high in Argentina, Panama, and Paraguay. Clientelism is very widespread in Africa and is present in public life. The same is true for most of the countries in Asia and the Middle East. The spread and intensity of clientelism worldwide mirror levels of corruption, which indicate a close connection between the two phenomena, though they are not identical. But just like corruption, clientelism is most widespread where the formal institutions of a state inadequately fulfil their functions.

Clientelism has serious implications for democracy because it affects the view that citizens have of the political system as well as the abilities of governments. Public goods and services are not being awarded according to lawful, transparent, and comprehensible decisions and procedures, but instead according to the specific interests of individual persons, groups, or political parties. This not only leads to inefficiency but also undermines the foundations of a democracy as informal procedures and institutions undermine the state's decision-making abilities, the rule of law, the separation of powers, and democratic processes and procedures such as elections. Parties practising clientelism sometimes defend themselves by highlighting how they help certain groups to receive state social benefits through such a practice. However, this form of clientelism often excludes other groups from these services and thus, violates the idea of the universality of state action where rights and claims should apply to all citizens. Rather, the clientelism of parties distorts politics as it always serves to maintain or acquire power in political competition. As seen time and time again, when the law loses its power, clientelism can descend into the deployment of criminal action to maintain power.

Where patronage and patrimonialism are important elements of the political process, there is a strong likelihood that a political system will also be shaped by corruption and mismanagement, and that parties will play a crucial role in this, even if not all parties in a country are necessarily involved (Koelble 2017; Kubbe 2017).

Corruption is the abuse of power for private gain. Political corruption not only significantly reduces government efficiency (Mungiu-Pippidi and Johnston 2017), but also affects confidence in the political system if there is no counter-

vailing force in the form of an independent and assertive judiciary, or a vibrant civil society that opposes corrupt politicians and parties.

In many countries, this is difficult if not almost impossible. This applies above all to countries with pronounced particularism, i.e., where entrenched individuals or groups have practically unlimited access to state power and therefore are unencumbered from asserting their personal interests over those of the state. Effective anti-corruption mechanisms can hardly be implemented in such countries because the rulers themselves have no interest in them (Mungiu-Pippidi 2006). This has been observed in, for example, Moldova, the Philippines, Romania, and Ukraine, and many other countries with widespread corruption.

In some societies, the culture of privilege and unequal treatment is an accepted social norm. That is why many people, not least budding politicians, fight to become members of the privileged group instead of calling for the enforcement of universal rules. Impartiality and fairness hardly exist in corruption-ridden societies. In such cases, bribery is a means of circumventing inequality. Bribery is often the only option for some to access certain institutions and government services. Bribery here does not necessarily require large amounts of money. Instead, small “special payments” for state services, regardless of amount, are a violation of the principle of equality and thus a violation of a fundamental norm of democracy. Politicians and parties who benefit from this system are doing the democratic order of their country a disservice. Corruption can only be gradually reduced and eradicated if such patrimonial attitudes and procedures are overcome. One challenge for this to happen is that parties must lead this reform process. However, if these political parties themselves are part of the patrimonial system or seek to do so, no serious measures to curb corruption will be implemented. Such a situation is fatal for their own reputation and democracy.

Even where there is no systematic corruption and mismanagement, there is a risk that parties enjoying political privileges and holding important offices will lose their legitimacy unless they can prove that they can represent social interests. Good, competent governance becomes a strong argument for political parties to do better. However, in many cases that is not enough in the long run. When parties have become distant from citizens and their ability to integrate and articulate social interests has withered, they will not be successful in elections either.

## TYPES OF POLITICAL PARTIES

In view of the problems and challenges listed above, the question arises as to whether one specific type of party may be better suited to fulfil the various functions than others. However, the “ideal type” of party does not exist because each party must adapt to the specific national, regional or local context in which it operates to optimally perform the various functions that are expected of it. Nevertheless, developing a typology of parties may be useful to identifying the properties that characterise individual parties, which may in turn offer indications as to whether and how a specific type of party contributes to the functioning of a democracy, and whether this is in fact an important goal shared by all or most types of parties. A typology can therefore provide some clues as to which “model” a party seeks to emulate. The diversity and changes in the party landscape, however, makes it difficult to adequately classify different types of parties into just a few categories. Even the party landscapes of Europe, which continue to form the basis for most typologies of parties, are now so heterogeneous that they can hardly be captured in just a few categories.

Typologies of parties usually concentrate on only a few characteristic features to show similarities and differences between individual parties. This book concentrates on the three following categories: (a) the ideological-political profile and programme of parties, (b) their organisational form, and (c) their goal orientation and functions in the political system.

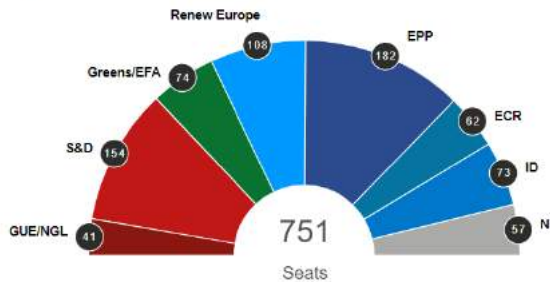
### **The political and ideological profile of parties as their distinguishing feature**

Many parties, especially in Europe, base their identity and uniqueness on a specific political and ideological self-image. The political developments in Europe in the 19th century gave rise to the emergence of communist, socialist and social democratic, Christian democratic, liberal, and conservative parties. Whilst such parties remain strong in many European countries, there has always been fragmentation within individual party families, to the effect that, in some countries, different parties belong to the same “party family”. Similarly,

the grouping of parliamentary groups in the European Parliament is based on ideological ties and they jointly exert a great deal of influence on European Union politics. Parties that do not belong to one of these party families or groupings have relatively little influence. There is great diversity within the party groupings, which creates challenges for internal cohesion. Plagued by numerous corruption cases, it may be argued that the Social Democrats of Romania have little in common with their “sister parties” in Sweden or Germany. The European People’s Party (EPP), on the other hand, struggled for a long time with its stance towards the right-wing Hungarian Civic Alliance (FIDESZ) party, whose leader, Victor Orbán, has been described by some EPP leaders as an autocrat because he *de facto* suspended control of the government in his country, restricted the independence of the judiciary via constitutional amendments and laws, bought out media outlets that were critical of the government, and restricted the scope for action of civil society organisations. Finally, at the beginning of 2021, the EPP group in the European Parliament suspended the members of FIDESZ, whereupon the party resigned its membership in the EPP.

Figure 3: Party families in the European Parliament.

European Parliament 2019 - 2024  
Constitutive session



- Political groups in the European Parliament**
- EPP - Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)
  - S&D - Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament.
  - ECR - European Conservatives and Reformists Group
  - Renew Europe - Renew Europe group
  - GUE/NGL - Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left
  - Greens/EFA - Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
  - ID - Identity and Democracy
  - NI - Non-attached Members

Since 2009, according to Parliament's rules of procedure, a political group shall consist of at least 25 Members elected in at least seven Member States.

Source: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en>.

For parties outside of Europe, their political-ideological identity is equally important for their profiling. For a few decades, the party groupings in many Latin American countries were similar to those found in Europe but they have since either been disbanded or become irrelevant.

Some of the liberal and communist parties in Asia were connected to the ideological currents of Europe, at least in the initial stages of their set-up. However, most of the parties in Asia, like those in Africa, cannot be assigned to the same traditional ideological trends. In addition, quite a few of the parties express a preference for a particular ideology without genuinely representing it, for the purpose of appealing to certain segments of voters. For example, whilst there are “social democratic parties” on all continents, not all of them have a decidedly worker-friendly agenda or maintain close relationships with the trade unions. In fact, some even hold viewpoints that are decidedly economic liberal in essence. At the same time, there is a tendency among liberal parties, such as that of French President Emmanuel Macron, to distance themselves from traditional liberalism and to claim instead a more “progressive” profile (without, however, always explaining exactly what that means). “Democratic People’s Party” or “Progressive Democratic Party” have become popular party names. This, too, suggests specific political-ideological positions, which, however, are not strictly adhered to in individual cases.

Nationalist or national-populist parties have re-emerged in recent years, not only in many European countries, but also in Latin America (López-Alves and Johnson 2019) and in Asia with some of them referring very clearly to the ideology of nationalism. Ecological and green parties, especially in Europe, are a relatively new party grouping that can be distinguished from other parties by their political and ideological foundation. Religious parties have gained a foothold in some Islamic countries, including Indonesia and Malaysia. In India, Hinduism is a key distinguishing feature of the ruling *Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)*. In Turkey, the ruling party *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP)* emphasises its religious elements though it would be inaccurate to classify it as a religious party.

Whilst the distinction between “left-wing” and “right-wing” parties was more common during the Cold War period than it is today, it has by no means lost its importance. Since the 18th century, socialist, communist, anarchist, and social democratic parties have used the term “left wing” to describe their position in the political spectrum. Representing a political attitude that emphasises social



equality, social rights, state intervention in the economy, and greater control or even prohibition of private ownership and private enterprises, terms such as “progress”, “reform”, and “internationalism” are embraced without any clear meaning. “Progressive” civil rights, women’s rights, anti-war, or environmental movements are also generally accounted for under this phrase. The term “left wing” is still very present in the political parlance of many countries, from the Democratic Party in the United States to the Communist Party in Portugal (which is one of the last to remain attached to Stalinism). In contrast, parties that emphasise concepts such as authority, hierarchy, order, duty, tradition, and nationalism or a liberal economic order are considered “right wing”, the extreme of which is typically represented by nationalist and fascist parties. In political debates, these terms are often used to expose or even to defame political opponents. Conservative parties, in particular, are often accused of being “right wing” by their “left wing” counterparts, often implying a nationalist or an anti-democratic stance.

Single-issue parties do not represent a comprehensive political-ideological agenda but rather campaign on a single topic. The party spectrum ranges from issues concerning animal protection, religious fundamentalism, and motorists to the pirate parties that concentrate on freedom of information on the Internet. In their founding phase, the green parties mainly represented ecological and pacifist issues but have since significantly expanded their agenda, which was an essential prerequisite for expanding their constituency. Overall, this confirms that parties tend to be more successful when they pursue a broader range of issues.

The reference to a particular ideology still plays an important role for many voters today, even if their ideological beliefs tend to be much less defined. Elections show that a party’s success is linked to its specific ideational core beliefs that distinguish it from its opponents and help the party to mobilise voters. Religiously motivated and conservative voters in the US today predominantly vote for the Republican Party because it has developed a distinct ideological profile over the past few decades (parts of which differ significantly from the key characteristics that the party displayed during the 19th and much of the 20th century). However, ideological profiling reaches its limits when voters expect not only ideology but also competence in solving concrete political issues. As shown in Indonesia and Malaysia, for example, religious parties do not necessarily achieve outstanding election results in countries where reli-

gious beliefs are of great importance to many people. Whilst the commitment to Islam is important for many people in those two countries, their decision-making in an election is also guided by other criteria. However, where a party can give the impression of combining its political-ideological commitment with the competence to solve specific political problems, as is the case for the BJP in India or the AKP in Turkey, the political-ideological positioning is a clear distinguishing feature in the political competition.

## The organisational form of parties as the distinguishing feature

Since research on political parties began, the most important criterion for the classification of parties by type has been the form of organisation. Initially, a distinction was made between the loosely organised parties of dignitaries, which were based on the temporary collaboration of community leaders, and the tightly organised mass parties geared towards the widest possible participation (Duverger 1963). After left-wing parties managed to achieve electoral successes as mass parties, former parties of dignitaries also began to gradually transform themselves by tightening their organisational structure and increasing their membership base.

Mass parties have existed and continue to exist not only in democratic countries, where party membership is based on free choice, but also in authoritarian and totalitarian states, where the state party forces citizens to join the party and not only mobilises, but also controls, the mass of its members. In the past, the Justicialist Party and its Peronists in Argentina or the “Party of the Institutionalised Revolution” in Mexico were mass parties with authoritarian governance. Whilst they have adapted to the democratic processes of their countries today, they continue to be classified as mass parties (although the Peronists have repeatedly split into various “sub-parties”, which often run together in elections). The communist parties in China and Vietnam remain mass parties in authoritarian systems today. The *United Malays National Organisation* (UMNO) in Malaysia can equally be described as a mass party. As an ethnic party, it represents most of the population of ethnic Malays and was the governing party without interruption since the country’s independence in 1951 to 2018. In India, the *Indian National Congress* (INC) was, and still is, a

mass party. The party emerged from a mass movement in support of independence led by Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi and was the governing party from when India gained independence in 1947 until 2014 with few interruptions. The Hindu nationalist *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), which has headed the government of India since then, is also a mass party. Both parties exemplify that mass parties can still exist in a democracy today. The African continent too, is home to mass parties, including the *African National Congress* (ANC) in the Republic of South Africa, the *New Patriotic Party* (NPP) and the *National Democratic Congress* (NDC) in Ghana, and, at least until the 2020 coup, Mali's *Rassemblement pour le Mali* (RPM).

In many countries in Europe, mass parties existed until the end of the 20th century, including, for example, the Socialists and Social Democrats in the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Germany, and Sweden, as well as the Christian Democrats in Germany and Italy, and the Gaullists in France. At that time, there were large sections of the population that shared the same social status and often the same political preferences. This was especially true of the traditional industrial workforce, which was organised in trade unions. But in the course of social differentiation, ties to individual parties became looser and the parties lost members from certain milieus. The parties started to focus more on solidifying their central organisation to successfully participate in elections. In addition, the previously sharp ideological demarcation became less relevant as more parties tried to reach out to a broader spectrum of the electorate. The term "catch-all parties" or "professional voter parties" was introduced for their classification (Kirchheimer 1965). In Germany, the term "Volksparteien" (people's parties) became established. Perhaps the most well-known example is the European People's Party (EPP), which comprises the association of Christian Democratic and Conservative parties in the European Parliament.

Voter or catch-all parties aim at creating as large a membership base as possible by seeking to appeal to voters of different social and ideological backgrounds. Catch-all parties strive to integrate different ideological positions into their election programmes and political proposals whilst also securing diversity in the party leadership and nominated candidates for election. This approach appeals to a much broader strata of the electorate than parties with a much narrower thematic or ideological focus (e.g., "workers" or "entrepreneurs" parties). As a result, catch-all parties already make an important contribution to the function of collecting and articulating social interests within

the party itself. Nonetheless, growing irreconcilability of political attitudes is catching up with these parties, making it increasingly difficult for them today to address the concerns from larger groups of voters.

Patronage-based parties tend to be loosely organised and dominated by a small party leadership. They are focused on catering to the needs of a narrowly defined clientele by using legal, and at times illegal, measures in order to secure access to state resources. Parties of this type can be found in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine and are considered to be hindering the consolidation of democracy in those countries (Gherghina and Volintiru 2020).

The political parties in the US represent their own type (Katz 2020: 222 f.), which cannot be compared to those of other countries. They are characterised by a very weak central organisation and a focus on individual candidates. They lack formally registered members yet allow a certain number of ad-hoc registered supporters to select the party's parliamentary and presidential candidates. Parties in the US are also subject to much stricter legal regulations than any other party in a free democracy. Weak levels of party organisation make them dependent on financial donations to finance expensive election campaigns, thus exposing them to the risk of being hijacked by dominant individuals who may not have any previous connections to the party or, in fact, to the realm of politics at all. Donald Trump serves as a good example here. In 2016, he was nominated as the Republican Party's presidential candidate despite having no formal ties to the party up until his nomination. A party's associations in the federal states play a significant role in the overall organisation as they control the national party headquarters and elect the national chairman. National conventions cannot be understood as party conventions where decisions on political programmes are taken but serve instead as the platform to proclaim the presidential candidate who has been elected in primary elections held in the individual states. The US experience has only limited value as a model worth emulating for the organisation of parties elsewhere in the world. This does not apply, however, to US election campaigns, which are closely watched by international spectators for novel approaches that may then find replication elsewhere. Social media, for example, was first used on a massive scale in Barack Obama's election campaign in 2008, and this approach was then quickly recreated around the world.

## Goal orientation and functions of parties in the political system as a distinguishing feature of parties

To further emphasise the functions that parties perform in a democratic system, a typology has been developed that not only considers the ideological orientation and organisational form of parties, but also their contribution to the promotion of democracy. This approach refers specifically to parties in the so-called transition countries outside of Western Europe and North America. Overall, it distinguishes between five groups of parties – mass-based, electoral, elite-based, ethnicity- or religious-based, and movement – described here in a somewhat modified and condensed form (Diamond and Gunther 2001: 7 ff.):

(1) *Mass-based parties* offer the opportunity to fulfil various functions that are important for a democratic order, provided that they observe the principles and basic rules of a democracy. In their early decades, mass parties contributed towards raising political awareness and mobilising the working classes in many countries in Europe and Latin America. Because of their close association with social organisations (especially trade unions) and religious organisations, they have aggregated and articulated their social interests. The party organisation itself was strengthened by this close cooperation with social groups. Because of their efforts to establish a broad organisational base, they have carried the idea of democracy to the remotest parts of different countries. However, there are several mass parties, such as the communist parties or the fascist parties in Europe, the populist parties in Argentina, Mexico and other Latin American countries, and some ethno-nationalist parties in Asia, that have repeatedly violated fundamental democratic principles in everyday political life, especially after obtaining government control. The political modus operandi of mass parties have been, and continue to be, dominated by restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of the press and other civil liberties, and may extend to the repression of other parties, the persecution of political opponents, electoral fraud, political clientelism, the abolition of the separation of powers, and the rejection of “checks and balances” regarding government initiatives. Clearly, none of these contribute positively to the democratic functions of parties.

(2) *Electoral parties* are primarily concerned with achieving the best possible election result and participating in government. Some electoral parties are focused on one or a few leaders; their organisational base is typically weak

and small in membership. In principle, their ideological values are not fixed but represent programmatic positions that can be accepted by a broad electorate. However, some popular parties in Europe retain their core programmatic brand. In combination with a relatively broad membership base, they are able to safeguard their pivotal place specifically in those countries, where they run local governments and have a strong local organisational base. They not only fulfil the procedural and executive functions of a party but manage to do justice to their representative function better than many of their competitors.

In general, however, electoral parties are heavily dependent on public opinion and a social mainstream of sorts. This does not necessarily have to be a hindrance to the fulfilment of their democratic functions, as they must constantly strive to recognise, understand, and adequately represent social trends and interests in the political domain. Failing to recognise emerging issues (either quickly or at all) will be of disadvantage to the parties. This was the case in Europe, in the debates concerning the effects of digitisation and later on climate change. In both cases, "*movement parties*" (see type 5 below) were at an advantage as these topics were integral parts of their core principles despite pursuing a narrower programmatic approach in general. The electoral parties that had achieved their goal of leading or participating in a government were strengthened by the Covid-19 crisis and thus fulfilled this second core function of parties. As electoral parties are ideologically or programmatically more flexible, it is easier for them to form government coalitions. In cases where the party's ideological basis or programme does not encourage identification with an electoral party, its leaders play an important role.

In Germany, the people's parties still retain a political-ideological brand and thus the affiliation to a party family. This makes them distinctive in a certain way. Typical "people's parties" include the *Christian Democratic Union* (CDU) and the *Social Democratic Party* (SPD). Both parties defend their core political-ideological profiles, but at the same time have developed into highly professionalised member and voter parties. As a result of this gradual de-ideologisation, they have adapted their political content to be more closely aligned with public opinion as determined by the media and polls. At least the CDU continues to enjoy electoral success, whilst the SPD has been increasingly losing voters for several years. Few other electoral parties in Europe have achieved this degree of professionalisation in terms of organisation and communication. Similarly,

in Britain, the *Conservative Party* and the *Labour Party* have largely maintained their status, with the electoral system there favourable to these two parties. In Spain, the socialist *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE) and the conservative *Partido Popular* (PP) have lost their former dominant roles. This is also true, for example, of the *People's Party* (ÖVP) and the *Social Democrats* (SPÖ) in Austria, even though the ÖVP has been gaining popularity again recently, not least because of its youthful leader Sebastian Kurz. Where electoral parties tend to rely on polls and professional advisors for their political and strategic decisions due to a diminished membership no longer serving as a sounding board for political sentiment, this has been associated with a weakening of their representational function. They can still win elections with this strategy and have the possibility of picking up on sentiments and opinions from the citizenry. However, their loss of votes in many countries shows certain limits of this strategy. The vote shares that were common three or four decades ago are hardly achievable any more.

There are other sub-types of electoral parties that deserve special mention. First, programmatic parties that have a certain resemblance to the earlier mass parties and today's popular parties. Programmatic parties pursue a more pronounced, coherent programmatic or ideological agenda that is embedded in their legislative and political agenda. In a majority electoral system with fiercer competition for individual mandates, a programmatic party must be somewhat more flexible or moderate in its political positions to attract enough voters. However, programmatic parties will represent their political positions and demands more clearly compared to other electoral parties, which remain programmatically vague so as not to deter voters. Even when taking over or supporting a government, a programmatic party will remain committed to its core values. Another hallmark of this type of party is its clearly defined social base and links to like-minded civil society organisations. In elections, it focuses on mobilising its core group of the electorate whilst appealing to voters outside of its core reach only to a limited extent. This type of programmatic party includes, for example, the *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN) in Mexico, the *Democratic Progressive Party* (DPP) in Taiwan, and the *Civic Democratic Party* (ODS) in the Czech Republic.

The so-called entrepreneur or business parties mentioned above form another group of electoral parties. In recent decades, such parties have been founded in many places by wealthy entrepreneurs or groups of companies.

These types of parties tend to have a weak organisational structure, a small number of members, and a programme that essentially focuses on representing the interests of their founders. The best known of these business parties is perhaps *Forza Italia* of the Italian entrepreneur Silvio Berlusconi, who served as Italy's prime minister four times between 1994 and 2011 and was elected to the European Parliament in 2019 at the age of 83.

Since the 1990s, business parties have played a significant role in Latin America. In almost all countries there, powerful corporate groups, including breweries, supermarkets, agricultural companies, and finance and media companies, have either set up parties themselves or have supported their creation through financial sponsorship. Of the estimated 278 parties that have emerged since the mid-1970s, 118 have had a business leader as their chairman and at least 20 were completely financially dependent on certain companies and their interests (Barndt 2014). These included, amongst others, *Cambio Democrático Super 99* (CD) in Panama (founder/owner of a supermarket chain Ricardo Martinelli was state president between 2009 and 2014), *Partido Renovador Institucional Acción Nacional* (PRIAN) in Ecuador and *Unidad Nacional* (UN) in Bolivia. At the height of the neoliberal economic reforms, business parties played an instrumental role in promoting the interests of the corporate groups associated with them. The rise of business parties was also facilitated by the general weakening of ties between parties and mass organisations, including trade unions. A problem and danger for democracy arises when a party system is reduced to competition between different corporate parties, as this threatens to degrade democracy to a vehicle for the implementation of corporate interests.

Finally, personalist parties, like business parties, are not interested in developing a broader organisational base or a concise political programme. Instead, they are geared towards their founder and chair, who uses the party essentially as a vehicle for the realisation of their own personal political ambitions. Such parties can be found more commonly in presidential systems and include, among others, the *Jedinaja Rossija* (United Russia) party of president Vladimir Putin in Russia, the *Pwersa ng Masang Pilipino* (PMP) party of former actor Joseph Estrada in the Philippines, the *Thai Rak Thai* (TRT) party of businessman and former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra in Thailand, and the *Movimiento Quinta República* (MVR), the first party founded by Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. However, personalist parties are also present in parliamentary sys-



tems and include, for example, the Freedom Party in the Netherlands, the *Lega dei Ticinesi* in Switzerland, and the *Věci veřejné* (VV, Public Affairs) and *Akce nespokojených občanů* (ANOA, Action of Dissatisfied Citizens) parties in the Czech Republic.

(3) *Elite-based parties* are formed by the elites of a certain territorial area or social class and are characterised by minimal organisational structures. Parties of local elites, clientelist parties, honourable parties (political parties that are essentially supported by the political activity of notables) and the business parties mentioned above belong to this category. All of these parties serve the very narrow, clientelist interests of a small number of elites and are usually led by a dominant party leader. Candidate nominations are carried out by the chairman or a few board members who in return expect absolute loyalty. The mobilisation of voters is based on clientelist networks. Material rewards and allowances for those at the lower end of these hierarchical networks are of great importance even though they often constitute little more than a small amount of money, a sack of rice, or a T-shirt. Local interests are of utmost importance in terms of social representation, whereby the aggregation of such interests primarily takes place in the form of agreements among the party elite, who decide which issues are important to the party. Accordingly, elite parties only have limited interest in the integration of different social groups. General social goals and interests, including the strengthening of the democratic order, are not considered or pursued as priorities by these parties. Maintaining public order is of priority to them if it allows them to pursue their particular interests.

(4) *Ethnicity- or religious-based parties* have different forms of organisation. Whilst some may have weak organisational structures, others share the characteristic traits of mass parties, for example the Hindu nationalist BJP in India, UMNO in Malaysia, or the (now banned) Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The most important distinguishing feature of this group of parties is the anchoring of their identity in apolitical traits, namely the affiliation with a specific ethnic group or religious community. Furthermore, their political goals are geared towards representing the interests of those who bear these traits. In contrast to nationalist parties, some members of this group of parties do not strive for administrative autonomy or secession but are content with utilising the existing state structure to gain advantages for their electoral constituencies. However, there are also many examples of religiously motivated parties aiming

to replace the state with theocratic structures, be it at the level of an existing nation-state (such as the *Al-Nour* party in Egypt) or in the form of a transnational pan-Islamic movement, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and its diverse manifestations in the Near and Middle East, which fights for the creation of a global theocratic state of all Muslims. In the case of parties based on ethnic distinctions, candidates are nominated by the party leadership or local ethnic elites, although competition within the party for nominations for seats in parliament or for posts in government offices may well occur. The mobilisation in elections follows more the clientelist pattern of dependence on vertical social networks and less the mobilisation strategies of mass or broader electoral parties. Like clientelist parties, ethnic and religious parties also focus on exclusive issues and only represent the interests of those groups or subgroups that share a particular ethnic identity. Examples can be found in countries and regions with strong ethnic identities, including Kenya, Myanmar, and several countries with strong indigenous parties in Latin America. The dominance of one ethnic group may result in a lopsided government, which may lead to conflicts with rival ethnic parties, as exemplified by Sri Lanka. The more that a party is focused on its ethnic profile, the less likely it is to represent the interests of those citizens who do not share this identity.

(5) *Movement parties* have emerged from social movements and have retained this character. In the first few years after their creation, the green parties in Europe, for example, still had a strong movement character whilst most belong to the established electoral parties nowadays. At present, movement parties in Europe can be found along the entire political spectrum. They include left-wing populist parties such as *Syriza* in Greece, *Movimento 5 Stelle* in Italy, and *Podemos* in Spain, but also right-wing populist parties such as *Golden Dawn* in Greece, the *Democrats* in Sweden, and *Vox* in Spain. The political-ideological programme of left-wing movement parties usually covers a wide range of topics. The left-wing populist parties take a stance against globalisation, the market economy, and the tutelage of state bureaucracy, and support social solidarity and a participatory democracy. The right-wing populist parties also oppose globalisation and its side effects, but they no longer demand democracy as a protective mechanism, but rather a return to nationalist measures of isolation and exclusion. The so-called Internet parties can also be counted among the group of movement parties.

(6) *Digital parties* represent a new type of parties that have emerged from the expanded digital communication options. This group includes, for example, the pirate parties in Northern and Central Europe, *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S) in Italy, and *Podemos* in Spain, which also define themselves as a movement. They simulate a kind of direct and participatory democracy by giving their members the opportunity to take part in discussions, electronic voting, and online training via online platforms and by raising donations online (Mosca 2020). A closer look at such parties and their internal procedures comes to the following conclusions:

[I]n both M5S and Podemos there is a clear discrepancy between the lofty promise and the prosaic reality of digital democracy: it is therefore doubtful whether these parties are more democratic than traditional political parties. While participatory platforms were presented as a way to disintermediate party politics and directly involve ordinary member in political decisions, their practice has been strongly plebiscitary and top-down. The participation of members has been severely limited in qualitative terms, often amounting to little more than a “reactive democracy” in which users are called to rubber-stamp decisions already taken at the top and crowd-source policy ideas, but with no binding mandate. (Gebauo 2019: 17)

These parties have introduced some (albeit limited) innovations with regard to the joint development of policy proposals. As comparatively fewer party members take part in virtual discussions on the Internet than in online elections and referenda, the legitimacy and representativeness of such virtual debates and their outcomes remain questionable. The decision-making process in digital parties reveals two forms of centralisation. On the one hand, many decisions are taken in the form of online plenary assemblies with practically no other form of debate as is customary in other parties. The discussion of certain matters in smaller expert committees, which would allow for an issue to be thoroughly investigated before a decision is taken, is mainly absent. On the other hand, the party leadership has the power to pick the timing of consultations, which grants it great influence on the outcome of the online debates. This form of centralisation also weakens the local organisational units

(such as sections, branches, or cells) which were previously responsible for membership recruitment and the maintenance of membership lists. Democratic pluralism, which is already limited in digital parties, is thus restricted even further. The potential for disagreement is heavily curtailed by this level of centralisation. Online voting leads to conformist behaviour resulting in approval rates of typically more than 80 per cent for proposals put forward by the party leadership. What we see then is the approval of leadership decisions rather than real choices between different options. Such procedures are reminiscent of the form of voting practised in the communist states of the former Soviet bloc or China. For example, to date none of the internal referenda held within the Spanish party *Podemos* have voted against any of the proposals put forward by the party leadership. Italy's *M5S* has only seen a small number of incidents where the party leadership did not manage to secure the support of a large number of its members. In practice, plebiscitary online democracy and digital parties thus fail to deliver on larger and more direct membership and offer little room for critical intra-party participation.

Examining the different types of parties from different perspectives confirms that an ideal type, which may be more conducive to the performance of a party's democratic functions than others, does not exist. Whilst the electoral parties may appear somewhat more random in terms of their ideology and programme, it is precisely this flexibility that allows them to address a wider range of changing concerns and issues that resonate with the electorate. The level of electoral success of a party thus primarily reflects its ability to convince the electorate of its capacity to represent their concerns in the political arena. Once a party is involved in government affairs, it should translate this capacity into practical policies. With a positive governmental record and effective representation, it can then hope for re-election. Importantly though, in the long run, the party must establish ongoing and lasting ties with the electorate that goes beyond just the election day.

## PARTY SYSTEMS

The different types of parties that exist in a country give an indication of the current state of its democracy and an outlook for possible future trends. This picture is further sharpened if we broaden our view to encompass the entire party system in a country. The pattern of relationships between the parties is significant as it reflects not only the relevance of the individual parties, but also the importance of certain political and ideological directions. The best way to grasp the composition of a particular party system is by looking at election results. After each national election, it becomes clear which parties and ideological tendencies are more strongly represented in a party system and which ones less so.

The characteristics, form, and composition of a party system determine not only the range of options from which citizens can choose when they cast their vote, but also the state of a country's democracy. In a parliamentary system, the number of parties represented in parliament influences the number of possibilities to form a government. In both parliamentary and presidential systems of government, this number affects governability because even presidential governments are dependent on political majorities in the parliament. Where a party system is characterised by a high degree of fragmentation and ideological polarisation, it becomes more challenging to form stable and effective governments. This in turn can undermine the legitimacy of the democratic system. Accordingly, it can be assumed that stable party systems are relevant for the consolidation of the entire democratic political system (Mainwaring and Scully 1995: 1).

The dynamics of a party system are reflected in the frequency and intensity of changes in its composition. Frequent changes concerning the political strength of individual parties and the alternation of individual parties in government responsibilities have been part and parcel of historical democratic processes. Changes that are limited to the fringes of a party system (for example, those that only affect small or extremist parties) do not pose a danger to the party system in general. However, democracy is at risk if change starts to affect those parties that form the key pillars of the democratic order. This may be caused, for example, by a sudden exodus of voters or the rise of previously fringe parties that hold populist or extremist positions.

A stable party system is desirable in terms of maintaining a stable democratic order. Stability, however, cannot be prescribed or constructed, and change and fluctuation are in fact an expression of the vitality of a democracy. Of course, sudden changes in the composition of a party system may be a warning sign. Therefore, it is important to maintain a healthy balance between stability and change.

Party systems can be classified according to different criteria, including: the degree of fragmentation, the strength of individual party camps, the distribution of power between the largest parties, the ideological distance (polarised or non-polarised), the type of competition (centripetal, i.e., oriented towards the centre, or centrifugal, i.e., oriented towards the extremes of the political spectrum), the intensity of competition, the distribution of potential voters (bipolar, centrist, etc.), the number of social lines of conflict (“cleavages”), the willingness and ability of parties to cooperate (“segmentation”), and the social anchoring of parties (“linkages”). The most common criterion used to identify party systems is the number of parties competing for power. In the past, a distinction was made mainly among one-, two- and multi-party systems, but given the dynamic nature of party systems, this classification can also be further differentiated.

### Classification of party systems

#### ► One-party system:

Only one party dominates the political discourse, and democratic freedoms are suppressed. In Cuba, North Korea, and Vietnam, no other parties besides the Communist Party are permitted. Although nine parties are registered in China, it is *de facto* a one-party system because of the Communist Party's dominance and the lack of real and open party competition.

► **Two-party system:**

The political process is dominated by two parties. Other parties receive a small, usually insignificant share of the vote and play no role in the formation of a government. Two-party systems exist particularly in countries with majority voting systems and presidential systems of government such as Ghana, Mongolia, Uruguay, and the US.

► **Multi-party system:**

More than two parties influence the political process. There are several forms of multi-party systems:

- **Dominated multi-party systems:** a large party dominates the political competition and solely forms a government whilst other parties are unable to form a real alternative. Countries, such as Angola, Belarus, Cambodia, Kazakhstan, Mozambique, Russia, Singapore, and Zimbabwe, with such party systems have authoritarian or semi-authoritarian political systems. The dominant party tends to shape (or manipulate) the political discourse in ways that make it unlikely for other parties to defeat the dominant party in elections. In Hungary, South Africa, and Turkey, some tendencies indicate that the dominant party may be abusing its position. In Japan, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) plays a very dominant role, yet respects the democratic rules of the game and lost power between 2009 and 2011.
- **Multi-party systems with moderate fragmentation:** although numerous parties take part in elections and parties with extremist positions are also represented in parliament, only three to eight parties whose programmatic or ideological orientation are not extremely divergent are considered for forming a government through coalitions. Countries with such party systems include Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden.

- **Fragmented multi-party systems:** numerous smaller parties coexist, but there are sharp ideological conflicts, which make forming a majority coalition difficult. Such party systems can be found in Chile, Costa Rica, and Indonesia. Similarly, the ideological conflicts in Belgium, Israel, Poland, and Ukraine are very pronounced, and they can also be considered polarised and fragmented multi-party systems.
- **Atomised multi-party systems:** there are numerous small parties formed by social, ethnic, or regional groups; their focus on the very specific, and often divergent, interests of individual groups undermines the willingness to cooperate and hinders the formation of coalitions or political majorities. This type of multi-party system can be found, for example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Haiti, and Malawi.

Whether a country adopts a two- or multi-party system depends on different factors, including, amongst others, social and political pluralism, political traditions, the development status of institutions, political culture, socio-economic conditions, regional importance, and denominational conditions. Finally, the right to vote has a significant, but by no means decisive, impact on the design of the party system. A majority electoral system is more likely to encourage the development of a two-party system (or a system with a few dominant parties), while a system of proportional representation is more likely to favour a multi-party system. However, there is no clear causal connection between the electoral system and the shape of the party system (see also Chapter 9).

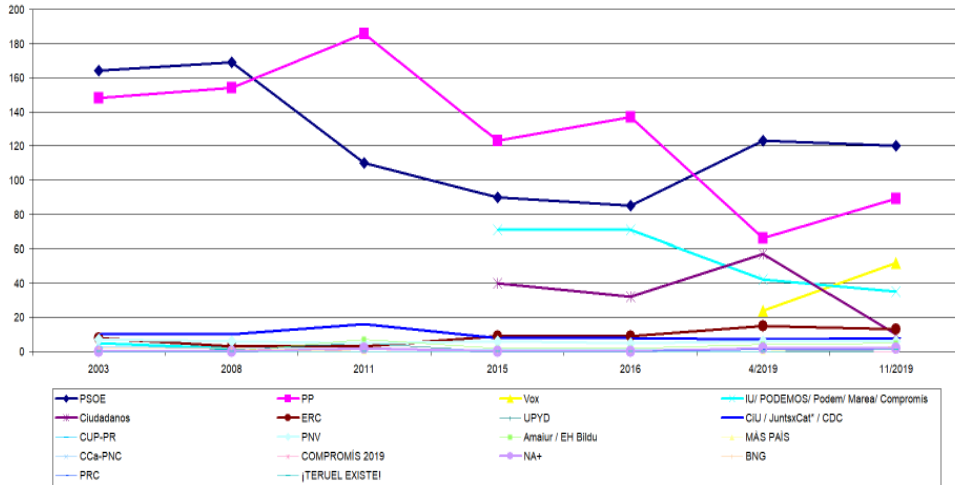
The fragmentation of the party system is caused by the weak representation of parties in parliament, the effects of which were described above. In fact, the fragmentation of both the party system and parliaments further undermines their ability to represent as most parties lack the support of a sizable proportion of the electorate.



Of great importance is the total number of parties that are successfully competing for parliamentary seats in a country. Big differences exist between countries with only two to four key parties and those with larger numbers of parties that exert political influence. The larger the number of parties, the more complex the relationships among them are, disregarding the actual size of the individual parties. Where several parties play equally important roles, political influence is exerted by many actors. The situation is further complicated when large numbers of parties are coupled with a high degree of polarisation whereby the political competition between parties no longer revolves around the political centre but is determined instead by extremist positions.

The example of Spain (see Figure 4) allows for the illustration of a dynamic party system and its possible negative consequences. Until 2015, the country had a two-party system dominated by the *Socialist Party* (PSOE) and the *People's Party* (PP). Since Spain became a democracy in 1978, both parties had taken turns in forming the government. Since 2015, however, the PSOE and the PP have lost their dominant position, with each holding only around a third (or less) of the electoral vote. In addition to the strengthening of nationalist parties at the regional level, a left-wing and a right-wing populist party – *Unidas Podemos* and *Vox* – emerged at the national level. The fragmentation of Spain's party system has meant that no stable government has been formed since 2015 and the adoption of the national budget was delayed for several years. In 2019, two national parliamentary elections took place within a span of six months, resulting in not much more than a minority coalition government with precarious stability. The transformation of the party system requires a different form of political discourse. The confrontational approach that dominated the interaction between the actors in the two-party system must make way for a new form of cooperation between different political parties. However, they have not been able to do so as at the end of 2020.

Figure 4: Fragmentation of the party system in Spain.



Source: Own illustration.

The example of Spain also illustrates that the lifespan and previous relevance of a party is by no means a guarantee for the stability of the party system overall. Whilst this correlation had initially been asserted with reference to the situation in Latin America (Mainwaring and Scully 1995: 32), the apparently stable party systems in Chile, Mexico, and Venezuela have since undergone significant changes. In other countries such as Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru, the party systems remain very volatile, with potential repercussions for the stability of their democracies. In Latin America, as well as other regions, two broad trends can be identified as exerting significant influence on the party systems. On the one hand, there is increasing polarisation, which is fostered by right-wing or left-wing populist, ethno-nationalist, and/or religious-fundamentalist parties. Where such parties achieve a relatively high share of the vote, they make it difficult for stable governments to form and govern. The second trend refers to the increasing personalisation of political competition at the expense of the parties. Political leaders who do not owe their political rise to a party do not care about its interests. It is not uncommon for such personalities to set up their own party as a kind of personal electoral association. If they end up in government offices, they take no account of party interests. Since they do not likely know the procedures of the political-parliamentary processes, they try to ignore them, which affects the reputation of democracy accordingly.

The effects of the party systems are shown in the following table.

Table 3: Advantages and disadvantages of party systems.

Two-party systems	Multi-party systems
Historically positive connotation. Two-party systems resisted the breakdown of democracy between the First and Second World Wars: UK and US.	Historically negative connotation. After the First World War, in Italy, Weimar Germany, the Spanish Second Republic, and the French Fourth Republic (1946-56), instability led to a crisis of democracy.
Effective. Produces governments immediately after elections. Governments are stable because they are formed by a single party.	Ineffective. Government formation after elections can be lengthy because of negotiations between parties. Coalitions lead to unstable governments.
Accountable. Because there is only one party in government, responsibility is clearly identifiable by the electorate.	Non-accountable. Because governments are formed by many parties, responsibility is obfuscated.
Alternation. Two main parties alternate in power. Voters directly influence the formation of the government, and a small shift can cause governmental change.	No alternation. Coalition negotiations are out of the reach of voters' influence and shifts of votes are not necessarily followed by changes of government.
Distortive. First-past-the-post (FPTP) system under-represents minorities and over-represents large mainstream parties of left-right.	Representative. Proportional representation (PR) fairly represents minorities in societies with ethno-linguistic and religious parties.
Moderation. Main parties have a chance to govern and thus avoid extreme claims. Need to gather votes from large moderate segments of the electorate.	Radicalisation. Allow representation of extreme parties. Some do not have any prospect for government and do not hesitate to radicalise their claims.
Discontinuity. Decisions are made by the majority and subsequent cabinets often reverse legislations.	Continuity. Decisions are made by consensus through consultations. There is more continuity in legislations.

Source: Caramani 2020: 240.

## PARTIES IN YOUNG DEMOCRACIES

Political parties, often in collaboration with other social movements, have played a central role as agents of political change in most countries that transitioned to democracy since the 1970s (Bermeo and Yashar 2016; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). In many cases, political parties worked with other social movements to mobilise people to demand democracy, but parties took over political leadership of the transition processes. The first and most important step towards democracies is usually elections, where political parties compete to become the government. These parties negotiate the terms of the transition with the representatives of the outgoing regimes and, if appropriate, form coalitions to agree on the terms of regime change. At the same time, political parties are also in competition with one another. The framework conditions for the stabilisation of the fledgling democracies have been (and still are) extremely difficult in many places, not only because of economic and social conditions but also due to social divides in many societies based on ethnic, religious, regional, and other dividing lines. Finally, new democratic governments and political parties are normally under extreme time pressure to produce results to legitimise the overthrowing of the old order and replacing it with a new one. This not only requires political skill, but also party members to put aside long-standing resentments and rivalries against other parties. In Chile, this was exemplified by the opposition to the Pinochet regime and the formation of the government of the *Concertacion*, an alliance of parties that opposed the military regime (Hofmeister 1994). In Chile, as in other countries with a highly polarised society, parties had to signal to the military and other groups that democracy did not threaten them. They had to reform the institutions and activate parliament, rapidly develop and put into practice economic and social changes, coordinate with international actors and, last but not least, explain to the electorate what was being done in order to keep them on side for maintaining democracy. Many party leaders were under pressure as they assumed important offices in the new governments with little or no experience in executive functions and these new responsibilities absorbed much of their time. Furthermore, there is a need to prepare for the next election campaign while meeting expectations.

Parties with more experience played a greater role than newly founded parties almost everywhere in these transition processes and in the years thereafter. However, trust in traditional parties have eroded to the extent that the performance of democracies fall short of people's expectations, and the parties and governments lose their credibility due to corruption, clientele politics, and mismanagement. In addition, in many societies in Africa, Asia and Latin America, traditional differences and divisions due to different nationalist narratives, religions, ethnicities, or regional identities have been accentuated again. This puts a considerable strain on the consolidation of existing parties and contributed to the fragmentation of the party system.

The following sections take a brief look at the party development of young democracies that were mainly established from 1990 onwards in various regions of the world. Three aspects of this development are worth highlighting: (1) the role of political parties in the democratisation processes; (2) some characteristics of the parties and party systems that contribute to the consolidation of democratic systems; and (3) the need for greater effort in consolidating the organisation of parties as a prerequisite to allowing them to fulfil their functions in a democratic system whilst also solidifying democracy in their countries.

## Sub-Saharan Africa

In Sub-Saharan Africa, while political parties were established in the second half of the 19th century, true party pluralism developed during the final phase of the colonial era in the late 1950s and early 1960s. As liberal democracy did not take root on the continent after many states gained independence, one-party military or authoritarian governments dominated for almost three decades. It was not until the early 1990s and the third wave of democratisation that multi-party systems emerged in many countries south of the Sahara (Riedl 2016; Wyk 2018; Basedau 2019). In countries like Ivory Coast, Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda, politicians who had already played an important role in public life founded parties. In Ghana and Zambia, party foundations were initiated by civil society organisations or networks. In several other states, including Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe (and to a certain extent South Africa), guerrilla movements came to power or were integrated into a new

constitutional framework and morphed into political parties. Despite these different origins, many parties had one essential feature in common: their ethnic-linguistic identification. Admittedly, ethnic differentiation was not always the key factor for party formation in most places, but it certainly played a more significant factor than social class, for example. Today, though ethnic political parties are expressly prohibited in most countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, voting behaviour is still very much tied to ethnicity. Though many parties portray an ideological orientation with their name, they are in fact parties based on ethnic (and linguistic) roots. In addition, religion also plays an important role in the founding of parties. It is to be expected that with increasing urbanisation and the growth of a new middle class, ethnic ties may gradually lose importance in some countries and allow space for the development of parties that are not based on ethnicity.

The creation of a political party was (and still is) largely motivated by the desire to obtain access to state resources by gaining political power via the route of participation in elections. In many cases, the establishment of a party is not in pursuit of a political programme but rather to enrich the party elite (Pelizzo and Nwokora 2017). As a result, they are usually most active in election campaigns when it comes to conquering positions of power and influence (Bob-Milliar 2019). Because the majority of parties in sub-Sahara Africa tend to have a weak organisational structure and lack a distinct ideological-programmatic identity, this focus on capturing government positions is a defining characteristic. Consequently, many only function as governing parties when state resources keep their machinery well-oiled. Opposition parties that have never been in government and have no major representation in parliament often cease their party activism until the next election. The building of party structures at the grassroots level, especially outside urban centres, naturally suffers from this practice. Many parties are therefore more like electoral machines. Only recently have there been increasing signs that (especially younger) party members are gradually taking on a more active role within their parties and trying to shape them into becoming continuously active organisations with their own programmatic profile.

Of course, this predatory behaviour has tarnished the reputation of the political parties and has weighed down the concept of democracy. Due to this situation, a paradox has developed. On the one hand, surveys show that more than two-thirds of citizens in Sub-Saharan Africa not only consider democ-

ocracy to be the best system of government in principle, but also support party pluralism (Mattes 2019). This also includes a belief that elections should be a competition between several parties and that there should be a political environment where civil society organisations are tolerated, and the provisions of the constitution (including the limitation on terms of office) are respected. At the same time, however, most Sub-Saharan Africans are disappointed with their democracies. The electorate have been disappointed by the behaviour of political parties and the fast and loose observation of democratic rules by many elected leaders, such as harassing opposition parties and civil society organisations, restricting rights and freedoms, and finally, violating the principles of free and fair elections.

Although elections are now widespread across the continent, there is rarely fair bipartisan competition conforming to the principles of democracy. Changes in power are still uncommon in many countries. Once a party has attained power, it usually defends it over several electoral terms, even when there is relatively open competition, such as in South Africa. Despite all the criticism of the behaviour of political parties and political leaders in this region, it is worth highlighting that the economic and social conditions in many of these countries make governance and the consolidation of democracy extremely difficult. For example, most economies are not diversified, the prerequisites for sustainable growth are precarious, societies are marked by considerable ethnic fragmentation, social and education systems are weak, and there are frequent natural disasters and epidemics.

It should also be pointed out that in Sub-Saharan Africa (apart from South Africa and Lesotho), presidential systems exist everywhere, which anyway promote personalism and presidentialism more than parliamentary systems.

Nevertheless, there are some indicators that democracy has taken root in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is not least due to the fact that political parties, despite their aforementioned behaviour, fulfil several functions decisive for the continued existence of democracies. These include giving legitimacy to regimes by incorporating political ideologies in their discourse, providing political leadership, ensuring opportunities for political participation, offering opportunities for the formation of coalitions (which effectively are the aggregation of interests) in order to maintain the government, developing programmes to socialise and mobilise people to be accustomed to self-help activities, and above all, ensuring political competition even within the elite over access to state re-

sources. It is therefore by no means only civil society organisations that spread the idea of democracy in Africa and groom people for politics. As on other continents, parties mobilise many people, especially at the local level, for political engagement in local councils or other organs of local self-government.

Although many parties are particularly active during election campaign times, they usually have a national party headquarters and other branches. This is at least the case in those regions of a country that are particularly important to them, such as the metropolitan areas of certain ethnic groups. Permanent employees who keep day-to-day party work going and plan and organise the election campaigns do so in national and regional party offices.

Party membership numbers can be high in some mass parties, such as the *African National Congress* (ANC) in South Africa, the *New Patriotic Party* and the *National Democratic Congress* in Ghana, and the *Rassemblement pour le Mali* party in Mali. Nevertheless, all parties have strict hierarchies and are not democratically organised. In fact, internal party democracy exists in virtually no party. As a rule, the party leader and a small party elite decide on the affairs of the organisation. This applies not least to the selection of candidates for offices. In addition, it is not uncommon for the wealthy to exert great influence on parties even though they do not formally hold a party office. Their influence can go so far as to supersede a party's decision making in parliament.

The financing of parties mostly depends on the personal assets of the party leaders or government grants, which are used for campaigning and, at times, for financing the lavish lifestyle of the party leader. In such circumstances, the chairman has undisputed authority over the organisation of the party committees and all relevant political decisions. However, as democratic politics become more established in Sub-Saharan African countries, there is also a growing understanding that parties need a broader institutional foundation. Along with the strengthening of civil society organisations and the expansion of parties to include women and youth associations, the pressure for the expansion and institutionalisation of intra-party democracy is also increasing.

For the time being, however, many Sub-Saharan African parties are still characterised by organisational weaknesses, limited internal party democracy, limited financial resources, inadequate programmes, clientelism, and fragmentation. Voting behaviour along ethnic lines makes it even more difficult for them to address groups across such ethnic borders. As many important parties have emerged from liberation movements, they often retain part of



their military character, their centralised structures and decision-making processes, and their solidarity with military veterans (e.g., the armed wing of the ANC in South Africa). This is especially true in cases where these parties took power during the transition to democracy only to continue to lead an authoritarian regime. The *National Resistance Movement* (NRM) in Uganda, the *Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front* (EPRDF) in Ethiopia, and the *Front Patriotique Rwandais* (RPF) in Rwanda fall into this category. In these countries, opposition parties are often weak and frequently consist of “recycled elites”. Effective opposition parties would have to demonstrate strong organisational cohesion, competitiveness, distinctiveness, and identifiability as well as the determination to engage in political debate to present a constructive alternative to the dominant party, which in many places is not the case.

What factors can contribute to building stronger and more cohesive party systems in Sub-Saharan Africa? Improving the quality and transparency of elections, and in particular enforcing open and equal competition between parties, could encourage political elites to invest in building electoral tools that overcome local differences and encourage stable party affiliation among voters (LeBas 2019). However, electoral law change aimed at “creating” more disciplined and cross-ethnic parties and thereby reducing the degree of party system fragmentation has had little effect. In Benin, it has led to a slow decline in the number of parties, and in Nigeria, such electoral engineering has driven greater cross-ethnic and cross-regional support for individual parties. The imposition of more competitive elections with close election results in Ghana and Sierra Leone have led parties in these two countries to strengthen their programmatic profiles and improve their internal leadership. Strong cross-ethnic mobilisation structures could serve as a basis for more socially rooted (and potentially socially accountable) political party organisations. This corresponds to a kind of social cleavage that has been important for party development in many places. In several Sub-Saharan African countries, trade unions played this role in the past, before the liberalisation of the labour market in the 1990s significantly weakened labour movements. However, other social associations exist in many places, such as rural cooperatives, housing associations, and professional unions in urban areas, which provide some potential for aspiring party activists, even if coordinating the actions of these various associations is difficult. Whilst churches – as one of the few social networks – can coordinate voters across ethnic and class lines, they tend to be reluctant

to make political commitments. Therefore, a better balance of power through more effective checks and balances between the executive branch and the legislature would be important in any case. Where the legislature (and thus the parties) is not dependent on the executive branch in elections, it can serve as a check against abuse of power and election rigging. In many established democracies, mass parties have emerged from originally parliamentary factions, and it is possible that a similar process could develop in Sub-Saharan Africa.

## Asia

Asia has also experienced a process of democratisation over the past four decades where the number of democratic countries has increased significantly. In addition to the older democracies of India and Japan, democracy has now been consolidated in the younger democracies of Indonesia, Mongolia, South Korea, and Taiwan, with South Korea and Taiwan being the most illustrative examples of how democracy and economic development can go hand in hand. However, over the last two decades, the consolidation of democracy has been disappointing, with an erosion of democratic processes observed in several countries on the continent, such as India, Thailand, the Philippines and Cambodia (IDEA 2019: 167). In India, attempts to exert political influence on the judiciary, the curtailment of the room for manoeuvre of civil society organisations and, last but not least, the persecution of religious minorities are all fuelling criticism about the state of the world's "largest democracy", as it likes to present itself.

There are so-called "hybrid regimes" in several Asian countries where formal democratic rules are followed in different ways, but also where certain preconditions for democracy are very weak and political freedoms are suppressed. Free and fair elections do not take place in these countries and the checks and balances either do not work or are limited. Countries like Bangladesh, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, and Sri Lanka belong to this group. In other countries such as Cambodia and Thailand, and the Central Asian states of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, democratisation has come to a halt with authoritarianism now returning. In China, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam, no attempt had been made to introduce representative democracy. With the

exception of Singapore, politics practically everywhere in Asia — both in the democratic and the non-democratic countries — is characterised by endemic corruption where political decisions are often made based on payments by individuals or corporations.

In addition, not only has nationalism gained in importance in traditional democracies such as India and Japan, but religion is again exerting a considerable influence on politics. This applies not only to Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia, but to Buddhism in Myanmar and Sri Lanka as well.

In this context, political parties have so far only played an important role in promoting democracy in a few countries. Party systems in Asia are as diverse as the political systems. However, despite individual differences, many party systems in Asia (especially in liberal democracies) have been characterised by increasing fragmentation over the past few decades, and this process is likely to become even more severe (Lye and Hofmeister 2011). This can be observed in India, for example, where the formerly dominant INC party has recently had difficulties maintaining its position as the dominant force of opposition at both the national and regional levels. The BJP party of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with its ideology of Hindu nationalism, continues to dominate politics in India.

The overthrowing of colonial rule was a key motive for the creation of political parties in many Asian countries. The representation of certain social classes only played a role in isolated cases. Although the Marxist parties founded in many places from the 1920s onwards represented a social agenda, there was for a long time no organised workforce that could have served as a catchment of support for such parties. Remarkably, the People's Action Party (PAP) in Singapore was one of the few parties in Asia that, at its founding in 1954, represented a clear social agenda alongside anti-colonialism, standing up for trade unions and workers' rights (Tan 2011). This was not least due to the experience of its co-founder Lee Kuan Yew, who became aware of the Labour Party in the UK whilst studying in England and who, after his return to Singapore, worked as a lawyer for trade unionists and persecuted students. For some time now, the PAP has shed its character as a party of the workers. Many of the original political freedoms existing at the time of Singapore's first free elections in 1959, won by the PAP, have also fallen victim to the authoritarian regime that developed after the republic's independence in 1965.

The Philippines was one of the first countries of the third wave of democratisation in Asia after the dictator Ferdinand Marcos was driven out by the People Power Revolution in 1986. It adopted a democratic constitution in 1987 and is the oldest democracy in Southeast Asia. Nonetheless, with the election of President Rodrigo Duterte in 2016, the country's democratic political order has been eroding because of systematic human rights violations by law enforcement officers in a "war" against drug traffickers, the curtailment of the freedom of the press, and the state's increasing influence on the judiciary. This erosion of democracy is the result of the inadequate institutionalisation of parties and the lack of a stable party system (Martínez Kuhonta 2016: 61 ff.; Gonzalez 2011). The country's parties have no connection to any social class or movement, and they do not try to represent any particular social group, apart from those who represent the interests of the traditional upper class. Most parties are personality-driven and the practice of clientelism dominates politics. Parties are primarily formed and shaped to support a presidential candidate. The bond between politicians and "their" party is very superficial. After each election, there are numerous changes in favour of the party or parliamentary group of the victorious president. No attention is paid towards building a permanent and stable party organisation. Parties remain weak and, under these circumstances, it is impossible for a large group of voters to be tied to a particular party.

In Thailand, during the various moments when the country had a democratic government, no parties with coherent and stable organisational structures were established. This was not only due to the repeated military interventions and coups against democratically elected governments, but also because the country's political parties were usually organisations in the service of personalities who were not committed to any ideology. As the country was never colonised, there was no breeding ground for an anti-colonialist party. Furthermore, Marxist and communist groups were persecuted, and no other political ideology was adopted. For a long time, political parties had no connection to a specific social class. Political parties largely existed as a means for their leaders to gain public office to enrich themselves. This is exemplified by the fact that most parties in Thailand have been led by businessmen or ex-generals who had become businessmen. The *Thai Rak Thai* party of the telecommunications mogul Thaksin Shinawatra is a well-known example. Thaksin was prime minister from 2001 until a coup in 2006. During his reign, he gained

great popularity, especially among the rural population, with a programme to expand access to healthcare, a debt moratorium for farmers, and small loans to promote small- and medium-sized businesses in structurally weak areas. Thaksin's rural support base helped him in his conflicts with the urban middle and upper classes and gave him and his party (or, after it was banned, a successor party) clear victories in the elections of 2005 and 2011. For the first time, there was a kind of connection between a social class and a political party – and the urban middle and upper classes, which rose against Thaksin, also invented their own political movement. Nevertheless, it would be too far of a stretch to hold that these parties were solely based on class as the disagreement between them was primarily directed at Thaksin's personality. Since the coup in 2014, this type of party formation has become obsolete, and the 2019 elections only served to legitimise an authoritarian regime.

In the Republic of Korea, a relatively stable party system has developed since its democratisation in 1987. Numerous parties are constantly being established and running in elections – no fewer than 50 parties were registered for the parliamentary elections in April 2020. The difference between parties is essentially based on ideological differences. Political competition is dominated by a conservative camp and a liberal camp. Social democrats and parties of the left are of secondary importance. The conservative and liberal parties have alternated with each other in state and government leadership several times over the past few decades. Due to various corruption scandals that damaged their reputation, and because of internal conflicts, they have been renamed and reorganised several times. The renaming and reorganisation of these parties have done little to alter the fundamental ideological orientation of the parties. The electoral system of South Korea is organised to favour the development of two political camps. A total of 253 of the 300 MPs are elected in single constituencies with a first-past-the-post system whilst the remaining 47 seats are distributed based on vote share. The lion's share of directly elected single constituencies is usually taken by the two dominant parties who have further entrenched their position by designing a system where they benefit most from state funding. Despite the peculiarities of party politics in South Korea, democracy is now firmly rooted, and the country is now one of the most stable democracies in Asia. There is open party competition with regular free and fair elections and voters' ties to the parties of the various camps are very stable. The parties enjoy a high degree of legitimacy to fill the most important

state offices and to exercise power. They have also achieved a level of organisational resilience that guarantees their continued existence (Lim 2011: 236).

Like South Korea, Taiwan has also seen a stable two-party-dominated system emerge after its democratisation in 1988. The differences between these two parties are largely based on their views of independence (Shyu 2011). Earlier social and cultural cleavages between, on the one hand, immigrants from the mainland and democracy advocates and, on the other, the original Taiwanese of the island and supporters of the nationalist KMT party (which led an authoritarian regime until 1988) have fallen to the wayside. Besides their differences on independence, a discussion on corruption – which affects the two dominant parties KMT and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) equally – can sometimes enter the political arena. The electoral system favours a two-party system despite there being more registered parties, though it should be stressed that this has not harmed the consolidation of democracy.

Indonesia today is the best example in Southeast Asia of a successful transition from a longstanding authoritarian regime to a democracy. April 2020 saw the fifth general election and the fourth direct presidential election since regime change took place in 1998. All elections were free and fair, and their results and the transfer of power were accepted by the electorate. Unfortunately, the practice of buying votes is still employed by all parties and candidates nationwide and is one of the reasons for high election campaign costs. There is, however, indication that many voters are not voting according to payments they receive. The first election of President Jokowi in 2014 and his re-election in 2019 were held as proof of a decentralisation of politics in the sense that he was a political outsider. He first came to prominence as the mayor of a provincial city and then as the governor of the capital Jakarta. When he was elected in 2014, he started a programme focusing on improving health and education, economic reform, and respect for human rights. The country's party system is stable and the number of parties in parliament is limited to nine. However, there are many cases of corruption among parliamentarians, and the stability of the party system is also a result of the great influence of party cartels. Despite the progress made in consolidating democracy, there were allegations against President Jokowi before the April 2019 elections of an alleged authoritarian turn and withdrawal from democracy (Bland 2020). This charge is based on an increasing restriction of criticism of the government through authoritarian laws, a waning determination in the fight against corruption, the promo-

tion of conservative Islamist identity politics, and the strengthening of the role of the military in the government. These developments threaten the progress made so far.

## Latin America

Following the US and Europe, Latin America has the longest experience with democracy, dating back to the first half of the 19th century when countries of this region became independent. Since their formation, political parties have found themselves the victims of both military coups and authoritarian governments on the one hand and, on the other, the key drivers in the development of democratic governments. During democratisation in the 1980s, parties were the central political actors (Mainwaring and Scully 1995). The democratic transition process took place almost everywhere in Latin America through elections where parties were the central drivers. They themselves promoted electoral and party laws that continued to secure their central roles in politics. The new democracies in Latin America thus became party states (Zovatto 2018: 291 ff.) even whilst presidential systems existed in all countries.

Nevertheless, from the beginning of democratisation in the 1980s, the party systems of many countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Uruguay, remained largely stable for circa thirty years. Most of the dominant parties during this period continued to play an important role in politics and have had success in getting candidates elected as presidents and forming governments (Freidenberg 2016). However, not all parties and party systems have survived the various crises and challenges of the last few decades, stemming from social and technological changes. Even countries like Brazil and Chile, which until a few years ago were considered stable, are now experiencing political crises that are impacting party systems.

The party systems of the Andean countries of Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela experienced the most radical change. The *Acción Democrática* (AD) and *Partido Socialcristiano* (COPEI) parties in Venezuela, the *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana* (APRA) party in Peru, and the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (MNR) party in Bolivia, which had dominated for decades, slipped into insignificance within a few years and were replaced by political

outsiders. This was not only the result of a crisis of representation but also an expression of exasperation by the electorate about the way politics overall was being conducted. Voters of these countries turned away not only from individual parties but from politics in general.

Venezuela is certainly the most spectacular case in this context, not only because its party system was extraordinarily stable for so long, but also because the country has been a model example of the consolidation of democracy in Latin America since the early 1960s – not least because of its party system. Venezuela was one of the very few countries in Latin America that did not have a military government after 1964. By the end of the 1990s, citizens no longer felt represented by the traditional parties and chose, instead, Hugo Chavez, who tried to establish “Bolivarian socialism of the 21st century”. His rise heralded a new form of political polarisation that did not exist in the decades of dominance by the AD and COPEI parties. Although both parties had represented (moderate) political and ideological differences, they shared a broad consensus on the basic patterns of politics and replaced each other several times in the leadership of the state and government. This consensus was then broken by a new polarisation between government and opposition. Chavism culminated – as is almost inevitably the case with populist regimes – in an authoritarianism that other political parties find themselves unable to escape from.

In Bolivia and Peru, the mass parties MNR and APRA, respectively, now only play a marginal role in politics after decades of dominance. In their place, outsiders and newcomers took on leading roles in both countries. In Peru, apart from the ideology of *Fujimorismo*, which unites the supporters of the former president Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000), no other party has been able to firmly establish itself. Parties have essentially become election machines that reinvent themselves after each election but do not build a permanent presence. Owing to this, the country has been described as a “party-free” democracy (Levitsky and Cameron 2003). In Bolivia, the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) indigenous party assumed dominance after Evo Morales’ 2006 election victory – a dominance that was lost after President Morales was forced to resign from office in November 2019. In the elections in October 2020, MAS’s presidential candidate Luis Arce celebrated a brilliant victory and the party won an absolute majority in both chambers of parliament. In Ecuador, the former party system no longer exists. A new party system emerged during Rafael Correa’s



presidency (2007-17). This new system is one dominated by *Alianza PAIS* – a dominance that has survived the replacement of its leader, President Correa. The resolved abolition of the “*no-reelección*” (non-re-election) of parliamentarians provides the political process additional continuity and stability. So far, this ban on immediate re-election has resulted in many inexperienced MPs sitting in parliament in every legislative period. These inexperienced legislators showed themselves to be ignorant of procedures and unfamiliar with the history of certain matters, and accordingly made erratic decisions and passed unsuitable laws. These practices have contributed to the loss of the parties’ ability to put forward their positions and the resultant crisis of confidence in the political system.

In a second group of countries in Central America, including Honduras, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama, as well as the South American states of Brazil and Chile, the changes in party systems were not as dramatic as that of the Andean states, though they did impact specific parties. In most cases, there was an increase in the number of political parties in parliament and previously dominant parties either lost their importance or were largely replaced by newcomers. It should be noted though, that many new parties were often set up by former leaders of previously established parties. In many cases, the character of political competition, political and party pluralism, the relationship between the parties, and the outcome of election results have not changed fundamentally despite the presence of more parties. The political elites have remained largely the same despite new party names. The situation in Guatemala is similar but the stability of the party system is fragile and voter volatility is high. Elections in Guatemala tend not to lead to decisive change and the dominant elites remain in power.

Up until the 2014 election, Brazil was a typical example of a party system where political competition led to cosmetic rather than substantive change. Since the 1990s, the number of parties represented in the two houses of Congress has grown slowly to around 15 parties in the Senate and 20 in the House of Representatives during the first decade of the new century. The largest share of seats always went relatively equally to four parties – *Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* (PMDB), *Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira* (PSDB), *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT), and *Democratas* (DEM). In addition, even under the left-wing President Lula da Silva (2003-11), the characteristics of the political process did not change. As his *Partido de Trabalhadores* never had a

majority in the fragmented parliament, Lula had to come to terms with other political forces in the customary manner, which meant that every legislative proposal required a painstaking search for majority support which could only be attained through concessions. In the first years of his presidency, the system was accelerated by paying numerous MPs an extra stipend for unobstructive behaviour towards government proposals. The discovery of these illegal payments financed through the misuse of public funds, known as *mensalão*, almost cost Lula the presidency. However, it was not until the economic crisis that began in 2014 and the simultaneous exposure of numerous corruption scandals that narrow limits were placed on the clientelist system of exchanging concessions with MPs and senators for good political behaviour.

In the 2014 elections, the number of parties represented in parliament increased to 28 and the four historically dominant parties collectively received only two-fifths of the votes. The shift in power did not occur in the Senate as elections for the Senate only allow for partial renewal. With this fragmentation of parliament, President Dilma Rousseff found it difficult to negotiate a political majority for her government – a failure that contributed significantly to her impeachment in 2016. The frustration of many Brazilians over the corruption scandals involving all major parties led to the election of the populist politician Jair Bolsonaro as the new president in 2018, making his then completely insignificant *Partido Social Liberal* (PSL), with 12 per cent of the votes and 52 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, the second most important party in the country. The other three formerly large parties each received around six per cent of the votes, as did five other parties, some of which only existed for a relatively short time. Since the 2018 elections, the country's ability to govern has been challenged on two major fronts. First, the further fragmentation of parliament and the party system makes it much more difficult to implement coherent political and legal projects. Second, Bolsonaro presents himself – much like Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines or Donald Trump in the US – as an anti-establishment politician (despite being part of the establishment as a member of parliament for decades). He and his followers openly sympathise with military dictatorship. Due to the lack of a clear majority in parliament, an independent judiciary, a strong system of decentralised government stemming from federalism, and an independent media, the likelihood of a relapse of the country to authoritarianism or semi-authoritarianism is low. Regardless, the developments in Brazil are a good example of how apparently stable party

systems can be shaken if the parties are not able to fulfil their function as representatives of the people. As citizens fail to understand the degree to which corruption and clientelism are endemic in the politics of Brazil, they have little patience with the traditional parties, which may ultimately lead to gains for the populists.

The experience of Chile, once considered an example par excellence of the consolidation of democracy in Latin America, shows how quickly political systems can fall into crisis. After democratisation, institutional regulations forced parties to seek understanding and consensus on important decisions and laws. As this was not always possible, it not only paralysed many reform projects but also contributed to the fact that the political elite remained largely the same. It was not until the mass protests of 2019 that large sections of the population expressed dissatisfaction with the political class to a degree not foreseen by any party. Populist politicians and parties immediately emerged, trying to profit from the dissatisfaction of many citizens. The protests were appeased with a hasty promise by the government to start a process of constitutional amendment. However, it remains to be seen whether this will solve the problem of representation expressed by the protests. The necessary renovation of political parties to allow them to appropriately fulfil their functions for democracy cannot be brought about by amending the constitution alone.

A third group of countries, including Argentina, Costa Rica, Colombia, and Uruguay, experienced gradual changes to the party systems due to a few new or renamed parties as well as substantial alterations to the political competition that has not led to a degradation of democracy. In Costa Rica and Uruguay, the traditional two-party systems changed with the establishment of a third force. In Argentina, the traditional two-party system has been reinforced after the recent elections in 2019. In Colombia, the two-party system is likely to be permanently disrupted, thereby impacting the political competition. After the 2018 elections, 16 parties are represented in the Chamber of Deputies and 13 parties in the Senate, with the two strongest parties in both chambers now holding significantly less than half of the seats – a situation which is a challenge to Colombian democracy and governability.

Many governments in Latin America today do not have a parliamentary majority because of the fragmentation of the party system. Although coalition presidentialism served as an alternative for previous governments for many electoral terms, several countries are now characterised by periodic legisla-

tive paralysis and continuous conflicts between the executive and legislative branches. The personal pursuit of power and expectations of benefiting economically make political consensus difficult. To make matters worse, some parties and their leaders have rediscovered populism as a tool to attain and retain power. These populist parties pose a serious challenge for democracy as persistent poverty along with wide income and social disparities create an ideal environment for their rise.

Corruption and mismanagement are rife in most countries despite detailed electoral laws that regulate campaign expenditure, parties receiving considerable subsidies, and parliamentarians being comparatively well paid in relation to the average income. One of the main reasons for this is the high cost of election campaigns. The personalised electoral systems require large investments from candidates and parties that cannot legally be refinanced as legal income. Another cause for the high cost is the lack of transparency and detachment from the electorate. A host of issues contribute to this situation where the electorate and party members view the internal workings of a party negatively. They include: the quality of the candidates; the manner in which party leaders are elected; the distribution of power within a party organisation; the responsibilities of internal party bodies and associations and the profile of their leaders; the lack of parliamentary party discipline; the form of public accounting with regard to the manner in which political decisions are made; and the role of certain dignitaries or other groups in important decisions. Many parties have now been compelled by law to introduce internal elections for the selection of candidates. The selection is sometimes conducted at delegate conferences whilst some others take the form of primary elections for all members. In Argentina, all eligible voters can even participate in decisions about the selection of candidates for a party after being registered in appropriate lists. Such procedures have contributed to breaking up and decentralising the traditionally oligarchic structures of parties. This decentralisation has, of course, come with the price of a loss of party cohesion and harmony. The conflicts over candidacies have become more violent and often end in resignations and the splintering of parties. The attempt to expand internal party democracy has thus contributed to the fragmentation of the party system in at least some countries.

Given the weaknesses of the parties, it is hardly surprising that they enjoy a negative reputation in all Latin American countries. In addition to the inter-

nal deficits of parties mentioned, other issues faced have been the often-tense interrelationship between the parties and the media coupled with their distant relationship with civil society (Zovatto 2018: 99). Above all, however, the low reputation of the parties can be explained by the fact that many citizens do not feel represented by them, even though they may vote for them on election day due to a lack of alternatives. However, high volatility in voting behaviour shows an underlying pattern of dissatisfaction. The parties can only counteract this if they intensify their efforts in favour of building a strong and transparent party organisation.

## Eastern, Central, and Southeastern Europe

In the countries of Eastern, Central and Southeastern Europe, parties did not play a major role in promoting the transition to democracy in the former communist states (Enyedi 2006; Kitschelt 2001). Whilst they were major promoters of political change in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and earlier in the transition processes in Spain, Portugal, and Greece, there were no parties in the former communist countries that could have taken on this role. Instead, the political transformation here occurred due to an implosion of the political systems in the face of increasing economic difficulties. As the regional hegemonic power, the Soviet Union lost control of its vassal states, creating scope for civil protest movements demanding democratic reforms. The most well-known movements that promoted political transformation that spilled over to other states were the *Solidarność* trade union in Poland and the Civic Forum established by Václav Havel in former Czechoslovakia. It was only after the system began to change and elections were on the horizon that new political parties emerged.

The parties that emerged from the transformation processes were fragmented and highly polarised against the former communist parties (albeit using new names). This contrast marked a clear line of conflict and differentiation. As Western European states and parties exerted a great influence on the design and course of the transition in the post-communist countries, new parties based on Western European parties emerged in many places. In addition, other parties emerged without any reference to the West. These include, for example, nationalist and populist parties that tended to coordinate selectively

with similarly oriented groups in Western Europe, for example, even if their representatives in the European Parliament formed a common group.

After the first free elections from 1990 onwards, the new parties in these transition countries formed governments and showed themselves capable of fulfilling the procedural side of party functions. These parties still faced two difficult challenges. First, they had to carry out a transformation of the system, whereby they had to bring about constitutional, economic, and social changes without prior experience. Second, they had to contend with the fact that their societies were fractious. There was no organised civil society allowing parties to coordinate action with organised groups. In addition, most of the electorate were sceptical of the parties and lacked the willingness to join a party. These issues not only made it difficult for political parties to anchor themselves in society but also to build a strong organisation. Without a significant number of members and loyal supporters, the articulation and aggregation of political positions and preferences proved challenging, making it difficult for parties to fulfil their function as representatives of the people. Politics in this context led to low turnouts in elections and high voter volatility. It was not just voters that were fickle; many politicians also showed little loyalty to their parties, which led to frequent party defections as well as the establishment of new parties.

The weaknesses of the parties led to the rise of individual personalities. Some, like the Kaczyński brothers in Poland, Václav Klaus in the Czech Republic, Vladimír Mečiar in Slovakia, and Victor Orbán in Hungary, knew how to clearly brand their parties in the form of what can best be described as populist nationalism. This clear political position contributed to their parties achieving a politically dominant role – a role they continue to play in Hungary and Poland. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the parties of Klaus and Mečiar lost importance after they left politics. As for Poland and Hungary, it remains to be seen whether and how the current governing parties will continue to exist without their currently dominant leaders.

In the two largest countries in Eastern Europe, Russia and Ukraine, a party system of politics has not been institutionalised to the same degree as in Central and Southeastern Europe. Independent politicians in these two states who are not bound to a party tend to wield great influence because of their presidential systems. This is exemplified by the election victory of the actor and comedian Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the presidential elections in Ukraine in 2019. In Russia, where civil liberties have been increasingly restricted since the

election of Vladimir Putin in 2000, parties have never had much influence on the composition of the government since the end of the Soviet Union. As opposed to political parties, the main political actors for Russia are the military and security apparatus, economic interest groups, regional governors, and the executive branch. In Ukraine as well, the oligarchs as an economic interest group exercised considerable influence on the formulation of political decisions and goals for a long time.

Unlike in Russia and Ukraine, the political agenda in Central Europe is largely determined by parties. Like in Western Europe, the differences between parties in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia are highly politically and ideologically shaped. This may be attributed to various factors, including a relatively advanced socio-cultural development, a somewhat larger urban middle class that existed before communist rule, and the character of the transition process, which was largely determined by negotiations between the old communist regime and pro-democracy civic movements or, like in Poland, the *Solidarność* trade union (Kitschelt 2001: 306 ff.). In contrast, societies like those in Bulgaria and Romania, which exhibit a more agrarian structure with no workers' movement and a small urban middle class, experienced no strong opposition to the previous communist regime. In both countries, old communist elites were able to maintain their power for years and have a decisive influence on the form of regime transformation that took place. This gave rise to problems in the development and sustainability of a political system based on political parties.

Despite high electoral volatility and corresponding large fluctuations in the results of individual parties, the party systems of Central and Southeastern Europe are relatively stable today. This has to do with the fact that, despite their organisational weakness, parties have been able to develop a clear political profile based on distinct political programmes that allow voters to differentiate between them. In Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Romania, for example, anti-communism still plays a major role in the core identity of conservative and national parties. As such, the need for the development of new parties is low. In addition, the established parties in many places enjoy relatively generous state party funding, which allows them to employ full-time staff and maintain a broad infrastructure of local and regional groups, even with a small number of members. Success against such established structures is difficult for newcomers. It should be noted, however, that these established parties

are not strictly mass parties. They are usually led by a small party elite and the decision-making processes are to a large extent centralised and bureaucratised, with party headquarters usually having the last word.

The establishment of political parties does not mean diminishing voter distrust towards them. On the contrary, this mistrust remains high and is fuelled by, among other things, cases of abuse of office and corruption. For example, Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš had to resign as finance minister in 2017 due to allegations of tax fraud (though he was elected prime minister of a minority government in the same year and allegations of corruption and subsidy fraud of EU funds were still raised against him). In Slovakia, the prime minister and part of his cabinet resigned in 2018 because they were the masterminds behind the murder of a journalist who uncovered cases of corruption within the government.

Despite such events, parties in the countries of Central and Southeastern Europe have overall established themselves as drivers of political development. Their parliaments, which are largely dominated by parties, have become a central platform for political debate and decision-making. In doing so, they in turn affirm the position of political parties.

## **A comparison of the development of political parties in “young” democracies**

Although the remarks about the development of parties and party systems in different regions are necessarily kept very brief here, it is important to highlight both the similarities and differences between the regions. First, it should be emphasised that political parties play a key role in the consolidation of the democratic political order in all fledgling democracies. Some current analyses of the state of democracy (e.g., International IDEA 2019) look very closely at other social groups and fail to analyse the role of political parties carefully or systematically.

Unsurprisingly, democratic consolidation is influenced by the differences between parties and party systems. We can only summarise these differences in a very cursory and general manner by essentially following the system of Webb and White (2007), even if their remarks on parties and party systems are based on observations made a decade and a half ago. For example, the



high voting volatility in Poland observed in the past has not existed for several years because the *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PIS) has established itself as the dominant force in Polish politics in the past few election cycles. In contrast, the stability of the party system in Chile has meanwhile fallen victim to remarkable fragmentation. This indicates an underlying shared dynamic affecting both established political systems based on political parties and fledgling ones. Moreover, there are still too few comparative analyses of party systems in Africa to be able to make general statements based on reasonably reliable empirical data.

## The legitimacy of parties

If we judge the legitimacy of parties and their anchoring in society based on voter volatility, the number of parties, the electorate's identification with individual parties, voter turnout, and membership of parties, it must be concluded that many traditional parties are losing legitimacy in several countries. This is most clearly noticeable in the emergence of new, often populist, and in some places also, nationalist parties, which often present themselves as anti-establishment parties. This phenomenon is by no means limited to just one continent. Webb and White's summary of popular party legitimacy, which probably still holds true, is as follows:

New democracies remain more electorally volatile and fragmented than established democracies, while electoral turnout, partisan identification, and party membership rates are lower. Anti-party sentiment is universal in democratic society, though this is often about "soft" lack of trust in parties rather than a deep-rooted hostility. Where antipathy towards parties is harder, it is not always associated with a preference for authoritarianism, but rather, for a personalistic form of democratic leadership. The popular belief that democracy is the best form of government predominates within all types of existing democratic regime, though hostility towards democracy per se, and therefore towards competitive forms of party politics, is more prevalent in the recently transitional cases. (pp. 354-355)

## Party organisation

The larger parties, by and large, have established organisations at many levels of governments, or at least at the national level, and are usually well-financed and have professional staff at hand for assistance. This development is largely due to receiving state funding for political parties. Unfortunately, clientelism, patronage, and demands of personal networks are a consequence of having influential party elites who exert influence on state institutions and thereby influence laws and procedures, often for personal enrichment and political gain. Regular members in such a political context are unable to play a decisive role in many parties. Intra-party interaction and democracy are often unknown or non-existent and there are few systematic efforts to increase the number of members.

With a few exceptions, parties in these young democracies are generally not mass parties and it is difficult for them to retain a large base of voters over the long term. Retaining loyal voters has been made more difficult in an environment shaped by modern mass communication. With new channels of mass communication, parties have lost their position as disseminators of political information. The system of government also plays an important role. Many of the new democracies (at least in Africa and Latin America) have presidential systems that clearly promote the personalisation of politics and political competition at the expense of the establishment and expansion of a strong party organisation. Parliamentary systems, as seen in Central Europe and the consolidated democracies of Asia, offer better conditions for stable party systems. It has already been noted above that this phenomenon of personalisation and presidentialisation of the parties is by no means limited to young democracies. In this respect, the party models have converged, as was suspected a few years ago:

Although parties in old and new democracies may be seen to converge and together can be seen to represent a mode of party organisation which is clearly different from early post-democratising Western Europe, it might be the parties in the West European polities that are developing towards the standard currently set by the new democracies, rather than the other way around. In this sense, therefore, this perspective not only reveals what is differ-

ent about party organisational development in new democracies, but also highlights what has been distinctive about the trajectories in Western Europe itself. That is, it underlines the uniqueness of the emergence of parties as strong movements of society, as opposed to agents of the state, a path which is unlikely to be repeated in a different institutional context of party formation and a different period. (van Biezen taken from Webb and White 2007: Pos. 5448f.)

## The fulfilment of party functions

The insufficient anchoring of parties in society considerably limits their ability to aggregate, articulate, and thus represent social interests. In addition to the poor performance of party-led governments and corruption cases, this is a major reason for both criticism of and weariness towards parties, the volatility of voters, and the rise of new and anti-establishment parties.

Regarding recruitment and governance, there is no doubt that political parties play a major role in recruiting candidates and government personnel as well as running the business of government. In a presidential system in particular, the ties between individual candidates and their parties are not always close, especially where the candidates are appointed by the party chairman and not confirmed by members. In addition, in presidential and some parliamentary systems, political leaders in government offices often act autonomously without taking in feedback from their parties.

As for the mobilisation of political participation, parties apparently only exert an extremely limited influence on the promotion of political participation – a situation that is reflected in the relatively low turnout in many places. Whilst that need not necessarily be a problem for democracy, it may indicate low voter satisfaction with existing conditions. It does become problematic when new or even anti-establishment parties mobilise dissatisfied voters, including those who have not previously participated in elections, and the established parties lose their ability to mobilise.

Even though many party systems have changed since the first few years of the 21st century, one may still agree with this summary observation:

Parties are at their most feeble in those recently transitional democracies characterised by personalistic, candidate-centred forms of presidential politics. These countries, as we have seen, are associated with weakly institutionalised party organisations, low levels of legislative cohesion, and undue executive encroachment on the media. Clientelistic linkages may persist, and elite partisan affiliations rapidly turn over. Parties generally fail to play central roles in the articulation and aggregation of interests, and the party government model does not apply: to the extent that a democratic system of accountable government holds it operates in a candidate-centred way. This is not necessarily dangerous for democracy, but there are risks. Politics without stable structures of partisan conflict can be more susceptible to the dangers of populist demagoguery, and in the absence of popular or charismatic leaders, the resultant power vacuum can be sufficiently destabilising to encourage support for “non-political” forms of government. (...) As we have noted, moreover, the prevalence of the self-interested exploitation of state resources is commonplace in these countries, a phenomenon which reflects an uncertain commitment to political equality, and thereby significantly undermines the consolidation of democracy. (Webb and White 2007: Pos. 5531)

This should prompt parties to devote greater effort to developing their own capabilities. This primarily affects various aspects of party organisation, which are dealt with in the following chapters. A scientist from Indonesia concluded an essay on elections and parties in his country as follows: “Although democracy in Indonesia has developed positively in a procedural sense, more time is needed for the country to have a mature society that would be essential for a more meaningful and substantive democratic system” (Hadi 2011: 209). However, parties should not wait until their societies have “matured” before refreshing the way they are organised. As the success of populism in the US and some European countries has shown, even established democracies are prone to “immature” decisions by a supposedly mature electorate. The parties must “continuously refresh” themselves.

## CHANGES IN THE PARTY SYSTEMS IN WESTERN EUROPE

The democracies and party systems of Western Europe have long been regarded as models worth emulating in other parts of the world. A look at the party systems across the globe shows that organisational forms of parties and their programmatic orientations are often based on Western European models. Taking a closer look at the evolution of the European party systems may thus offer clues as to likely developments in other regions. In fact, the assessment of party systems in emerging democracies reveals some structural similarities.

Examining the development of Western European party systems, it is strikingly apparent that most parties have lost their popular base over the past few decades. As a result, party systems have become increasingly volatile, a development that has been accompanied by the establishment of two new “mainstream” party families and additional changes in the party spectrum. The two new party families in question are the Greens and the populist parties (Poguntke and Schmitt 2018). In addition, a few other outlier parties have entered the political discourse. In France, for example, these include President Emmanuel Macron’s *La République en Marche* party, which, due to its diverse ideological orientation, cannot be assigned to any of the established party families, even if its representatives in the European Parliament joined the Liberal Group. The so-called “pirate parties”, which temporarily achieved electoral successes in some countries as “Internet parties” and were also represented in the European Parliament, embody a new type of party because they have introduced new forms of internal party organisation, participation, and voting which do not align with the established procedures and processes of the traditional parties. In addition, their programmatic focus on the protection and expansion of digital freedoms does not fit into traditional ideological patterns. Finally, the European-federalist movement *Vol!t* was founded in 2017 and holds a seat in the European Parliament. With a relatively high percentage of votes from younger voters, it has achieved initial successes in local and national elections in some European countries.

From the 1980s onwards, the Green parties became the first major challengers to the established political forces in Europe. However, nowadays they

must be regarded as part of the political mainstream. Their firm anchoring in the party systems of Austria, France, Germany, and other countries signifies the fragmentation of the respective national party systems. This development is illustrated even better by examining the success of populist parties at integrating themselves into the party systems in almost all European countries. The first formations of this heterogeneous family of parties appeared in Denmark and Norway as protest parties against high tax rates in the early 1970s, followed a decade later in Finland and Sweden. From the 1980s onwards, populist parties established themselves in other countries on the continent. In the 2014 European Parliament elections, this group of Euro-sceptic parties won around a fifth of all parliamentary seats. In most Western European countries, the fragmentation of the party system that accompanied the rise of the populist parties has made it more difficult to form a government.

The rise of such parties gathered speed with the financial crisis of 2008, which led to conflicts over rescue and austerity measures in the debt-ravaged countries, especially in the south of the continent. Europe, defined here as the constitutional community of the European Union and its executive agency the European Commission, became the subject of political debate after decades of having been perceived as a bureaucratic apparatus. The populist parties utilised the criticism of the EU to protest against what they referred to as established elites. An additional boost to their popularity arose from the so-called migration crisis from 2015 onwards, which is exemplified by the increasing support for the German populist party *Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)*.

Whilst it is true that conservative and populist parties are also gaining a relatively high share of the electoral vote in the countries of Central and South-eastern Europe, it must be noted that the party systems in these countries have been marked by high levels of volatility in voter behaviour since the start of the democratic transformation process in the 1990s. The rise of populist parties is a relatively new phenomenon in Western Europe and can be witnessed in particular in those countries that were most affected by the crisis of the eurozone and the refugee crisis, including Italy, Greece, and Spain, as well as France and Germany, two of the EU's core players that held a key role in addressing those two crises. One may argue that their prominent role has caused upheaval within their national party systems. In the case of France, the traditional party system has all but disappeared and been replaced by new parties.

It is worth remembering that volatility does not automatically imply a change in the format of a party system. Every democratic election brings with it changes in the relationships between the various parties. The fact that individual parties may disappear and be replaced by new ones is also part of the normal democratic process. However, the party systems in Western Europe are now not only characterised by volatility but also by fragmentation. The result is that it has become increasingly difficult to form stable government coalitions. Whilst the process of fragmentation began in the 1980s, it has accelerated considerably with the onset of the eurozone crisis and the refugee crisis. It is important for politicians and parties alike to acknowledge the developments and to develop effective and timely countermeasures.

Socialist parties and Christian Democrat parties are most affected by the changing party systems. Many Socialist and Christian Democrat parties have long dominated the party systems in most European countries, especially after the Second World War. Today, many Socialist parties are but a shadow of their former selves, most notably in France. Christian Democrat parties have also lost their former dominant status in countries across Europe, including Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Italy's *Democrazia Cristiana* was dissolved in the early 1990s after decades of dominating the national political discourse. In Germany, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) suffered significant losses in the polls, and it remains to be seen how the party will cope with the imminent change in leadership following the stepping down of its long-term chairman and Chancellor Angela Merkel. After the 2017 elections, the country struggled to form a new government, which highlighted not only prevailing problems in the German party system's ability to govern, but also revealed a new pattern of ideological polarisation that is likely to put a strain on the process of forming a stable government in the future. In the UK, the trend towards further fragmentation of the party system, which became very evident after the 2016 elections, appears to have stopped following the last elections in 2019. It remains to be seen whether this will last.

The (Western) European populists have become somewhat more moderate in their behaviour towards the EU since the 2016 Brexit referendum and no longer threaten to leave the Union, as Marine Le Pen from *Rassemblement National* (RN, bis 2018 *Front National*) in France or Matteo Salvini from the Italian *Lega* had occasionally threatened to do in the past. For the time being, however, these parties will be able to hold on to their position in the respective

party systems of their countries. As climate protection is an increasingly important topic on the European agenda, the Green parties (along with other parties with an ecological programme) can be expected to make gains in future elections without, however, completely replacing the established parties. Where traditional popular parties lose voters, new parties emerge at the centre of the political spectrum, including in France or *Ciudadanos* in Spain. Finally, there are strong indications that some of the groups mentioned above may be able to secure a small niche in the party system and win political mandates in parliament. Volatility and fragmentation will continue to affect the party systems in Western Europe for the foreseeable future. This, in turn, poses challenges for the formation of government and the act of governing. Any party with ambitions to form the government must be committed to continuous reform.

### Questions to the reader for critical evaluation

- What kind of party system exists in your country?
- What changes have there been in terms of the number of political parties represented in parliament over the last five terms? What are the reasons for this development? What are the consequences of these changes?
- How can the political parties be characterised and how do they differ from each other? Which party type can the political parties be assigned to?
- How are political parties viewed and what contributes to their reputation? What are the developments regarding membership numbers?
- How well do the political parties perform the functions assigned to them?



# 3

## Ideologies and Party Programmes

### IDEOLOGY AND PARTY MANIFESTOS

Every political party has a programme that expresses its political goals and justifies its claim to power. Even politicians and parties who are primarily motivated by political power formulate ideas to justify their ambitions and differences from other parties. Voters demand to know which ideas a party or a politician adhere to in their approach to shaping the community. They may be rather narrow, focusing, for example, on the representation of the interests of a particular social group, municipality, or constituency. They may also be very ambitious, such as turning the principles of “freedom, equality, and fraternity” into reality for society as a whole. The motto of the French Revolution continues to inspire many political programmes and serves as a kind of guiding principle. No party will be seen as legitimate without submitting at least a rudimentary programme in which it expresses its political beliefs in the form of principles and innovative proposals. Such basic positions and programmes are often based on an ideology.

An ideology can be defined as follows:

a more or less coherent set of ideas that provides the basis for organised political action, whether this is intended to preserve, modify, or overthrow the existing system of power. All ideologies therefore have the following features. They:

- (a) offer an account of the existing order, usually in the form of a “world-view”
- (b) advance a model of a desired future, a vision of the “good society”
- (c) explain how political change can and should be brought about – how to get from (a) to (b). (Heywood 2017: 10)

Ideologies offer a perspective to understand and explain the world. How one perceives the world, society, and politics is dependent upon deeply rooted beliefs, opinions, and basic assumptions. Whether consciously or subconsciously, every person holds a particular set of political beliefs and values that guide and influence their behaviour. Political ideas and ideologies set the goals that inspire political activity. The pursuit of power by politicians and parties is usually guided by such principles, values, and beliefs. Power is then the instrument for implementing these ideas.

Whilst politics and parties may very well undergo a process of de-ideologisation, whereby emphasis is placed on pragmatic solutions instead of ideological positions, it would be incorrect to assume that ideology no longer has its place. Ideologies are still of great importance for parties to distinguish themselves from one another. However, they must be able to successfully adapt their fundamental beliefs to the constantly evolving challenges of everyday politics. The “end of history”, as proclaimed by American political scientist Francis Fukuyama at the end of the Cold War, did not occur. Fukuyama prophesied the global triumph of Western liberal democracy and its values (Fukuyama 1992). Instead, we find that traditional ideologies such as liberalism, conservatism, or socialism are still thriving whilst others, such as nationalism, are experiencing a revival of sorts. At the same time, new ideologies, including ecologism and feminism, are gaining political importance. Ideologies continue to inspire and guide newly emerging parties in the formulation of

their manifestos. To understand a party's political positions, it is thus useful to first examine its ideological foundation.

Political ideas guide politicians and parties whilst also shaping the nature of political systems. Government systems around the world differ widely and are generally associated with certain values or principles. Absolute monarchies are often based on deeply entrenched religious ideas, particularly the divine right of kings. The political systems in most Western countries, however, are based on liberal-democratic principles, which are inspired by the motto of the French Revolution (liberty, equality, fraternity). Western states usually advocate the concept of limited and constitutional government whereby the executive branch must be representative and subject to regular and fair elections. Traditional communist political systems, meanwhile, were ruled by a single party and rooted in the political ideas of Marxism-Leninism. The authority of the ruling Communist Party was based on Lenin's belief that the Communist Party alone can truly represent the interests of the working class. Even the mere organisation of the international community as a collection of self-governed nation states reflects the importance of political ideas, more precisely the idea of nationalism and the principle of national self-determination.

After all, political ideas and ideologies can function as a kind of social adhesive by imparting a set of unifying beliefs and values to social groups or society at large. Individual political ideologies have traditionally been associated with particular social classes (for example, liberalism with the middle class, conservatism with the rural aristocracy, and socialism with the working class). These ideas reflect the life experiences, interests, and aspirations of a social class and therefore help foster a sense of belonging and solidarity. But ideas and ideologies can also successfully bind different groups and classes within a society together. For example, most Western states share a common belief in the fundamental importance of liberal-democratic values, whilst Islam has established its own set of common moral principles and normative beliefs across Muslim countries. By imparting a unified political culture on society, political ideologies help promote order and social stability.

Ideologies cannot be understood as complete and self-contained schools of thought but instead represent a somewhat fluid set of ideas that overlap with and are shaped by other ideologies. This not only promotes ideological development, but also leads to the emergence of hybrid ideological forms, such as liberal conservatism, socialist feminism, and conservative nationalism.

Furthermore, every ideology contains several diverging, even rival, traditions and points of view. It is not uncommon for disputes between supporters of the same ideology regarding the supposed true nature of the ideology in question to be more passionate and fiercer than disagreements between supporters of rival ideologies. Such conflicts, both between and within ideological traditions, are made even more confusing by the fact that they often use the same terminology, including freedom, democracy, justice, and equality, yet apply different definitions to these political terms.

Anyone who is politically active should be familiar with the main ideologies. This is not only important to determine one's own position, but also to assess the political positions of others. The most important political ideologies are briefly presented below, each with an excerpt from the introductory book of Andrew Heywood (2017).

## Brief resume of political ideologies

**Liberalism:** its central theme “is a commitment to the individual and the desire to construct a society in which people can satisfy their interests and achieve fulfilment. Liberals believe that human beings are, first and foremost, individuals endowed with reason. This implies that each individual should enjoy the maximum possible freedom consistent with a like freedom for all. However, although individuals are entitled to equal legal and political rights, they should be rewarded in line with their talents and their willingness to work. Liberal societies are organised politically around the twin principles of constitutionalism and consent, designed to protect citizens from the danger of government tyranny. Nevertheless, there are significant differences between classical liberalism and modern liberalism. Classical liberalism is characterised by a belief in a ‘minimal’ state, whose function is limited to the maintenance of domestic order and personal security. Modern liberalism, in contrast, accepts that the state should help people to help themselves” (24).

**Conservatism:** “is defined by the desire to conserve, reflected in a resistance to, or at least a suspicion of, change. However, whilst the desire to resist change may be the recurrent theme within conservatism, what distinguishes conservatism from rival political creeds is the distinctive way in which this position is upheld, in particular through support for tradition, a belief in human

imperfection, and the attempt to uphold the organic structure of society. Conservatism nevertheless encompasses a range of tendencies and inclinations. The chief distinction within conservatism is between what is called traditional conservatism and the New Right. Traditional conservatism defends established institutions and values on the ground that they safeguard the fragile 'fabric of society', giving security-seeking human beings a sense of stability and rootedness. The New Right is characterised by a belief in a strong but minimal state, combining economic libertarianism with social authoritarianism, as represented by neoliberalism and neoconservatism" (62).

**Socialism:** "has traditionally been defined by its opposition to capitalism and the attempt to provide a more humane and socially worthwhile alternative. At the core of socialism is a vision of human beings as social creatures united by their common humanity. This highlights the degree to which individual identity is fashioned by social interaction and the membership of social groups and collective bodies. Socialists therefore prefer cooperation to competition. The central, and some would say defining, value of socialism is equality, especially social equality. Socialists believe that social equality is the essential guarantee of social stability and cohesion, and that it promotes freedom, in the sense that it satisfies material needs and provides the basis for personal development. Socialism, however, contains a bewildering variety of divisions and rival traditions. These divisions have been about both 'means' (how socialism should be achieved) and 'ends' (the nature of the future socialist society). For example, communists or Marxists have usually supported revolution and sought to abolish capitalism through the creation of a classless society based on the common ownership of wealth. In contrast, democratic socialists or social democrats have embraced gradualism and aimed to reform or 'humanise' the capitalist system through a narrowing of material inequalities and the abolition of poverty" (S.95).

**Anarchism:** "is defined by the central belief that political authority in all its forms, and especially in the form of the state, is both evil and unnecessary. Anarchists therefore look to the creation of a stateless society through the abolition of law and government. In their view, the state is evil because, as a repository of sovereign, compulsory and coercive authority, it is an offence against the principles of freedom and equality. Anarchism is thus characterised by principled opposition to certain forms of social hierarchy. Anarchists believe that the state is unnecessary because order and social harmony do not

have to be imposed 'from above' through government. Central to anarchism is the belief that people can manage their affairs through voluntary agreement, without the need for top-down hierarchies or a system of rewards and punishments. However, anarchism draws from two quite different ideological traditions: liberalism and socialism. This has resulted in rival individualist and collectivist forms of anarchism. While both accept the goal of statelessness, they advance very different models of the future anarchist society" (137).

**Nationalism:** "can be defined broadly as the belief that the nation is the central principle of political organisation. As such, it is based on two core assumptions. First, humankind is naturally divided into distinct nations and, second, the nation is the most appropriate, and perhaps only legitimate, unit of political rule. Classical political nationalism therefore set out to bring the borders of the state into line with the boundaries of the nation. Within so-called nation-states, nationality and citizenship would therefore coincide. However, nationalism is a complex and highly diverse ideological phenomenon. Not only are there distinctive political, cultural and ethnic forms of nationalism, but the political implications of nationalism have also been wide-ranging and sometimes contradictory. Although nationalism has been associated with a principled belief in national self-determination, based on the assumption that all nations are equal, it has also been used to defend traditional institutions and the established social order, as well as to fuel programmes of war, conquest and imperialism. Nationalism, moreover, has been linked to widely contrasting ideological traditions, ranging from liberalism to fascism" (163).

**Fascism:** "is the idea of an organically unified national community, embodied in a belief in 'strength through unity'. The individual, in a literal sense, is nothing; individual identity must be entirely absorbed into the community or social group. The fascist ideal is that of the 'new man', a hero, motivated by duty, honour and self-sacrifice, prepared to dedicate his life to the glory of his nation or race, and to give unquestioning obedience to a supreme leader. In many ways, fascism constitutes a revolt against the ideas and values that dominated Western political thought from the French Revolution onwards; in the words of the Italian fascists' slogan: '1789 is Dead'. Values such as rationalism, progress, freedom and equality were thus overturned in the name of struggle, leadership, power, heroism and war. Fascism therefore has a strong 'anti-character': it is anti-rational, anti-liberal, anti-conservative, anti-capitalist, anti-bourgeois, anti-communist and so on" (S.194).

**Feminism:** “is defined by two basic beliefs: that women are disadvantaged because of their sex; and that this disadvantage can and should be overthrown. In this way, feminists have highlighted what they see as a political relationship between the sexes, the supremacy of men and the subjection of women in most, if not all, societies. In viewing gender divisions as ‘political’, feminists challenged a ‘mobilisation of bias’ that has traditionally operated within political thought, by which generations of male thinkers, unwilling to examine the privileges and power their sex had enjoyed, had succeeded in keeping the role of women off the political agenda” (219).

**Green ideology:** “is based on the belief that nature is an interconnected whole, embracing humans and non-humans, as well as the inanimate world. This has encouraged green thinkers to question (but not necessarily reject) the anthropocentric, or human-centred, assumptions of conventional political ideologies, allowing them to come up with new ideas about, among other things, economics, morality and social organisation. Nevertheless, there are different strains and tendencies within green ideology. Some greens are committed to ‘shallow’ ecology (sometimes viewed as environmentalism, as opposed to ecologism), which attempts to harness the lessons of ecology to human ends and needs, and embraces a ‘modernist’ or reformist approach to environmental change. ‘Deep’ ecologists, on the other hand, completely reject any lingering belief that the human species is in some way superior to, or more important than, any other species. Moreover, green ideology has drawn from a variety of other ideologies, notably socialism, anarchism and feminism, thereby acknowledging that the relationship between humankind and nature has an important social dimension. Each of these approaches to the environment offers a different model of the ecologically viable society of the future” (245).

**Multiculturalism:** “is more an arena for ideological debate than an ideology in its own right. As an arena for debate, it encompasses a range of views about the implications of growing cultural diversity and, in particular, about how cultural difference can be reconciled with civic unity. Its key theme is therefore diversity within unity. A multiculturalist stance implies a positive endorsement of communal diversity, based on the right of different cultural groups to recognition and respect. In this sense, it acknowledges the importance of beliefs, values and ways of life in establishing a sense of self-worth for individuals and groups alike. Distinctive cultures thus deserve to be protected

and strengthened, particularly when they belong to minority or vulnerable groups. However, there are a number of competing models of a multicultural society, which draw on, variously, the ideas of liberalism, pluralism and cosmopolitanism. On the other hand, the multiculturalist stance has also been deeply controversial, and has given rise to a range of objections and criticisms" (S.274).

**Islamism:** "is characterised by, among other things, a revolt against the West and all it supposedly stands for. Some commentators, indeed, have gone as far as to suggest that Islamism is a manifestation of a 'civilisational' struggle between Islam and the West. The most controversial feature of Islamism is nevertheless its association with militancy and violence. While not all Islamists endorse violence, a doctrinal basis for militant Islam has been found in the notion of jihad, crudely translated as 'holy war', which has, since the 1980s, been taken by some to imply that all Muslims are obliged to support global jihadism. Islamism, however, has no single creed or political manifestation. Distinctive Sunni and Shia versions of Islamism have developed, the former associated with the related ideas of Wahhabism and Salafism, the latter with Iran's 'Islamic Revolution'. In addition, 'moderate' or 'conservative' trends can be identified within Islamism, characterised by the attempt to reconcile Islamism with pluralism and democracy" (299).

What all ideologies have in common is that they construct a kind of dogma that they use as a template to explain the world. Indeed, several ideologies claim to be able to explain the meaning of history. In addition, ideologies translate their worldviews into concrete demands concerning a desired shape of the political order and formulate concrete political demands that are in turn reflected in the manifestos of political parties. Many, perhaps even most, parties around the world follow an ideology more or less overtly. It is therefore important to know which ideology a party is associated with, not least because some ideologies reject important principles of a free democracy, such as pluralism of opinion and the freedoms associated with it. Several ideologies serve to establish authoritarian or totalitarian forms of rule.

Liberalism, conservatism, socialism, and communism and their respective sub-forms remain the ideologies most widely represented. For some decades now, ideologies that are guided by a religion, such as Islamism or Hinduism,



have also been important. The Christian religion has also stimulated various forms of ideology formation, although the spectrum here is extremely broad. Some Christian fundamentalist parties and movements (such as the American Tea Party movement in the US) interpret the statements of the Bible in a conservative way and derive direct guidance for their political manifesto from them. The Christian Democrat parties in Europe and Latin America, however, refer primarily to Christian roots in their anthropology and in their social policy proposals, but are otherwise open to party members with different world-views. Religious affiliation thus does not play a prominent role for them. In economic and socio-political terms, they sometimes represent quite different positions, which, however, mostly arise from liberalism or conservatism. For the Christian Democrat parties, the human being and his dignity form the core of a political order that must inform all political decisions. For parties linked to the ideologies of Islamism or Hinduism, the enforcement of relevant religious beliefs in the political arena, and accordingly, religious affiliation are important factors.

Whilst populism is sometimes referred to as an ideology, it is better understood as a method of gaining political power. Populists rely on a few key statements but lack the comprehensive worldview of other ideologies from which political programmes can be derived. Populism is utilised by a variety of parties and movements at various ends of the ideological spectrum to seize political power. Nationalism often appears in conjunction with other ideologies and is by no means limited to so-called extreme right-wing parties. Many parties that represent the interests of a regional or ethnic group borrow from nationalism to support their demands for greater autonomy or state independence and, last but not least, the largest communist party in the world, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) of China, also uses elements of the nationalist ideology to justify its regime's claim to power in the country and internationally. The corrosive consequences of this ideology are to be expected everywhere: "Nationalism favours the populist de-institutionalisation of political culture and endangers the stability of representative democratically legitimised political constitutional bodies in the constitutional state as well as at the intergovernmental supranational level" (Kunze 2019: 27).

## PARTY PROGRAMMES

Party programmes are often based on certain ideologies. However, they are by no means direct derivations as ideologies do not provide concrete guidelines for the structuring of political action. The best example of this is the implementation of the socialist ideology by the Communist Party in the Soviet Union. Marx and Engels, the philosophical founders of this ideology, did not describe how to organise a socialist society. Lenin, the founder of the Soviet Union, understood Marxism to mean that the bourgeoisie should be eliminated, all means of production should be nationalised, and power should be centralised in the hands of the government, i.e., the Communist Party. Other socialist parties, however, which also follow Marxism, have drawn different lessons for political practice. Party programmes, even if they are based on an ideology, are primarily a reflection of the political ideas of the founders and members of a party.

The following types of party programmes can be identified:

### ► The party programme

The party programme or party manifesto contains the principles the party represents (based mostly on ideologies) and the general goals it wants to achieve. Even if such party programmes, or declarations of principles, contain few or no concrete policy proposals and are not always mentioned in everyday political life, they are of great importance for the parties as they capture their respective political identities. The party programme is what distinguishes a party from its competitors, even though it may agree with other parties on specific political issues. Party programmes are designed for the long term whilst policy or election programmes serve short-term purposes, such as for elections or to elucidate the party's positioning on issues of current interest.

Party programmes are often drawn up by its founders during the founding phase of the new organisation. It is sometimes updated by a small group of the party elite or with the participation and approval of many of its members. Even if members are not involved in the revisions, there is usually a discussion and vote on the new programme during party conventions. The more the

members are involved in the process of drafting the party programme, the better they will represent it in public.

If a party programme is to be drawn up or updated with the broad consensus of one party, it is advisable to set up a committee that determines the topics to be addressed and develops a first draft of the programme. In addition to members of the party leadership and representatives of intra-party groups, such a committee may also include persons who – given their expertise as philosophers, social scientists, economists, or natural scientists, but also as committed members of certain professional groups – can make important contributions to the fundamental profiling of their party. The draft of a party programme developed by this committee can then be presented to party or specialist committees and then discussed with the participation of a large group of party members. The latter may be invited to express their opinion on the draft or on individual sections. Moreover, physical or virtual working groups may be organised, thus giving all party members the opportunity to express their opinion. The debate on a basic programme offers an outlet for the broad participation of members in internal party debates. If the draft programme is finally adopted at a national party congress, the party can achieve considerable public attention.

However, parties adopt different approaches to drawing up a basic programme. In some cases, the task of preparing a draft may rest with the party chairman and a commission before it is either adopted by acclamation by the party congress or simply proclaimed by the party leader. Levels of support for the party programme will always be highest if many members have been involved in its conception.

The programmes of parties with many members do not change very often because such parties are characterised by a strong sense of identity, and conflicts within the party about its fundamental programmatic or ideological directions are largely absent, thus making the need for changes to its basic programme redundant. In addition, reviewing and adapting the programme requires a high degree of coordination. This process may also be associated with controversial internal party discussions and the need for compromise, which may undermine programmatic innovation. It has been shown, however, that even with established parties, internal party pressure for a programmatic realignment increases in times of disappointing election results and dwindling membership numbers. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in Ger-

many serves as a current example, whereby a small group of party members is calling for a more conservative reorientation, thus not only exacerbating the internal-party conflict, but also promoting electoral volatility as some possible voters may be discouraged and deterred by a conservative turn of the party. Before starting a discussion about the renewal of its programme or ideological orientation, a party should first consider the possible consequences of such a debate (Hennl and Franzmann 2017).

Parties that want to appeal to as large a number and as broad a stratum of voters as possible – the so-called voter or people’s parties – should formulate and advocate clear concepts on at least three major policy areas in both their basic programme and their election programmes: (1) economic and social policy (what economic and social order does the party stand for?); (2) security policy (how does the party want to guarantee the personal security of citizens and the external security of its state?); and (3) justice within society (how does the party want to strengthen social cohesion and reduce inequalities?). If it offers coherent concepts on these three major areas and the related policy fields, it will retain a solid base of voters even if some of its candidates are not very popular.

Of course, there are many other issues that can dominate a country’s political agenda in the short or long term. These are, for example, the fight against diseases and epidemics, hunger and unemployment, education and training of youth, migration, climate and environmental protection, new identity issues and, in Europe, the reform of the European Union. Parties are expected to make policy proposals on all of these issues and flesh them out in their election programmes. But it is crucial that they understand how to frame their political response to such issues in the context of their major basic programmatic guidelines. This will give coherence to their policy offer during an election campaign.

## ► The election programme

The election programme is drafted before an election and contains concrete proposals and demands regarding the issues that a party wants to address in the upcoming legislative period and hopefully as leader or part of a future government. Election programmes must be redrafted before each election

and must contain proposals for several policy areas, with concrete goals and measures to achieve. However, even if a party underlines its broad competence by mentioning many policy areas, only a few topics are usually of central importance to an election. For this reason, a party should only highlight from three to a maximum of five topics in its election manifesto and expose them in its election campaign.

Parties must ensure a certain level of coherence concerning the content of their election programmes over the years. For example, those who have ignored climate change as a political issue for years will not be able to score points if they suddenly propose radical measures for climate protection in their election manifesto. Those who have traditionally promised tax breaks will not be taken seriously if they suddenly declare raising taxes to be central to financing investments in the social sector. The statements of an election programme must underline the competence of a party in certain areas and credibly tie in with the previous positions of a party.

Many parties do not invest a lot of effort into developing a party programme or an electoral programme because their success at the polls is largely determined by the performance of their candidates. Nevertheless, one should not underestimate the contribution of a programme to the development of a strong party identity. A party's programme serves to inform citizens and voters about its fundamental positions, and to demonstrate its ability to translate social concerns into convincing political proposals and programmes. Whilst traditional ties to a party or membership of a particular social group are important factors influencing voting behaviour, electoral analyses confirm time and again that it is especially the important group of "swing voters" that makes their vote dependent on a party's election programme. Each party should therefore attach great importance to the development of a coherent programme. In addition, the drafting of an electoral programme offers the opportunity to invite the party's own members to participate in the definition of topics and goals that are important for a party. On the one hand, this helps the party to listen attentively to the concerns of the society because party members know rather well the issues that are important to the people, and which should be addressed in the election programme. On the other hand, by participating in the programme discussion, members are mobilised for the election campaign.

## ► Position papers

In addition to their general programme, some parties prepare position papers in which they explain their positions and goals on individual topics. This applies, for example, to economic policy, energy policy, gender policy, youth and family policy, digital policy, climate and environmental protection policy, agricultural policy, and cultural policy. Position papers can be prepared in close collaboration with representatives of the various sectors addressed, thus creating close links between the party and important societal groups.

### Questions to the reader for critical evaluation

- Which ideologies are represented by the parties you know? How can they be distinguished from each other according to their ideology?
- What are the most important core statements of the ideology of individual parties and what political demands do they derive from it?
- In what ways do the parties orient themselves on their ideology and their basic values with their policy proposals on substantive issues?
- What are the most important topics of individual parties? What are they particularly committed to?

# 4

## The Party Organisation

A political party's organisation is its backbone. A meaningful programme and a charismatic leader embody the party's message and can mobilise voters. However, without a stable and efficient organisation, a party will not be able to develop and further sharpen its political profile in the long run, or to effectively convey the political leadership claims of its representatives. Successful parties are organised as permanent institutions that are not only active during election campaigns, but also continuously take a stand on political issues. Ideally, a party should strive for a sufficiently high degree of organisation with active party groups, local branches in many, if possible all, parts of a country, updated members, and close exchange with other social groups. Opposition parties require stable and functional organisational structures because they lack the various forms of representation that governing parties and their representatives have at their disposal. Parties that neglect their organisation, or that lack the means to establish permanent organisational structures, are disadvantaged in the political competition. To maintain, expand, and adapt its organisational structure to new political and social framework conditions pose a perennial challenge for every party. Today, this includes the use of digital technologies and media, not only for communication with members and citizens but also for internal procedures and processes, such as the organisation of digital party congresses.

In addition to a functional, formal structure, five factors are of central importance to the organisation of a party, namely, members, professional employees, local associations, financial resources to cover the costs of maintaining and expanding the organisation as well as a contemporary communication strategy with a comprehensive online and social media presence, including the specialist staff responsible for managing the various platforms.<sup>1</sup>

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS FOR PARTIES

For parties to formally organise themselves and to participate in the political competition, certain legal requirements must be in place that allow for their creation whilst also guaranteeing the necessary political freedoms to promote their political goals and to build an organisation. The freedom to create a party is nonexistent in a dictatorship. However, even in countries that regularly hold elections, the legal framework for the establishment of parties may be limited and their room for manoeuvre significantly restricted. In many democracies, on the contrary, the freedom to create a party is enshrined in the constitution whilst a dedicated law on political parties determines their tasks, their internal order, as well as the conditions for and the extent of the public funding they receive. Some party laws provide very precise guidelines related to intra-party democratic procedures for the election of their chairmen and board members. In many countries, however, party laws do not interfere profoundly with the parties' internal structures.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Webb and Keith 2017, who, however, do not mention the fifth point – online and social media presence. Developments in recent years show that no party can avoid paying the utmost attention to this element.



### Requirements for the existence of a party

- Freedom of organisation
- Freedom to stand for election
- Freedom of speech and assembly
- Fair and peaceful competition between parties and candidates
- Diversity of parties
- Involvement in the electoral process and contact with electoral bodies
- A level playing field without discrimination
- Guarantees for media access and fair reporting
- Transparent and verifiable political funding

In principle, a party must register as an organisation to obtain the legal status of an association, to protect its name and logo, and to confirm its intention to participate in elections. The registration of parties is based on the principle of freedom of organisation, which also includes the freedom to form political parties and other political organisations and to join them. In many countries, proof of a minimum number of supporters is required for registration. Where this number is set so high that it becomes impossible or at least tremendously difficult for a new grouping to reach the status of a political party, the freedom of organisation may be restricted, which is incompatible with the principles of democracy.

The special characteristics of a party vis-à-vis other public associations are recognised in the constitutions and national party laws. In recognition of their unique contribution to the functioning of democracy, parties are granted special rights and privileges, but also enjoy special protection regarding their political activities that are not applicable to private associations. These privileges include, for example, tax benefits and, under certain conditions, state financing of parties. At the same time, however, parties are subject to regulatory control. Indeed, because of their claim to political power, political parties must submit to a greater degree of accountability than civil society organisations so as to prevent possible abuse of power or corruption. Many countries, however, largely fail in meeting these specific objectives.

In most countries, national legislation remains rather vague on the inner workings of parties. Only a few countries have established precise guidelines regarding intra-party procedures, including the desired frequency for party conferences to be held, the process of electing party leaders and board members, the rights of party members, the creation of intra-party associations, and the establishment of a quota system for the inclusion of women on electoral lists. In principle, the internal procedures within a party are defined in their respective party statutes. The statutes of numerous parties from all over the world can be found on the website “Party Statute Archive” (<https://www.politicalpartydb.org/statutes>), which is jointly managed by various research institutions. This allows for comparisons and may provide inspiration for the review of the statutes of one’s own party.

To participate in an election, parties must comply with additional requirements, such as the submission of their candidate lists for the candidates’ names to be printed on the ballot papers. Because the party law in Germany stipulates intra-party democratic procedures for the election of candidates, when registering for an election, a party must also provide evidence of this intra-party selection process, in the form of a protocol in which the voting results are recorded.

Especially in those countries where political parties receive state funding or where they can otherwise gain access to public funds, regulations regarding the registration for participation in elections and the internal procedures of a party are stricter. In most democracies, however, such regulations are not too prescriptive, which contributes to the large number of political parties around the world. Once a party has been registered, it can start building its own internal organisation.

## ORGANISATION AND PARTY STRATEGY

Party organisations represent the institutional corset of the party, allowing it to fulfil its tasks and functions as a political and social organisation (Schmid and Zolleis 2005). They are not static structures, but must dynamically adapt to political, social, and cultural changes. Despite the continued commitment of a party to its fundamental ideological and ideational beliefs, parties today also

look much more closely at the preferences of certain groups of voters. In addition to their own offer (based on their ideological-programmatic fundamental beliefs), parties are very much focused on the demands of voters. This results in a need for strategy and management, which is also reflected in the type of party organisation. Parties therefore need a strategic centre that ensures the coherence of its overall organisation and prevents internal fragmentation. This strategic centre is represented by the top party leadership, which usually consists of a small group of people who are supported by advisers and other committees. They analyse, discuss, and propose the party's reactions to topical political events and determine the party's strategies and positions in electoral competition.

The strategic centre does not operate completely autonomously. Rather, the party leadership must observe the efficiency criteria in the making of its strategic and political decisions, but also strive for support within the party to ensure its decisions are sustainable in the long term. Strategic capabilities therefore require internal party procedures that ensure that the party's aims and objectives do not encounter active resistance from its party members and sympathisers. In all decisions, it is important to pay attention to whether and how they affect the identity of the party and its perception by its party members and sympathisers, so as not to weaken the party's foundation. Strategic action must encompass both the internal and the external arenas. To secure power for the party leadership, internal party acceptance is crucial.

For this reason, the inner workings of the parties are often contradictory and fragmented. In contrast to private companies, rationality and efficiency are not the decisive criteria for leading a modern political party, especially if it has numerous members. "Tasks and roles in political parties are seldom functionally and efficiently linked with one another, goals and means correspond rather confused with one another, the use of resources and the handling of tasks often diverge, intentions and actions in many cases do not correspond" (Schmid and Zolleis 2005: 13). Overall, political parties have limited success in overcoming contradictions, inconsistencies, fragmentation, and hypocrisy.

With the help of the organisation of the party, power and influence inside and outside the party can be structurally secured and expanded. Party leaderships try to consolidate and expand their position through party organisation. In doing so, they must maintain a balance between securing power and increasing efficiency. The party organisation is shaped not only by statutes, pro-

professionalised party offices, or political bodies, but also by strategic considerations. The latter react primarily to external changes, i.e., political, economic, and social developments and the occasional sudden emergence of issues to which one has to react quickly. A party leadership should continuously ask and answer the following questions:

- which social groups should be involved and represented?
- which interests should be represented more emphatically?
- how does the party become interesting for non-members and stay interesting for new and old members?
- how are the resources used most efficiently?
- in what way can a successful promotion of young talent be designed?
- how can the campaign capability be improved?
- how can the decision-making process be moderated satisfactorily?
- which context conditions influence the design of the party organisation?

Party organisations are not static bodies but have to continuously adapt to a changing environment to perform their various functions effectively over the long term. In view of the dynamism of political and social processes to which parties must react, by adapting their own organisational structure, there can be no ideal model for the organisation and structure of a party. Nevertheless, there is a wealth of knowledge and experience regarding the various aspects of party organisation, which are presented in the following sections.

## The structure of political parties

The structure and organisational form of a political party are fundamentally influenced by two factors, namely the political system and its own self-image. Regarding the political system, it is relevant whether a state is structured in a centralised or a more decentralised/federal manner, and how elections are organised; both elements are connected with each other. In general, the structure of national parties corresponds to the various levels of government. One can roughly differentiate between three levels of government. The local level is made up of municipalities and districts, and represents the lowest administrative level for the election of political representatives. The middle level in

centralised or unitary states tends to have administrative units with severely limited political autonomy. In decentralised and federal states, on the other hand, there is often a high degree of political autonomy that adds political weight to regional elections. Finally, the national level, with a democratically elected government at the top, whose competences are determined by the structure of the state.

Figure 5: Ordinary structure of a party organisation.



Source: Own illustration.

The inner-party associations of youth, women, local politicians, etc. usually have a similar structure.

In a centralised or unitary state, it is highly likely for parties to also be very centralised and for their regional and local groupings to have a lower degree of autonomy (*vis-à-vis* the party headquarters) than in a decentralised state. In federal or otherwise politically decentralised countries with a higher degree of political autonomy in their regional structures, a party must ensure that coordination with and between its regional branches functions as smoothly as pos-

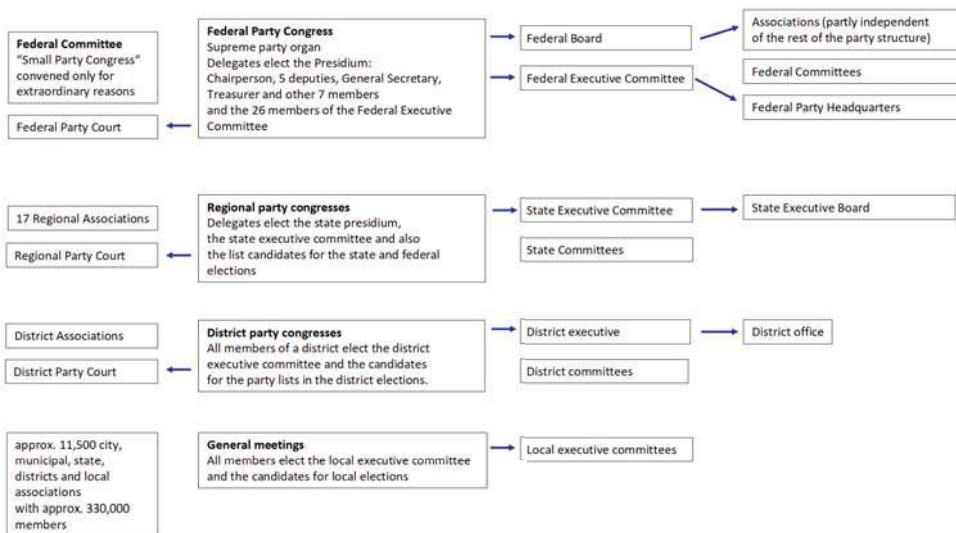
sible. Undoubtedly it is possible that in decentralised countries as well, parties may be organised in a very centralised manner and the power of the party headquarters may reach out to regional and local units. However, because of the relevance of regional elections, there will always be strong regional party leaders who build their own legitimacy, especially if they win elections, thus gaining considerable influence on the national party leadership. Parties in decentralised countries not only grant their regional divisions a presence in the national party leadership (if not by election, then by co-opting the regional chairmen in the national party executive committee), but also a high degree of independence in deciding on candidates for elections and on politically strategic issues such as collaborating or forming coalitions with other parties. During elections in Germany, for example, parties draw up state-level lists of candidates in the individual federal states. Germany's electoral law even stipulates for the regional divisions of the parties to decide independently on their choice of candidates. The regional associations of the major parties ensure that the national party leadership does not exert any "external" influence on the selection of candidates. There is also a relatively large degree of autonomy regarding the political and strategic orientation of the regional branches of a party in alliances and coalitions, even if such decisions are not made without the consent of the national party leadership. In other federal countries as well, many, but not all, political parties grant their regional associations a high degree of independence. In the federal state of Australia, for example, both variations can be observed: whilst the Australian Labour Party has become increasingly centralised and the national party headquarters exercises tight control over its regional branches, the Australian National Party is very decentralised and grants its regional associations a high degree of independence. In all cases, a party must be organised in such a way that it achieves the best possible coordination between the various levels of its organisational structure. Otherwise, there is a risk of conflicts between the representatives of the individual party levels, which burden the organisation.

The second important factor in building a party is how it sees itself and the role of its members. Parties that are extremely focused on their chairmen and that do not encourage the intensive involvement of the members in internal party discussions are more centralised, whereby important decisions are ultimately taken by the party leadership. Political parties that want their members to participate in internal discussions and decisions tend to be more

decentralised in structure and allocate much more decision-making powers to the local or regional branches of the party's organisation. As a result, there are vastly different procedures that apply to the decision-making process within a political party.

Because political parties in most countries are largely free to structure their internal organisation without having to comply with extensive legal requirements, they are organised in correspondingly diverse manners. The way they are organised may not have a direct impact on the quality of a country's democracy, yet it may indirectly affect the electoral prospects of a party and its position within the party system. This applies, for example, to the participation of women, both in the party leadership and as candidates in elections, the attractiveness of the party's organisational form for new members, the solidarity with the party programme and the unity of their groups in parliaments.

Figure 6: Structure and organs of a party (using the example of the CDU in Germany).



Source: CDU federal office.

Even where it has difficulty achieving electoral success, a political party should try to maintain local branches in order to be physically represented in structurally weak regions. And it should also ensure that such branches, despite their below-average membership and low level of activity, are integrated

into internal party processes in a representative manner. In this context, it can be useful not to impose the principle of location for membership everywhere, but to establish other formats and forums that are more in line with the spatial circumstances, but above all, with the interests and time disposition of its members for internal party participation.

## The party chairman

The national chairman is of exceptional importance for every party. Even the chairmen of regional or local party associations are usually very influential in their geographical area. However, it is the national leaders who accumulate rights and competences that often exceed the formal competences as laid down in the party statute.

### Duties and competencies of national party chairmen

- Coordinate party activities and the work of the party executive committee
- Exert influence on the party programmes and positions on current political issues
- Represent the public face of the party and shape its perception by citizens and voters
- Exercise a decisive influence on the nomination of candidates in elections or the allocation of government offices (and thereby create loyalties)
- Fulfil the role of head of government or state if their party wins elections
- Ensure conformity of ministers and parliamentarians with the party
- Coordinate the party's position on political issues with parliamentarians and parliamentary groups
- Maintain contact with the regional and local party branches and, above all, with their leaders



In recent decades, the functions and competencies of party leaders have increased even though party membership numbers have been on the decline in most countries and the bond between citizens and individual parties has waned (Cross and Pilet 2015). Citizens' trust in political parties is decreasing as voters pay more attention to individual personalities instead. In many places, this has resulted in both the personalisation of politics and the "presidentialisation" of political parties (Poguntke and Webb 2005; Rahat and Kenig 2015). The already influential role of the party leader has been further strengthened. The intermediary structures of political parties that are most affected by presidentialisation have lost power and influence. This includes not just delegate assemblies but also party organisations at regional, local, and constituency levels. Political party chairmen today steer their parties with more autonomy and authority than they did a few decades ago.

During the presidentialisation trend, many political parties have started looking for new ways of recruiting members. Central to these efforts has been the "democratisation" of the parties, i.e., the increased participation of party members in intra-party decisions. In recent years, many political parties have started involving their members more strongly in the election of the chairman, either through the introduction of an open ballot in which all party members can cast their vote, or through the reform and expansion of the procedure of voting through delegates by granting participation rights for certain intra-party groups or associations (Pilet and Cross 2014).

In many political parties, the chairman is elected by the delegates of a party congress. A victorious candidate must be well networked within his party to gain the support of the various delegates. This network may benefit both his own administration and the entire party, as the chairman is familiar with the individual voices and groupings within the party and takes them into account in his administration. This is of great benefit for the cohesion of a political party. There are various forms of election by delegates in many countries, including Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, and Spain. Whilst they have experienced some changes in the last few decades, mainly in terms of an increase in the number of delegates, the basic principle of election by delegates has remained unchanged.

The most common reason for procedural changes in the election of the chairman is a defeat in the general elections of a country. It is not uncommon for the authority of a party leader to be questioned in this case. When a

party chairman decides to resign following an election defeat, political parties sometimes take this as an opportunity to democratise the process of electing a new leader and to modernise their public image. However, the effect of such procedural changes on future election results tends to be minimal.

Some political parties elect their chairman through elections by direct vote, which are open to all party members. At first glance, this may seem very democratic, but it involves both higher costs and considerable risks. Only rarely do all party members take part in such an election. A low turnout, however, tends to damage the reputation of the party and leaves the chairman with only a weak mandate. This was the case, for example, in the election of the two chairmen of the *Social Democratic Party* (SPD) in Germany in 2019. Only 54 per cent of the party members took part in the primary elections, of which just over half (53 per cent) voted for the winning team. As a result, the new chairman effectively only secured the votes of a quarter of all party members.

Despite the risks associated with elections by direct vote, directly elected chairmen can base their position on higher levels of legitimisation and accordingly act more independently and, in some cases, even autocratically. This, however, may put a strain on the cohesion of a party. In the case of internal party conflicts, which are by no means rare, different procedures for appointing board members make it difficult to find a result that satisfies all members and groups of a party.

Especially in parliamentary systems of government, party leaders are often also leaders of parliamentary groups. In some countries, including Great Britain, the political groups have a decisive voice in the election of the chairman or at least the process of selecting the candidates for the chairmanship.

Another selection method is election by an electoral college. An electoral college can be composed of representatives from the parliamentary group, constituency associations, affiliated trade unions, and other professional associations with each group holding the same share of electoral votes. This procedure is used to mediate between different interests and is used, for example, by the two main parties in the US.

The various party families share some similarities regarding the process of electing the party leader. Centrist political parties and conservative and right-wing extremist parties tend to cling to the traditional limitations of direct participation in the selection of their leaders. Many green, liberal, and radical left parties, on the contrary, provide more direct involvement to their party

members. However, even parties that do not involve all members directly in the election of new party leaders are exploring new approaches to involve the grassroots more closely in the process. For example, candidates may be obliged to engage in intra-party questioning by the members at regional meetings, who may then cast their vote in favour of their preferred candidate. The outcome of this intra-party vote must be considered at a later party congress. Increasing the number of delegates, paying attention to intra-party groupings, and the possible introduction of weighting of votes associated with this process all serve the goal of greater membership participation. This development is already observed in countries with a long democratic tradition. Because parties are generally rather conservative organisations and do not like to change their internal party procedures, and because reforms usually entail changing other regulations and procedures, many parties shy away from too many or radical modifications, the consequences of which are not easily foreseeable. Opposition parties tend to be more open than government parties to changing their internal procedures and processes.

Table 4: Party family and leadership selection methods, 1955-2012 (in per cent).

Type of selection method	Party family						
	Radical Left & Greens	Communists	Social democrats	Liberals	Conservatives	Radical right	Regionalists
Voters and members	29.1	0.0	12.5	26.6	11.3	0.0	18.2
Conference delegates	58.5	29.4	59.2	58.8	67.7	56.6	56.1
Others (mixed)	0.0	0.6	9.8	2.5	3.2	26.3	6.8
Parliamentary group	2.2	0.0	15.2	11.2	13.9	0.0	0.0
Party organs	10.2	69.9	3.4	1.0	3.9	17.2	18.9
<b>TOTAL N (100%)</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>686</b>	<b>519</b>	<b>1013</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>148</b>

Source: Lisi; Freire; Barberà 2014: 20.

In Germany, in particular, parties from different political camps, such as the *Die Grünen*, die Sozialdemokraten, *Die Linke* but also the right-wing populist *Alternative für Deutschland*, elect not just one, but two equal co-chairmen. *Die Grünen* introduced this practice in their founding phase to adopt an image

of progressiveness by not only involving the two most important inner-party groups in the party leadership, but also setting an example for gender equality, which is why at least one of the two chairmen must be a woman. However, this process has not helped resolve internal party conflicts, nor does it matter to most voters whether a party has one or two leaders. There are indications that, instead of strengthening the profile of the chairmen and their party, the division of the leadership role further increases the need for coordination due to the rivalry between the two co-chairmen for dominance and public visibility.

Regardless of whether the election of a party leader takes place with broad or limited participation of the party members, several candidates usually apply for the chairmanship as soon as a change is due. There are often very intense debates within the party and the candidates present themselves in person and also virtually to the party members, even if in the end only the delegates at a party convention actually vote on the next leader. Such rounds of presentations help to raise the visibility and profile of the candidates, but they and their supporters should avoid such competition fuelling intra-party conflicts and jeopardising the unity of a party. It is therefore important to include the camp of the “losers” in the extended party leadership in order to achieve the greatest possible unity of the party for the future.

In order not to endanger internal party coherence or prejudice public perception, many political parties try to avoid open competition for the party leadership and try to arrange the election of the chairman and other important executive positions through coordinated and predetermined informal processes. Even if large numbers of party members are formally involved in the election of the party leadership, their role is often reduced to the confirmation of stipulated arrangements. Governing parties aim to avoid conflict over the choice of party leader especially if they also hold the role of head of government, since any potential conflict with an internal challenger might affect their authority as a leader. Opposition parties are more open to competition in the process of electing a party leader.

The continued relevance of informal procedures in the selection process of party leaders in many countries indicates that an expansion of intra-party voting rights does not have any significant effect in favour of its “democratisation”. Competition is most intense when the election of the chairman is decided by the party faction in the national parliament, as is the case in Great Britain where several candidates from the same parliamentary group may

compete against each other. The competition is least intense if a party leader is elected at a party congress, which often sees the delegates confirm the candidate who had previously been chosen by the party committees.

Political party leaders across the world tend to be men of middle to advanced age with extensive experience as parliamentarians or other politically relevant functions. Despite the international recognition of individual female heads of government and party leaders (including Angela Merkel in Germany, Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar, Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand, and Sanna Marin in Finland, who became the youngest head of government in Finland at the age of 34), it remains relatively rare for women to be elected to the role of party chairman. Large parties involved in government have significantly fewer female chairpersons. Young male politicians also encounter obstacles on the way to the top of the party leadership. It is more likely that opposition parties entrust young politicians with a national leadership role when a management team renewal is due after a disappointing election result. This was the case in Austria, for example, when in 2017 Sebastian Kurz was elected chairman of the *Volkspartei* (ÖVP) at the age of 31, and a few months later became Federal Chancellor and head of government. In international comparison, his age as leader of his party and the government marks a clear exception. In the local or regional groupings of a party, however, young politicians are more likely to take on leadership positions. Nevertheless, the road to national party leadership is long.

The share of women in leadership roles is shown in the two tables below. The data covers a total of 12 countries from Europe, as well as Israel and Australia, and applies to the period 1965 to 2012.

Table 5: Gender of party leaders, 1965-2012.

Gender	Number	Number in %
Women	58	10.8
Men	477	89.2
Total	535	100

Source: Wauters and Plilet 2014: 82.

Table 6 below illustrates the distribution of women in leadership roles according to party family for the period 1964 to 2021.

Table 6: Gender of party leaders by party family, 1964-2012.

Party family	Frequency of female leaders	Percentage	N of party family
Greens*	4	25.0	16
Radical right	8	19.5	41
Liberal democrats	15	15.3	98
Conservatives and Christian democrats	18	9.2	196
Social democrats	10	8.1	123
Radical left	3	7.3	41
Regionalists	0	0.0	20

Source: Wauters and Plilet 2014: 84.

\* The authors also explain: A considerable number of green parties have a collective leadership system and are consequently excluded from our analysis. As these typically include one male and one female co-leader, the actual percentage of female Green leaders is even higher than that reported here.

Once elected to the role of head of a party, many leaders remain in office for a long time. Many political parties do not stipulate either a time limit or a limit to the number of times a chairman can be re-elected. In some countries, however, there are clear legal requirements for this. In Germany, for example, every party must hold a party conference at least every two years, at which the chairman and other board members are to be elected or confirmed in their office by a vote. Such votes are an important indicator of the support of a chairman by his party.

Chairmen rarely resign voluntarily. The most common change occurs after a disappointing election result, especially when a party moves from the government role to the opposition benches. Political parties punish their leaders if they lose elections but not all party leaders automatically lose their office as a result. Quite a few remain at the top of their party even after a disappointing elections, either because there is no suitable successor who enjoys similar levels of support or because they anticipate a rise in their public profile that may

yield greater chances of success in future elections. Political parties must allow their chairmen time to profile themselves. Many influential political leaders had lost elections before they could gain recognition, not only as party leaders but also as heads of government and state. Among them are well-known personalities such as Helmut Kohl in Germany, François Mitterand and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in France, and Lula da Silva in Brazil, who won the election for president of his country only at the fourth attempt. All of them were also leaders of their parties. In the US, Joe Biden had also run twice for a Democratic presidential nomination before 2020, but he was never party chairman.

The way in which the chairman is elected has a major impact on the length of time he or she will remain in office. There is clear evidence that chairmen elected by delegates stay longer at the helm of a party than those who reach their position in the form of a general membership vote. After losing an election, the latter are much more vulnerable and subject to strong pressure to resign. Such party leaders may enjoy a high degree of legitimacy through direct elections but are then also much more exposed to fluctuations in the sentiment of the party base. Where delegates decide on the election and the fate of a party leader, it is to be expected that they will consider the wider political implications of a sudden change at the top of the party and are therefore less willing to force such a change based on their current disappointment over a poor election result. It can be useful for a party to keep an experienced chairman in office because profiling a successor takes time and public sentiments naturally fluctuate. That is why many delegates pay attention not only to the current popularity of a candidate for the party chairmanship, but also to their experience and competence in managing a complex organisation such as a party, their networking skills and ability to work with other important representatives and groupings (including the parliamentary group), and other skills that a successful party leader should have (see also Chapter 11 on Political Leadership). Finally, delegates are more likely to consider that replacing the party chairman only spruces up their party's public image for a short time as everyday politics are likely to quickly shift the focus of the public and media away from the new leader.

If a change in leadership becomes necessary after all, the party should ensure that the new successor is elected without major dramas creating conflicts

and divisions. Where there are several applicants for the office of party leader, conflicts are to be expected. However, they should be managed in a way that does not damage individual intra-party groups. It is helpful to stipulate clear rules for the intra-party competition, which all applicants should adhere to. Where all members are involved in the election of the chairman, there is a greater risk of more vehement political conflict because more emotions are involved and candidates are more likely to resort to populist means for self-promotion than is the case at a delegate convention. It will take a lot of time and effort to heal any rifts within the party after a competition dogged by conflict.

In any case, the form of the election of the chairman has no lasting influence on the performance of a political party in the elections. Whether an internal election with open competition takes place with the participation of all party members, or only a limited number of delegates elect the new party leader, is insignificant to the electorate when they cast their vote.

## The party executive committee

In addition to the chairman (or chairmen), a national political party's leadership usually comprises other elected members of its executive committee, for example, a general secretary, a treasurer, the chairmen of regional associations, and possibly some important office holders who are co-opted at least in an advisory capacity to the party presidency. Additional invitees normally include the head of government (if they belong to the party and are not its chairman anyway), the chairman or speaker of the parliamentary group, and the presidents or governors of states. Together, this group represents the leadership of a party – sometimes also called the party presidium or executive committee. In addition, there is usually an extended board of directors to which a larger group of elected or co-opted members belong. This can include the chairmen of regional associations and some internal party associations, such as the chairman of youth organisations or, if applicable, the national commissioners, in order to support the recruitment of new members and to support intra-party political training activities. The integration of non-elected members in the executive committee of the party ensures that deliberations



and decisions consider the broadest possible spectrum of opinions and that the individual branches of the party bear joint responsibility for the decisions that have been made and represent them to the public.

Different procedures are in place regarding the election or selection of the members of the executive committee beside the party president. In many countries, they are elected by the delegates of a party convention; yet, procedures vary. In some cases, party members can stand for election individually, allowing the delegates of a party congress to choose between several applicants. In other cases, the members of the executive committee are elected from a list together with the chairman. In yet other cases, the chairman independently selects the other members of the executive committee without the prior involvement of the party. Whilst the latter approach allows a chairman to secure a maximum level of loyalty, this procedure may exclude different voices from the executive committee. This may have negative implications as there will be no absolute homogeneity among party members, except perhaps for cadre parties who maintain a strong internal discipline. It is desirable for a party to practise listening to others internally, to accept and respect contrary opinions, and to take them into account when making decisions; this will be advantageous when dealing with external competitors, e.g., in coalition negotiations with other parties.

In accordance with their structure from the local to the national level, political parties usually have numerous chairmen and executive committee members who are also elected by vote. In some countries, such regular intra-party elections are even stipulated by party law.

Table 7: Advantages and disadvantages of the procedure for internal party executive committee elections.

	Type of Election	Advantages	Disadvantages
Party chairman	Election by delegates during a party convention	Broad legitimacy and a high probability of good networking with important party cadres and regional organisations	none
	Primary election (direct election by all members of the party)	Broad legitimation (if high voter turnout and transparent voting process); direct participation of members	Intensification of the internal party conflict and the formation of camps with several candidates; possibility of choosing a popular candidate who is not sufficiently anchored and networked in the party; possibly weak legitimacy if participation is low; high cost of conducting direct voting
Other executive committee members	Election by delegates to a party convention in the form of a closed list presented by the candidate for the chairmanship	Loyalty to the chairman and homogeneity of the party leadership	Dissenting opinions and internal critics are not involved in the party leadership, which tends to encourage conflicts within the party; important intra-party groups may feel underrepresented at the executive board and there is a risk that they will leave the party in the event of discrepancies
	Individual election of each candidate by the delegates of a party convention	Selection from different candidates; the board of directors reflects the breadth of the membership; inclusion of internal critics in the party leadership, which can promote their loyalty	Lower homogeneity of leadership; occasional discrepancies about political positions of the party, which disturb the public image of unity
	Selection/appointment by the chairman	High degree of loyalty to the chairman and high degree of unity of the party leadership	Limited legitimacy of the board members; risk of paternalism within the party organisation with possible disadvantages for the professionalism of party work

Source: Own illustration.

The leadership of large political parties also generally consists of a secretary-general who supports the chairman in fulfilling their duties and managing the day-to-day activities of the party. In the case of socialist or communist parties, whilst the chairman is the leader and responsible for the political representation of the party, the secretary-general is responsible for coordinating all activities, including the regional branches, associations, and special organisations. Parties with a large organisation and sufficient resources may additionally employ a managing director in addition to the secretary-general.

In many political parties, the executive committees meet regularly, although there are noticeable patterns in the frequency of such meetings. Where a chairman or secretary-general enjoys a strong position, they may be tempted to forego regular meetings and instead choose to take far-reaching decisions without consultation. In other parties, decisions must be taken only after close coordination with its leadership committee and possibly also with other bodies of the organisation. To prevent unilateral decision-making by its president, the executive committees of many parties hold frequent meetings or use other forms of coordination to explore the most important political issues.

Executive committees usually have a strong position compared to party congresses or general party committees. In general, party congresses cannot exert control over executive boards once they have been elected. On the contrary, almost all parties show a trend towards the development of oligarchic structures whereby a limited group of people has great power that is difficult to control. Even if a political party displays the hallmarks of a democratic organisation across different levels, and its leaders are democratically legitimised, this may not conform with intra-party realities.

It is common for many parties to adopt leading political proposals or motions at national, and sometimes regional, party conventions to determine their own position in current political debates. The preparation of the proposals is carried out by the executive committee, which exerts considerable influence over the position of the party convention. Where party members or delegates are given a large say in the discussions on and adoption of such motions, the latter can be changed during a party congress. Parties in which the members enjoy fewer participatory rights tend to strictly adhere to the guidelines laid down by the executive board.

### The iron law of oligarchy

In 1911, in a classic work on political party research, Robert Michels demonstrated the iron law of oligarchy, in other words, the “rule of a few”. According to Michels, every organisation inevitably produces an elite group that it can no longer effectively control. Accordingly, party leaders and party apparatuses would increasingly go off on a tangent by themselves given their advantages in terms of information and increased specialisation of politics. “Whoever says organisation says tendency towards oligarchy. In the essence of organisation lies a deeply aristocratic trait. [It is] the mother of the rule of the elected over the electors, of the commissioners over the principals, of the delegates over the delegating” (Michels 1989: 19). The accumulation of offices and the concentration of power are the accompanying features of oligarchies, which poses a problem for the democratic decision-making process within a party. An improvement in democratic processes and the exchange of views within a party can help to dismantle hardened party structures.

## PROFESSIONALISM OF THE PARTY ORGANISATION

Political parties should be professionally managed and equipped with modern communications technology in order to achieve their political goals. The party organisation is headed by the party headquarters, led by the chairman and the board. Headquarters perform the following important functions for their party.

### Tasks of a party headquarters

- Support party leadership in the development of party programmes and positions on important issues of day-to-day politics through analysis of current issues and the preparation of position papers
- Coordinate election campaigns and implement other campaigns and actions aimed at raising the party's profile
- Analyse election results and draw up conclusions for future party strategies
- Observe and evaluate the actions of the various party branches regarding adherence to the party line on political issues
- Arrange surveys and analyse results with recommendations for the party strategy
- Conduct the party's press and public relations work and maintain its social media channels
- Monitor other political parties and evaluate their actions in the context of their own party strategy
- Carry out administration of party finances, financing of election campaigns, and preparation of transparent accounting of the entire financial resources of the party

Ideally, a party headquarters is well-equipped in terms of personnel and technology and has various specialist departments that focus on tackling priority issues, preparing positions on current topics in the political debate, providing party representatives and members with supporting arguments, shaping the party's communication strategy and public image, and organising and coordinating election campaigns. In general, a party's organisation includes the headquarters not only at the national level but also in important regions, albeit on a smaller scale and with smaller facilities. If a party has enough resources, at least in larger cities and municipalities, it should have a permanent infrastructure with a few permanent employees who are responsible for looking after party members, organising local party activities, communicating with members, and organising local election campaigns. To finance these employees, a party requires a continuous source of revenue.

The maintenance of the party's headquarters is tied to its regular, non-campaign-related expenses.

Table 8: Full-time employees of a party (average).

Country	Average number of full-time paid staff in head office	Average number of head office staff per 1,000 party members	Average number of full-time paid staff in legislative party	Number of legislative staff per member of parliament
Australia	21.0 (3)	0.04 (3)	-	-
Belgium	30.5 (10)	0.12 (10)	11.9 (8)	1.0 (8)
Czech Republic	28.3 (4)	0.17 (4)	2.8 (4)	0.1 (3)
Denmark	9.0 (4)	0.12 (1)	23.3 (4)	1.6 (4)
Germany	77.0 (1)	1.50 (1)	726.8 (6)	7.0 (5)
Hungary	12.0 (1)	0.15 (2)	57.8 (4)	1.1. (4)
Ireland	27.0 (3)	0.60 (2)	32.1 (5)	1.9 (4)
Israel	12.5 (2)	0.01 (4)	24.3 (3)	3.7 (3)
Italy	64.0 (4)	0.12 (2)	-	-
Netherlands	44.5 (2)	0.10 (7)	-	-
Norway	19.4 (7)	0.02 (1)	24.5 (7)	1.7 (7)
Portugal	1.0 (1)	0.09 (5)	38.0 (6)	2.3 (6)
Spain	105.6 (5)	0.12 (8)	37.7 (5)	0.8 (5)
Sweden	35.8 (8)	0.12 (7)	37.3 (6)	1.1 (6)
United Kingdom	93.1 (7)	0.12 (60)	3.2 (5)	1.2 (5)
Overall mean	42.9 (62)	0.12	92.9 (63)	2.0 (61)

Source: Webb/Keith 2017: 42.

Nowadays, permanent staff is more important than ever since election campaigns and political marketing require a high level of specialist knowledge that cannot be provided by part-time, volunteer party members. In addition, permanent staff must take on more and more functions that were previously carried out by committed party members on a voluntary basis. However, with today's decline in party membership, the pool of volunteers has also been shrinking. In order to carry out their tasks efficiently, full-time and voluntary officials must be intensively trained in all the topics that have long been the

order of the day for managers in companies (including leadership, conflict, and project management).

Political parties with the necessary financial resources may compensate for the shrinking number of volunteers by increasing the number of permanent staff. Public party funding, which exists in various forms in many countries, should be used to set up a professional party headquarters. Figure 7 below depicts the organisational chart of the relatively well-funded German CDU as an example.

Figure 7: Organisation chart of a party headquarters (using the example of the CDU in Germany).

Membership chairperson	Chairman	Federal Treasurer
Coordination Department	Secretary-General	Financial Officer
Office for External Relations		Internal Audit Officer
Press Office	Federal Chairman	Legal Adviser

Central Tasks & Digitalisation	Programme & Analysis	Strategy & Planning	Campaign & Marketing	Organisation & Events
HR, Legal, Data Protection	Political Analysis	Political Analysis	Campaign planning & strategic communication Candidate Services Online Communication & Digital Strategy Citizen Communication	Event Planning & Organisation
Administration & Finance	Program Development Topic-oriented planning	Program Development Topic-oriented planning		Finances, Sponsoring, Contracting, Protocol
Budget & Finances	Management	Management		
Digitalisation	Expert Panels Application	Expert Panels Application		

Source: CDU federal office

In addition to its permanent employees, many political parties also employ the services of political consultants. This applies above all to the carrying out of opinion polls and marketing campaigns, and the planning and imple-

mentation of election campaigns. In parliamentary systems, the use of political consultants is significantly less common, compared to in presidential systems. In parliamentary systems, election campaigns are typically planned and coordinated by the party headquarters with little need for the individual candidates to supplement the official election campaign with an elaborate campaign of their own. In addition, most candidates lack the financial means to hire consultants on a long-term basis. Therefore, external advisers are usually engaged at the level of national and, to a lesser extent, regional party headquarters. In contrast, in presidential systems focussed on personalised campaigns, the party organisations play a rather subordinate role in designing the election campaigns. Instead, it is the candidates who create their own supporting infrastructure, which largely consists of consultants that are highly specialised in political marketing. The US is a prime example of this practice. As parliamentarians in the US are largely responsible for their own election campaigns, an army of external advisers is constantly on duty to support congressmen and senators. This also contributes to high election campaign costs. Similar developments can be witnessed in many other presidential systems, including Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, Mexico, and the Philippines. Election campaigns in these countries have become exorbitantly expensive. As it is difficult to cover expenses at this scale through legal campaign donations or parliamentary allowances, in many cases they are re-financed by corruption and mismanagement of public funds or other forms of illegal donations and financial contributions.

## THE DIGITISATION OF THE PARTIES

The measures imposed in response to the spread of the coronavirus in spring 2020 have significantly spurred the process of digitisation in politics and political parties. The digital revolution provides political parties with several opportunities and challenges. Forerunners in the use of technical possibilities have been new parties such as the *Grünen* or *Piraten* parties in some central and northern European countries, the *Movimento 5 Stelle* party in Italy, and the *Podemos* and *Ciudadanos* parties in Spain. Many traditional and larger parties



that needed more time to respond to technical changes have since joined the process of digitisation.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, many political parties were already using digital instruments for direct communication at the national level and with regional or local party branches. The pandemic has resulted in the expansion and strengthening of these forms of interaction. For example, video tools and collaborative word processing systems are now used to host conferences whilst the use of cloud storage is also advancing, especially for political parties that can afford this form of secure data storage. The expansion of technical equipment and possibilities results in an increased need for technical support. It is thus necessary for enough staff to be employed in the party headquarters to manage this new digital work. Because this is associated with considerable costs, parties with greater assets and greater financial resources will be able to make better use of the new digital possibilities.

## Opportunities of digitisation

Digitisation not only facilitates new forms of communication within the party and with the public, it also opens new ways of participation for party members. Members benefit from timely access to essential information, which places them at an advantage vis-à-vis the media. As they receive much more detailed and frequent information from the party leadership, the individual party member feels better supported in representing the party's political positions towards the public.

The expansion of opportunities for participation extends to different areas. Meetings of party members at local and regional levels, and even national party congresses can now be held virtually. Instead of passively following party congresses on television or via online platforms, new technical means have made it possible for members to actively participate in all forms of party meetings. This ranges from simple requests to speak and digital forms of submitting and defending proposals to the congress, to participation in internal party elections. Unless a party has already shifted its *modus operandi* towards a digital form of participation, many parties do ensure the continuation of analogue submission procedures. Although there are only a few parties with significant experience hosting online general meetings, it appears that a larger number

of party members take part in virtual meetings, as this form of participation is more compatible with professional or private commitments.

Digitalisation has also made it much easier to bring together technical experts in working groups who otherwise only rarely come together, sometimes with great organisational and financial effort. The party can use its personnel resources much more wisely in a digital format, bringing together members who represent special areas of interest and who otherwise can hardly participate in internal specialist debates. A political party can benefit greatly from this in debates on factual issues.

Digitalisation acts as an equaliser in election campaigns as it allows even small parties with a low budget to carry out intensive election campaigns and reach parts of the electorate it would otherwise not have been able to engage with. The number of users in social media shows that small parties often have many more followers than large, traditional parties.

All party members and employees who work with these technical forms and formats, especially those who take care of social media in the field of public relations, must be continuously trained and kept up to date with the latest digital developments. A regular exchange of information and knowledge among this group of people, which should not only include the representatives of the national party headquarters but also those of its regional and local branches, must therefore be part of everyday party life.

However, in addition to the high level of support and costs required, digitisation brings with it other challenges that affect the democratic substance of a party and must be considered in greater detail.

## Challenges of digitisation

The first major danger of digitisation is the possibility of a digital divide, or a situation where party members who cannot or do not want to use the digital tools will be excluded from online internal party debates. Although there are always barriers to participation within a political party, care must be taken that digital media does not create additional barriers. The political party *Die Grünen* in Germany, which started working with digital instruments early on, observed that both younger and older members use this form of intra-party participation intensively – the younger ones because they are more familiar with digital

tools, and the older ones because they have more time. However, it was also observed that women participate significantly less than men in party life via digital media. This presents a conundrum for any party that has placed gender equality firmly at the centre of its political identity and party organisation. Deliberations are already underway to introduce a form of quota system for digital participation, with a certain proportion of women required to be present in online debates.

The digitisation of votes and elections is also potentially problematic as it might affect the fundamental principles of democracy. Internal party elections are about personnel decisions, be it for executive committee elections or the nomination of candidates. Motions at party meetings and congresses are also often subject to votes. Digital voting, however, entails security risks (e.g., data manipulation by hackers or other external disruptive factors), which can only be kept at bay with great technical and financial effort. More importantly, participation in elections and votes requires a process of developing an informed opinion and confidentiality must be ensured. This means that everyone who takes part in a vote should make their decisions independently. This, however, can neither be guaranteed nor controlled in online votes and elections. Experiences with *M5S* in Italy and with *Podemos* in Spain raise great doubts about the transparency and accuracy of online voting procedures. In Germany, the Federal Constitutional Court has *de facto* banned electronic voting procedures in general elections because it makes their use dependent on the possibility for the entire election process and the election outcome to be thoroughly checked without the need for special expertise. The Court argued that, whilst manipulation or electoral falsification in conventional elections with ballot papers was only possible with considerable effort and carried a remarkably high risk of early detection, software programming errors and targeted falsification of votes through manipulation of the software of electronic voting machines are a lot more difficult to detect. The wide spectrum of possible errors in the software of voting machines or deliberate election fraud therefore requires special precautions to safeguard the integrity of public voting. For this reason, similarly strict security requirements would also have to be applied to internal-party digital voting procedures.

In many places, the Covid-19 pandemic has helped dispel reservations about digital elections within parties. As parties had to carry on with business

as usual throughout the pandemic, the legal procedures in several countries were changed to allow for elections to be held digitally. Even in a country with great reservations and restrictions concerning digital elections like Germany, new legal regulations have been created. In other countries, it was sufficient to adapt the statutes to allow for the new forms of membership participation.

Even as parties adopt digital tools in their organisation and work, it must be remembered that politics and political parties are fundamentally rooted in personal interactions between people. Democracy assumes a community of people who agree on the rules of their coexistence. This is only possible not just through the sober exchange of factual arguments, but also through the involvement of emotions that test political cohesion and political dissent. Such emotions are difficult to convey in online encounters.

For community-building purposes, political parties rely heavily on human encounters, informal conversations and agreements between people, and shared experiences. It is this social element of interaction that creates strong ties between citizens and a party, and which cannot easily be replaced by virtual forms of interaction. This applies to life within the political party itself and even more so to the party's interactions with citizens and voters. At party conferences, rousing speeches can electrify delegates and alter the course of the debate to bring about decisions that were not anticipated. A candidate can stir up enthusiasm among the party members and mobilise their support in an election campaign. Physical interactions allows for agreements to be made in informal conversations, or for casual meetings between party members to initiate joint initiatives. This and much more is only possible through human encounters.

The direct contact between citizens and politicians remains the basis of democracy even in the age of digitisation. New technical possibilities can facilitate and accelerate internal party procedures and processes. However, political parties will only be able to fulfil their pivotal role as mediator between state and society if they maintain and perhaps intensify the direct exchanges with citizens and voters in the form of human encounters.

## THE NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES

The nomination of candidates for mandates in parliaments and public offices at all levels of government is a classic function of political parties. This not only applies to the selection of candidates for the positions of municipal councillors, mayors, national representatives, or presidents of the state, but also includes appointments to a wide range of offices and posts in government agencies and state and semi-state institutions. In some cases, political parties may even influence the appointment of positions in private companies. In Brazil, Ghana, Indonesia, Mexico, the Philippines, the US, and other presidential democracies, political parties decide on thousands of posts in the public and semi-public sectors after the elections, from doormen in government offices to board members in large state-owned companies. There is also a high degree of patronage in parliamentary systems, for example, in Spain as well as many countries in Africa and Asia.

Because the executive functions continue to be of great importance to political parties, it is important how these are performed, particularly in relation to appointments in governments and parliaments. Decisions on candidacies for elections and appointments to political posts are often a significant source of internal party conflicts. There is often an excess of potential candidates for nomination, and only some will be elected. Those candidates who were not elected often expect a different form of compensation. Even among the elected candidates, conflicts may arise regarding the appointment to specific positions in parliament, or the appointment to government posts. The method for selecting and determining candidates, and the role of personal interests, is therefore of great importance.

Candidates for elections must meet the legal requirements for eligibility. In most countries, there are at least basic legal rules and restrictions in place. As these regulations tend to be quite broad, in principle, most citizens meet the qualifying criteria. Citizenship is usually a basic requirement for any candidate wishing to stand for national elections. In the countries of the European Union (EU), citizens of one of the 27 EU member state can also run for office in the local elections in other EU states or in the elections to the European Parliament, provided that they reside in that country. Residence in the constituency is required in several countries and is often a prerequisite for eligibility regarding

the participation in local elections. In some cases, candidates for elections are required to pay a deposit of a fixed amount of money or to submit a minimum number of supporting signatures. These requirements are meant to ensure the integrity of a candidacy. In Brazil and the Philippines, candidates for the election of the president must hold national citizenship from birth, whilst in the US, eligible candidates must have been born in the country. Additional educational or literacy requirements for candidates constitute a restriction of civil rights and are thus not common in democracies. Additionally, to avoid potential conflicts of interests, many democracies also exclude candidates with certain backgrounds (including convicted criminals and bankrupts) from running for certain public offices (e.g., civil servants, judges, or the military).

Some political parties have additional criteria for candidacy. In most cases, party membership is a prerequisite to ensure a candidate's loyalty to the political party and its political positions. Some political parties are extremely strict in this regard. The Socialist Party of Belgium, for example, used to require candidates' children to be enrolled in state schools and their spouses to be active in the relevant associations of the party. There are hardly any such demands today, because such a close identification between a candidate and a political party rarely exists anymore. However, many candidates have often invested considerable time and effort into building their career within a party. They may have joined the party at a young age and worked their way up from the local level, perhaps as a member of a local parliament, to candidacy in a regional or national parliament. Such candidates often boast a broad network of contacts within the party that is beneficial in the internal competition for candidacies and political posts. However, many political parties are also open to so-called lateral entrants or newcomers who offer desirable professional expertise or qualifications. In countries like Argentina, Brazil, India, Indonesia, and the Philippines, this group of people often includes celebrities from show business or sports. Whilst this may momentarily catch voters' attention, it is unrealistic to expect these newcomers' long-term commitment to the party, its values, and its work. Lateral entrants can be found more often in presidential systems than in parliamentary systems, as the latter expects stronger unity within the party and, accordingly, closer ties with the party organisation.

In local elections, many political parties are less focused on their candidates' long-term loyalty as the appeal of the individual candidate is more important than the appeal of the party. At this level, political parties sometimes

look for candidates with a certain level of local prominence, even if they have little or no attachment to the party they are running for.

Non-partisan candidates are accepted in many countries, provided that they meet certain minimum requirements. In most countries, however, it is difficult or even impossible to be appointed to a higher public office without the support of a party apparatus. Where political party organisations are weak and single-constituency majority voting exists, non-partisan candidates have a greater chance of success in their electoral constituencies. In Russia and the Ukraine, for example, non-partisan candidates constituted around one-quarter or one-sixth of parliamentarians at times. Without the financial help and organisational resources provided by political parties, non-partisan candidates in most democracies have little chance of winning national elections. Bernie Sanders, for example, was the only independent Representative and later Senator in the US Congress for some time. For both of his presidential candidacies, he joined the Democratic Party because the chances of an independent candidate to be victorious in the elections, even if he is wealthy, are slim. The failure of billionaire Michael Bloomberg to secure his nomination as presidential candidate of the Democrats in 2020 shows that money alone does not guarantee a successful candidacy in the US. Whilst Donald Trump may have been more successful four years earlier, he did not rely on his financial might alone but, as some commentators believe, managed to “hijack” the Republican Party.

Political parties have quite different procedures for the selection of candidates for elections and decide largely autonomously on how to do so. Only in a few countries are certain aspects of the nomination process regulated by law. In Finland and Germany, for example, the process of selecting candidates must follow democratic procedures. Depending on the type of election, the law stipulates for candidates to either be elected by the local or regional party associations in the form of delegate assemblies or by open membership decisions. Of course, the selection process for the presidential candidates of the Democratic and Republican Parties in the US, which follows grassroots democratic rules, receives a lot of attention. In other presidential systems, party congresses sometimes decide on the candidate from among several applicants. However, because the candidate has often been determined prior to nomination at the party congresses, the vote of the delegates is more likely to simply confirm a decision that has already been predetermined.

There are different procedures for the selection of parliamentary candidates, which concern both the degree of centralisation (i.e., whether nominations are mainly done at the level of the national party leadership or rather delegated to regional, district or local bodies) and the group of people involved in the nomination at the different organisational levels of the party. In strongly centralised political parties such as the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan or the Socialist Party and the People's Party in Spain, party leaders decide largely autonomously on individual candidates for election to the national parliament whilst also deciding the districts or provinces they will run in and/or the rank they are placed at in the respective party lists. In many countries, however, procedures have been adapted to adhere more closely with the principle of internal democracy. Whilst national party leaders may be able to veto some decisions, the most important decisions concerning the nomination of candidates for election rests with the delegates and activists at the regional and local level. In the most decentralised processes, the nomination decisions for each constituency are in the hands of all party members at the grassroots level, who vote in closed primaries or, in some places, in open primaries with the participation of non-party members. In general, the procedures for nominating parliamentary candidates correspond to one of the following models.

### **Nomination process for the selection of parliamentary candidates**

Listed in order from strongest centralised to strongest decentralised process:

- National party leadership determines the entire process of nomination
- National party leadership determines nominations based on a list of proposals submitted by a regional party branch
- Regional party branches nominate according to a list submitted to them by the national party leadership
- Regional party branches draw up a list of proposals that must be confirmed by the national party leadership
- Regional party branches fully control the nomination process
- Candidates are elected by all members of a constituency

Source: According to Norris 2006: 91.



Local and regional party leaderships tend to have a higher degree of decision-making autonomy in local and regional elections. However, in some highly centralised political parties, candidates for the position of mayor in important municipalities may also be selected by the national party leadership. The gradual transfer of decision-making power in the nomination process from the national to the local and regional level reflects the desire of many parties to democratise its internal decision-making structures so as to recruit new members. However, in practice, the procedural changes have had little impact on member recruitment. In addition, political scientists have observed that the democratisation of nomination procedures has not limited the influence of regional or national party leaders on the selection of candidates. The British Conservatives, for example, in some campaigns, followed a precise eight-step procedure which includes the following steps:

- Submission of the formal application form to the party's central office
- Interview by party officials
- Presentation at a "weekend" selection committee meeting
- Admission to the national list of approved candidates
- Application for a specific constituency
- Selection and interview process by the local party groups of individual constituencies
- Final nomination meeting of party members of the constituency
- Confirmation of the candidacy by the party executive committee

Whilst some of the steps listed above represent mere formalities, others may involve competition between hundreds of applicants, uncertain results, and heated internal conflicts, especially when it comes to application in a safe constituency where the party is projected to win.

In addition to such formal barriers, additional obstacles may discourage certain groups (e.g., ethnic minorities) from declaring their interest in running for office. Even where democratic procedures apply in principle, these are sometimes reduced to formality if the candidates have already been chosen (for example, if a well-known MP is running for re-election) or if there are no opposing candidates. The nomination of women also plays an important role in this context and will be discussed below.

## THE ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF POLITICAL PARTY MEMBERS

In his fundamental book on party research, Maurice Duverger wrote that political party members are “the real substance of the party, the stuff of which its activities are made. Without members, a party would be like a teacher without students” (Duverger 1963: 63). However, a look at both older political party research and the more recent development of many political parties and political party systems shows that the answer to the question of how many members a party needs is by no means clear. The number of political parties is increasing worldwide, yet the number of members per party is decreasing. This indicates that the relationship between a political party and its members is more complex than it might appear at first glance.

Table 9: Party membership by country.

Country	Year	Electorate	Total party membership	Total membership as % of national electorate (ME)
Australia	2013	14,722,754	231,000	1.57*
Austria	2006	6,107,892	1,054,600	17.27
	2011	6,333,109	853,518	13.48
Belgium	2007	7,720,796	426,053	5.52
	2012	8,008,892	385,729	4.82
Denmark	2007	4,022,920	166,300	4.13
	2011	4,079,910	149,640	3.67
Germany	2005	61,870,711	1,423,284	2.30
	2013	61,946,900	1,317,550	2.13
Italy	2006	47,098,181	2,623,304	5.57
	2011	47,126,326	2,106,025	4.47-
Netherlands	2006	12,264,503	304,469	2.48
	2013	12,689,810	308,846	2.43
Norway	2005	3,421,741	172,359	5.04
	2012	3,641,753	161,811	4.44
Poland	2007	30,615,471	304,465	0.99
	2013	30,762,931	241,544	0.79+-

Country	Year	Electorate	Total party membership	Total membership as % of national electorate (ME)
Portugal	2005	8,944,508	341,721	3.82
	2011	9,624,425	281,307	2.92+-
Spain	2008	35,073,179	1,530,803	4.36
	2011	35,779,491	1,494,001	4.18+-
Sweden	2006	6,892,009	266,991	3.87
	2010	7,123,651	252,632	3.55+-
UK	2005	44,245,939	534,664	1.21
	2015	46,502,545	559,457	1.20

Source: Webb and Keith 2017: 33.

Most political parties do not emerge as mass or member parties, but rather as groups of people with common political concerns. These people want to take part in political debates and decisions, stand for election and be elected whilst, if possible, not competing with internal party competitors for electoral positions in constituencies or on party lists. If a political party has many members, this intensifies competition within the party, which is not desired by all of its leading representatives. During the early days of political party formation, the members of a party were not considered to be of great significance. It was the workers' parties in the 19th century that first realised that a stronger membership base would strengthen their position in the competition against the political parties comprising of local or national dignitaries. The latter eventually also began to embrace new members, who no longer had to be members of the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, the influence of party members on these political parties remained relatively small. Older research on political parties only highlighted two advantages of a larger membership, namely membership fees and volunteer work, especially in the context of election campaigns (Duverger 1963). The fact that party members should also participate in intra-party decisions neither occurred to the leaders of political parties, nor was it discussed in the academic debate, let alone demanded by the members themselves. It was not until the 1970s that the role of party members was reassessed, triggered above all by the competition between the two most important parties in Germany and Great Britain: the Christian Democratic Union and the Social Democratic Party, and the Conservatives and the Labour Party, respectively.

In both countries, the potential benefits of a large membership base were recognised. Other European party democracies followed this trend very hesitantly. Nonetheless, the realisation gradually took hold that a higher number of members holds more advantages than disadvantages for a political party. The advantages and disadvantages of high membership numbers for political parties can be described as follows (Scarrow 1994; Detterbeck 2005):

### **Potential benefits of high membership numbers for political parties**

- Members strengthen the political party's image. A party with many members is perceived to be strong and accordingly treated more respectfully by the media and the public, which may have a direct impact on voter behaviour.
- Party members act as important links between a political party and society. A party with a broad membership base, which represents a broad cross-section of different sociological milieus and support groups, will recognise important issues earlier and develop its own positions, which it can then portray as an example of its higher level of representation.
- Party members are loyal voters of their party.
- Party members are important multipliers and recruit other voters for their own party; through their familial, professional, and social contacts, they engage with parts of the electorate that a political party otherwise has little or no access to.
- Party members contribute to the financing of a party through membership fees and donations, voluntary work, or the soliciting of party donations.
- Party members do a lot of voluntary work within a party that otherwise could not be done. This ranges from helping with the updating of the membership directory, collecting membership fees, doing administrative work in the local office, to writing petitions on behalf of the party, preparing analyses on specific policy areas, or participating in the preparation of policy papers.

- Party members contribute to the political profile of a party by contributing ideas to internal party discussions.
- Party members act as candidates for elections. Whilst it may be easy for parties to find enough people to run for office in national or regional elections, it is sometimes much more difficult in the municipalities to fill an electoral list with enough candidates (this is especially true for countries with broad municipal representations). In such cases, party members are often prepared to stand at least *pro forma* as candidates and support the election campaign, even if they do not have any major ambitions for political office.
- In sum, political parties make an important contribution towards facilitating the participation of citizens in politics, which constitutes a fundamental principle of democracy. In turn, this contributes towards the legitimisation of political parties themselves.

The advantages of a large party membership also produce some costs, although they may not always be considered disadvantages.

### **Potential costs of high membership numbers for political parties**

- Large party membership bases imply a need for increased finances in terms of the necessity to organise and support party members, but also higher costs related to communication and the facilitation of their involvement in internal party processes.
- At times, “ordinary” party members may be ideologically less flexible than experienced career politicians, who are more familiar with the necessity for compromise and concessions in the conduct of politics. Engagement with grassroots members may thus require a greater need for explanation, which costs time and effort. It may even restrict a party’s room for manoeuvre, and in the event of conflicts, may tarnish the party’s public image. The youth associations of par-

ties especially tend to adopt strict ideological positions, which often lead to conflicts between the younger and older members of a party.

- A larger party membership base inevitably nurtures internal party dissent and facilitates the formation of different factions, because it is naturally more difficult to maintain harmony in a large group and intra-party competition is very fierce.

If one considers the arguments presented above, the benefits of large party membership bases outweigh the associated costs. This conclusion is confirmed by more recent developments where parties with a small or declining number of members are seen to be at a disadvantage vis-à-vis political parties with a larger number of members. Modern communication tools cannot completely compensate for the disadvantages of shrinking membership numbers. The personal contact between the political parties and the citizens as their potential voters remains an indispensable element of modern and successful party work. Therefore, political parties should continue to invest a lot of attention and resources in working with their members. Political parties that fail to do so will be placed at a disadvantage in the political competition.

It is not only the political parties that benefit from numerous and active party membership. Every single party member can also obtain concrete benefits from their commitment to a party if they want to get actively involved. However, many party members only want to express their basic agreement with the political line of a party and only become involved selectively, especially during election campaigns.

### Potential benefits for party members

- Party members have access to information about political processes and decisions and they often have quicker and more direct access to the relevant politicians.
- Party members exert greater political influence than citizens without a party affiliation because they can participate in the inner-party decision-making process (assuming the processes are organised in a bottom-up manner) and independently organise political campaigns and meetings.
- It is easier for the members of a political party to run for political office than for citizens without party membership, especially since in many places membership in a political party is a prerequisite for running for office.
- Party membership offers opportunities to get to know like-minded people and expand one's own network.

Direct individual membership is now a common form of becoming a party member, although different regulations remain in place for different political parties. Basic units of communist parties, for example, were often organised in the form of factory cells based on the professional activities of the party members. For several decades, the British Labour Party and the social democratic parties in Norway and Sweden maintained a form of indirect membership via affiliated trade unions. In the 1990s, around 350,000 direct party members and around four million indirect members of trade unions were connected to the British Labour Party and made financial contributions to the party fund. In return, the trade unions controlled 50 per cent of the votes at the party congresses. This regulation has now been abolished in the two Scandinavian countries and changed significantly in Great Britain, not least because the trade unions have lost their previously dominant role in the face of the upheavals in the economy and the labour market. The Labour Party has freed itself from the influence of the trade unions, but at the same time has lost an important support group.

## Intra-party participation and democracy

“Shouldn’t the parties that stand up for democracy in a country first and foremost also consider the rules of democracy within their own organisation?” This question is often heard, especially from younger party members in countries that do not yet have a long tradition of democracy. Some young people are particularly disappointed when political leaders who have fought for the ideals of democracy during a dictatorship at the risk of their own lives go on to lead their political parties autocratically after a regime change and exclude their party members from the decision-making process. Yet, even in established democracies, both younger and older party members often feel disenfranchised in favour of a small party elite. This contradiction between the demand for intra-party democracy and the parties’ oligarchic structures has characterised the evolution of political parties since their formation in the 19th century.

Intra-party democracy poses a major challenge for many political parties, similar in significance to the challenge of winning votes in elections, formulating and representing political positions, and building and maintaining an efficient party organisation (Detterbeck 2005; Carty 2013; Borz and Janda 2020). Many party members today expect internal party processes and procedures to also adhere to the principles of democracy and transparency. Indeed, many political parties do experiment with new forms of participation aimed at retaining current and recruiting new members. Nevertheless, it is often difficult for political parties to meet the demand for intra-party democracy. In most cases, legal requirements are in place that stipulate how political parties should observe democratic procedures in their inner workings, particularly about the election of board members and the nomination of candidates. However, even if these guidelines are not being openly disregarded, experienced politicians in leading positions may not always base their legitimacy on transparent internal party elections. This affects even those parties that started out with a grassroots-democratic approach, for example *Die Grünen* or the Internet parties. Those parties, too, give rise to an elite of experienced politicians with control of the internal procedures and political discourses as well as personal networks that may be useful to the party but primarily to their personal ambitions.

Intra-party democracy relates to three different areas: (1) the election of the party leadership, (2) the selection of candidates before elections, and (3)



joint decisions on political programmes and positions. How membership participation is regulated in these individual areas depends on the organisational form of a political party, for example, whether it is organised along centralised or decentralised lines, whether decisions are taken exclusively by the chairman or a small executive committee, or if other bodies are involved, and how the procedures are institutionalised in the statutes (Scarrows 2005). In political parties with a high degree of inclusion, party members (and at times even registered supporters) play an important role in the election of the party leadership or in the nomination process. Such political parties also offer more opportunities for party members to debate the party's stance on individual policy areas. Political parties with a high degree of exclusion tend to be more centralised. However, a higher degree of decentralisation does not automatically lead to greater membership participation if, for example, only regional and local party leaders can participate in decisions on certain issues, whilst the rank-and-file party members do not really have more rights to participate. It is true that political parties with a high degree of internal democracy usually also have a high degree of institutionalisation, including concrete rules concerning the participation of party members. However, centralised and exclusive forms of decision-making can also be stipulated or institutionalised. The form of organisation thus has a clear influence on the degree of internal party democracy.

Of the three areas of intra-party democracy mentioned above, the different procedures for the election of a party chairman and the nomination of candidates for elections have already been discussed in the previous section. As has been illustrated, there are quite different methods for both. Election analyses have shown repeatedly that a political party's internal selection and nomination process have no lasting impact on the election results. On the contrary, their impact on internal party affairs may be more substantial. This might be explained by the fact that inclusion in internal party processes and participation in decisions on specific topics is increasingly important to a certain segment of party members, often comprising the more active ones who may even run for certain offices. Often, however, many party members only want to express sympathy with the political goals of a party and, whilst they may become more involved during election campaigns, they show no interest in more intensive forms of involvement and do not raise claims to jointly decide on the party leadership or election candidates.

Whilst the above-mentioned reservations apply to the direct participation of party members in the election of the party leader via a primary election, the nomination of the candidate for a constituency should involve party members on the ground as directly as possible. The local, regional, or even national party leadership can check in advance whether all candidates fulfil the formal requirements for nomination. However, the grassroots members should then have the final say. This facilitates their mobilisation during an election campaign. In cases where parties have to present a list of candidates comprising several constituencies, a delegates procedure may be useful. However, even in this case, the candidates should seek to establish close contact with the grassroots members, introduce themselves, and explain their goals and plans.

Joint decisions on a political party's political manifesto were mentioned above as an example of how party members can participate in important internal party debates and decisions. However, a party's manifesto is rarely updated. The discussion on election programmes can energise the inner-party debate and get members excited about the election campaign, thus fulfilling an important mobilisation function. Joint decision-making on a political party's stance on specific issues of daily politics, on the other hand, is usually very limited and also not very practicable. This is the task of the mandate holders in the parliaments, who are not bound by instructions, but who are expected to align their stance on individual substantive issues with the political programmes of their party (see also the section on parliamentary parties in chapter 10).

Even progressive political parties, which allow their members to participate in the election of its leadership and the nomination of candidates for election, offer only limited involvement in decisions on individual political issues or the position of their parliamentary group on individual bills. As has been shown above with reference to digital parties, frequent internal votes are at risk of being controlled and manipulated by the party leadership and in no way guarantee that party members have a real say in the decision-making process. Political practice in modern democracies is characterised by abundant negotiation processes in formal and informal bodies in which compromises are found in non-public areas at the elite level, and where decisions are either dismissed or unilaterally implemented. Public action in parliaments and governments has become the central point of reference for the leading political party actors. Government action and inter-party negotiations in the parliamentary space require freedom of action, which would be undermined by

the necessity to comply with party resolutions on specific policy issues. Parties that grant extensive joint decision-making powers regarding specific policy issues to their members may find its leadership curtailed in its freedom to act, thus paralysing the whole party. Governing parties must often make decisions on matters that are not included in party programmes. Lengthy consultations of its party members and votes on individual issues can limit the party's room to manoeuvre. Even so-called movement parties such as the green parties in Europe experience time and again that it is impractical to involve all party members in day-to-day political debates and decisions. When applied to the inner workings of a political party, representative democracy thus translates to a basic faith in the elected representatives and the belief that they will make decisions in accordance with the party's fundamental principles. Elected representatives in parliaments must be granted the independence of their mandate, which means being confident that they represent the basic principles of their political party in debates and votes.

Even if political parties strive for maximum transparency and maximum levels of intra-party participation of party members, various phenomena typical of larger organisations cannot be avoided. This must not be classified immediately as a restriction of intra-party democracy. First and foremost, there is the prominent position of a party chairman with access to formal and informal instruments of power and influence. In addition to their charisma, a party leader must also maintain many informal contacts within the party to feel its pulse. This gives him an advantage of information and a broad network, which a skilled party leader knows how to utilise to secure his own power position and push through his plans and, occasionally, even his preferred candidates. Furthermore, the professionalisation of politics and political parties leads to a formal empowering of the party headquarters and those in leadership positions. In addition, rapid decision-making processes in modern mass democracies do not allow for lengthy voting processes within the parties even though modern communication tools are better and faster than ever before. In this case, it falls on the party leadership to do what it was elected to do, namely, to lead and make decisions.

In view of these structural conditions of politics and its decision-making processes, there are certain limits to intra-party democracy. These limits contest the position that intra-party democracy is a supposed panacea against dwindling party membership numbers. Intra-party democracy does not neces-

sarily lead to more engagement, as was observed in South Korea for example (Koo 2018). Some political parties in Europe are experiencing the entry of new party members not because they cultivate more inner-party democracy, but because they are seen as having special competence on current issues such as climate protection. The grassroots democratic expansion of party membership rights and the new forms of party membership have neither increased the number of party members nor slowed down the decline in party membership as a consequence of demographic change (Decker 2018: 287). Neither has the membership profile of political parties become younger or more feminine as a result. However, internal party mobilisation through the provision of opportunities for direct participation apparently prompts more party members to participate in internal processes and creates more interest in collaboration, even if participation rates related to the direct election of the party chairman, surveys on individual topics, or voting on a coalition agreement are often relatively low. The latter, however, harbours the risk that internal party groups with vested interests in specific issues may utilise such participation procedures to bring about decisions that impair the overall public image of a political party and distort the opinion that prevails at the grassroots level.

Viewed objectively, intra-party democracy only partially refers to joint decision-making and perhaps more so to access to knowledge and participation in both intra-party debates and election campaigns. This means that the party leadership must continuously and transparently inform its party members about its stance on certain questions and on internal party processes whilst also offering opportunities to party members to participate in internal debates or other activities. Today there are many forms and formats of participation, both analogue and, increasingly, digital. Personal encounters with party members and their involvement in internal debates and activities – not least through associations of youth, women, and local politicians, working groups, and other forums – remain the most important opportunities to involve party members in active party work. This is especially relevant for local party groups and in local politics. In addition, local politics is an important learning environment in which party members gain the necessary experience to qualify for higher functions.

## Intra-party conflicts

Intra-party democracy also means that individual groups may publicly articulate their views and controversies, at least within the party. A political party should not shy away from this, even if political parties and the electorate may at times believe that resolving differences of opinion and conflicts in the open implies weakness, a lack of credibility, or divisions within a party. Indeed, in extreme cases, the different positions can be so far apart that they overshadow all other aspects of party work and lead to a paralysis of party activities. However, internal party differences can equally fertilise and enrich the political discussion. Indeed, a political party's ability to tolerate and manage intra-party conflicts is rather a testament to its strength and dynamism.

Differences of opinion and conflicts about political views, strategies, and positions are constantly present in political parties. Whilst such conflicts are inevitable and legitimate, they must be resolved in an orderly manner so that a political party does not suffer permanent damage and disadvantage in the next elections. It is important for conflicts to be resolved in a democratic and transparent way and for all involved to respect the democratic majority decisions of their party with which such conflicts are resolved. However, this is not always the case.

In some countries, even prominent party members who held parliamentary seats or other public offices have left their political party when a conflict was not resolved in their favour. Young political parties that have not yet achieved stable internal cohesion and that do not have institutionalised mechanisms for the resolution of internal conflicts are particularly affected by such divisions. Noteworthy examples can be found in Latin America (Dyck 2018), as well as in Italy, South Korea, and Turkey. Such conflicts not only harm the political parties but are a bad example of democratic behaviour. Democracy simply means the need to respect majorities, even if your own position is only shared or supported by a minority. A separation is often justified as being due to an alleged turn away from important political-ideological or political-strategic positions; for example, in the case of cooperation or a coalition with other groups that were previously competitors. Not infrequently, however, personal dissatisfaction with defeat in internal party debates is the real motive. A party split is of no benefit to anyone. The political parties that emerge from divisions often remain weak.

## The acquisition of new members and new forms of membership

All over the world, people participate in demonstrations, protests, and other forms of public mobilisation. Regardless of the specific topic at hand, this shows that people want to express their interests and influence political decisions. Many people are politically active, be it by supporting local initiatives to improve the resources of a kindergarten, by calling for measures against climate change, or by criticising specific government policies at the national level. However, many people prefer direct, selective, and more thematic forms of political participation than joining a political party. Political parties are therefore competing with social movements and non-governmental organisations that give greater space for individualised forms of participation (Decker 2018: 277 ff.). In principle, however, political parties can take advantage of the willingness of citizens to participate in politics to recruit new members.

Political parties that acknowledge the competitive advantages of a large membership base with a view to their electoral success are keen to expand their ranks even further. Different political parties have developed new strategies to increase their own attractiveness for potential new party members. New forms of participation include non-committal party membership which allows for participation in internal meetings without having to formally join the party. Other models include trial memberships, joining a support network, or registration as so-called “party friends” with a reduced membership fee. The new forms of participation in party work may extend to the following:

- Spreading regular and comprehensive information about the positions and actions of a political party
- Participation in working groups, project groups, or commissions, possibly with voting rights, as well as invitations to local or regional party conferences but without the right to propose motions or to participate in votes
- Participation in internal surveys on specific topics and directional decisions
- Running for office as a candidate on the party list where the party is short of candidates (this is particularly the case in local elections)

As has been elaborated above, another form of recruitment is to expand the participation rights of individual party members to make party membership more attractive.

The impact of alternative forms of party membership has so far been limited. Nevertheless, the efforts listed above create a pool of additional supporters that can be mobilised for specific purposes, for example, to participate in traditional election campaign activities or joint celebrations, and also to support the political party in social media. In addition, political parties should continue to rely on established and tested membership recruitment measures. Despite the prejudice and contempt political parties sometimes encounter, attracting new members does not have to be that difficult, provided the parties do in fact try (Laux 2001).

All recruiting measures are based on the recognition that people are interested in politics because they acknowledge that their own living conditions are determined by politics. The public expresses political views and principles that it would like to see more clearly reflected in political decision-making processes, yet may not have a clear idea how to get directly involved. Many of these people are just waiting to be approached by the political parties.

Personal contact is the best means of addressing people who are interested in politics and encouraging them to join a political party. A home visit that is carefully prepared and carried out with courtesy and discretion can make the decision to join the political party much easier. The recruiter should provide official information material, which may include official publications (e.g., the party programme and latest election manifesto), a letter of introduction from the party chairman, an application form, and marketing materials.

Another form of recruitment is the organisation of public events, lectures, and discussions, as well as celebrations for specific occasions or cultural activities, to which those believed to be close to the political positions of a political party can be invited.

Public hearings on local politics tend to attract a lot of attention and give a political party the opportunity to publicise its political positions and attract new supporters and members.

Political parties should pay particular attention to their membership list, which can be used for various purposes, including the distribution of political information, fundraising, or the mobilisation of support during election campaigns. In addition to the postal address, telephone number, e-mail address

and profession of each party member, the list should also contain additional information on topics of particular interest to the individual, their experience in specific thematic areas, and their membership in other clubs and associations. This allows for the party members to be informed and mobilised about issues that best resonate with their interests and expertise. The national data protection requirements of the respective country must always be strictly adhered to when creating and processing a membership database.

Political parties around the world have developed different regulations concerning the process of becoming a party member, as well as the rights and obligations of their party members (Kosiara-Petersen, Scarrow, and van Haute 2017). Most practise a traditional form of party membership whereby a person applies to and, subject to approval, takes part in meetings and decisions that are open to ordinary members according to the statutes. If required, each member also pays a regular membership fee.

Experience has shown that party membership fees do not play a particularly important role in the decision for or against party membership, not least because the fees tend to be rather low and there is little monitoring of whether all party members pay their contributions regularly. However, there is evidence to suggest that political parties with a higher threshold for membership or higher membership fees have fewer members. Political parties that offer more political advantages also manage to attract more party members. Political parties with many party members can offer their members more advantages, for example, the possibility to run for office in elections.

To attract new members, a political party can follow the following plan of action.



## Action plan for attracting new party members

(Particularly recommended for party divisions in municipalities)

1. Research the existing support base. How many party members exist in relation to the size of a community? What type of profile do party members have, according to social group, income, occupation, age, participation in local associations, etc.?
2. Constant updating of the party membership file. Is there an up-to-date list of all party members containing relevant basic information? Are all party members regularly invited to party events? Do they regularly receive the information and statements published by the party? Do they pay their party membership fees regularly? Do they have a membership card?
3. Compilation of reasons that encourage party membership. What does the local political party have to do to attract new party members? How is the political party perceived in the local community?
4. Compilation of reasons that discourage party membership and elaboration of the arguments and actions against it.
5. Definition of clear goals for party member recruitment.
  - How many party members should be recruited within a specified period, for example, three to six months?
  - Identification of people and groups who may share the same interests as the political party.
  - Definition of target groups for party member recruitment and possibly a separate campaign tailored to certain target groups, such as young people, women, or senior citizens.
  - Identification of a list of occasions that are particularly suitable for the recruitment of new party members, for example, election dates or any national or local anniversaries.

- Coordination with other party members concerning the organisation of the membership campaign, including clear division of tasks among involved party staff members.
6. Creation of a series of follow-up steps to contact people who have agreed to become a party member.
  7. Organisation of an induction meeting for new party members. Preparation of a short training session on the political party, its programme, and its political positions. Formulation of expectations for the new party members. Provision of official party documentation, including the party programme, brochures, and manuals.
  8. Planning measures to keep the new party members actively involved in the party work.

## THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTIES

In most of the world's democracies today, gender equality is enshrined in the respective national constitutions. However, in many countries, equal treatment of women in many areas of public life is not a given. This includes the equal treatment of women in the economy (not only in terms of equal pay, but also in terms of equal access to management positions), in administration and the judiciary, in educational institutions and, finally, in the realm of politics. Far fewer women than men are represented in almost all parliaments worldwide. Leading positions in political parties worldwide are also clearly dominated by men, although there are no reliable figures to document this. The Inter-Parliamentary Union regularly compiles the relevant data for parliaments, an extract from which is shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Share of women in parliaments worldwide.

Rank	Country	Lower or single house		Rank	Country	Lower or single house	
		%	Women/ Seats			%	Women/ Seats
<b>50 to 65 %</b>							
1	Rwanda	61,3	49 / 80	2	Cuba	53,4	313 / 586
3	United Arab Emirates	50,0	20 / 40				
<b>40 to 49.9 %</b>							
4	New Zealand	48,3	58 / 120	5	Mexico	48,2	241 / 500
7	Sweden	47	164 / 349	10	Bolivia	46,2	60 / 130
11	Finland	46,0	92 / 200	12	South Africa	45,8	182 / 397
13	Costa Rica	45,6	26 / 57	14	Norway	44,4	75 / 169
16	Spain	44,0	154 / 350	17	Senegal	43	71 / 165
18	Argentina	42,4	109 / 257	18	Mozambique	42,4	106 / 250
20	Switzerland	42,0	84 / 200	22	Portugal	40	92 / 230
<b>35 to 39.9 %</b>							
24	Austria	39,9	73 / 183	27	France	39,5	228 / 577
28	Ecuador	39,4	54 / 137	30	Serbia	39,2	98 / 250
32	East Timor	38,5	25 / 65	36	Italy	35,7	225 / 630
<b>30 to 34.9 %</b>							
39	Cameroon	33,9	61 / 180	39	Great Britain	33,9	220 / 650
45	Nepal	32,7	90 / 275	47	Zimbabwe	31,9	86 / 270
49	Germany	31,5	223 / 709	50	Australia	31,1	47 / 151
<b>25 to 25.9 %</b>							
52	Angola	29,6	65 / 220	52	Canada	29,6	100 / 338
54	Albania	29,5	36 / 122	60	Poland	28,3	130 / 459
61	Philippines	28,0	85 / 304	63	Estonia	27,7	28 / 101
67	USA	27,3	118 / 433	69	Bulgaria	27,1	65 / 240
72	Israel	26,7	32 / 120	77	Tunisia	26,3	57 / 217
82	Algeria	26	120 / 462	83	Niger	25,9	43 / 166
<b>20 to 24.9 %</b>							
90	Uruguay	24,2	24 / 99	100	Chile	22,6	35 / 155
110	Indonesia	21,0	121 / 575	111	Bangladesh	20,9	73 / 350
112	Ukraine	20,8	88 / 423	116	Pakistan	20,2	69 / 342

Rank	Country	Lower or single house		Rank	Country	Lower or single house	
		%	Women/ Seats			%	Women/ Seats
<b>15 to 19.9 %</b>							
121	Czech Republic	19	57 / 300	122	Colombia	18,8	32 / 170
124	Romania	18,5	61 / 329	129	Mongolia	17,3	13 / 75
142	Brazil	15,2	78 / 513	143	Paraguay	15,0	12 / 80
<b>10 to 14.9 %</b>							
145	Malaysia	14,9	33 / 222	147	Ghana	14,6	40 / 275
148	India	14,4	78 / 540	153	Hungary	12,6	25 / 199
158	Ivory Coast	11,4	29 / 255	163	Botswana	10,8	7 / 65
<b>5 to 9.9 %</b>							
166	Japan	9,9	46 / 464	172	Benin	8,4	7 / 83
180	Nigeria	5,8	21 / 360	182	Sri Lanka	5,4	12 / 223

Source: IPU 2021.

The fact that women are holding important offices, including as heads of government and heads of state, does not hide the fact that women experience unequal treatment in politics. In Europe, for example, women are underrepresented in nearly all national parliaments. However, the share of female delegates in the respective national parliament ranges from 12 to 47 per cent. Women are also still underrepresented in the national governments of the 27 EU member states, with the proportion of female ministers standing at just under a third in 2019.

Statutory rules to safeguard gender parity in their national parliaments exist in ten of the 27 EU member states. For example, the use of quota regulations at the party level, aimed at increasing the number of women in key positions. For others with neither statutory nor internal party quota regulations, the proportion of women in parliaments is between 12 and 28 per cent. Malta and Hungary rank below most of the EU member states, with less than ten per cent of female parliamentarians in their respective national parliaments. In contrast, Finland, France, Spain, and Sweden have a high share of female parliamentarians at 40 per cent and above. In the European Parliament, women make up 39 per cent of all members in the 2019-2024 legislature (286 out of 751 seats), which is a new record.

Parity laws that were adopted in France and Spain have contributed to an increase in the proportion of women represented in political parties and parliaments (as well as in other governmental and non-governmental institutions and companies). In these countries, the political parties must allocate a certain number of positions to women when nominating candidates, and also when awarding party offices. In Finland and Sweden, political parties maintain a balanced representation of men and women through voluntary commitments. The proportion of women in the Finnish parliament has increased to 46 per cent whilst it grew to 47.4 per cent in Spain, thus placing the country at the top of the list of EU countries in this regard in mid-2020.

Many countries have adopted specific strategies and legal regulations to increase the proportion of women in parliaments (Norris 2006: 96). Often, such arrangements are designed as some sort of temporary transition or bridging measure until gender parity has been achieved in legislative and other elected bodies. Such measures include the following three main strategies:

- 1. Reservation of a certain number of seats in a parliament for women** or ethnic minorities (e.g., the Maori in New Zealand). Such regulations were adopted primarily in countries with a majoritarian electoral system and a dominant Muslim culture in Africa and South Asia, for example, in Bangladesh and Pakistan or in Botswana, Lesotho, Morocco, and Tanzania. This strategy guarantees a minimum number of women in elected offices. Internationally, Rwanda has stood out for several years as the country with the highest proportion of women parliamentarians. However, the Rwandan political system is not a democracy as it is understood and described here. In Rwanda, as in other more democratic countries, women are appointed by the male party elite and enjoy little independence or influence on key decisions. In Pakistan, such “quota women” are treated as “proxy” or “token” (alibi women) and are discriminated against by their male colleagues in the exercise of their mandate, for example, in terms of allocated speaking times or the right to contribute to legislative initiatives (Fleschenberg 2006: 91). However, a distinction must be made between women who are elected and those who are appointed. Women with their own electoral base can act more independently and maintain their own legitimacy, which is derived through the democratic process of their election. In India, for example,

where one-third of seats in the local municipal elections are reserved for women, the successful female candidates gain a lot of influence and power. On the contrary, women who have been appointed to their position by the chairman or another leader of a party are often marginalised from any real decision-making responsibility because they lack an independent electoral or organisational basis.

- 2. Quota legislation for the candidate lists of political parties.** Whilst different regulations on this issue exist, in most cases, a minimum number of places in party offices and on lists of candidates for elections must be reserved for women. In Spain, for example, each gender must be represented by a minimum of 40 per cent on a list of candidates running for office. In Poland, this number is set at 35 per cent. In Portugal, the minimum percentage is set at 33 per cent; however, the law also stipulates that a maximum of two candidates of the same gender may appear next to each other on the party's list of candidates. The rationale here is that neither of the two genders can be relegated to the lower ranking and less promising list positions. Experience shows that such quota regulations do contribute to an increase in the proportion of women represented in politics. However, where compliance with the quotas is not linked to sanctions (as is the case in Brazil or Indonesia), political parties often ignore them. Even in countries where quota systems are observed (for example, in South Africa), female parliamentarians are often prevented from developing their full potential as their placement on the party's list of candidates for election is decided by the male-dominated party leadership who also determine the extent of their scope of action in parliament. In addition, the opportunities for women parliamentarians to exert influence are determined by the overall social context. In socially conservative societies, for example, female parliamentarians are operating within tight margins and are often constrained to dealing with supposedly women-specific issues such as gender equality or female genital mutilation. As a rule, the effectiveness of quota regulations depends not only on how well they are observed by the political parties, but also on the type of electoral law in place as well as other factors. Therefore, regulations on quotas must at least be coordinated with the electoral law so as to achieve an increase in

the proportion of women in politics and parliaments. In some countries, younger women in particular resist a quota system because they want to be elected based on their own merits and not because of their gender. However, it has been shown that without specific regulations on quotas to secure female participation, the proportion of women in politics and political parties often cannot be increased.

- 3. Voluntary gender quotas** adopted by the political parties regarding the internal process of selecting candidates for election. The attitudes and procedures of the political parties are of central importance in order to increase the proportion of women in electoral offices. A possible incentive here may be a political party's commitment to the democratic principle of equality, which it also uses in competition with other parties. It has been shown in recent years that addressing gender inequality has become a key issue in the political discourse between political parties. However, even with the best of intentions, increasing the proportion of women in politics and parliaments is not an easy task for any political party.

A comparison of different countries and procedures shows that two internal party procedures can contribute to increasing the proportion of women in parliaments: (1) increasing the proportion of women in leadership positions in a political party, and (2) centralised decision-making by the party leadership for the nomination of female candidates (Pruyser et al. 2017).

Political parties around the world are predominantly led by men. If a political party reforms its internal rules and procedures to secure a higher proportion of women in internal party leadership positions, then the number of women standing for election or running for office will also rise. Evidence suggests that, in places where women lead local party associations, the proportion of women running for office is particularly high. Political parties are thus encouraged to amend their statutes and procedures to achieve a maximum level of parity in the allocation of internal management positions. This applies also to the party presidium and the extended party executive committee. In any case, it is helpful for the women within a political party to be organised in dedicated intra-party women's associations that not only focus on specific issues of concern to women, but that also intentionally promote women leadership positions.

Table 11: Gender of the party leader and election procedure, 1965-2012.

Selectorate	Frequency of female leaders	Percentage	No. of selectorate*
Party members (or voters)	16	13.9	115
Delegates to party convention	34	11.6	294
Parliamentary caucus	5	9.6	52
Party council	3	5.0	60
Self-appointed or appointed by incumbent	0	0.0	10

\* Based on Australia, Israel and ten countries in Europe.

Source: Wauters and Pilet 2015: 84.

The second point is more complicated. There are clear indications that the proportion of female candidates increases when the party leadership holds central decision-making authority. In fact, the central party leadership in political parties with a centralised nomination process can independently decide to increase the proportion of women, even without the relevant statutory provisions in place. On the contrary, evidence suggests that women tend to be disadvantaged in the nomination process when it is the party members or other local representatives that select a constituency's candidate for election. The mere appeal to respect gender equality when nominating candidates usually has no real impact, because local branches are less concerned with the public image of the party and instead base decisions mainly on local criteria. Likewise, appealing to male candidates to forego running for office in favour of a woman is unlikely to be successful if the local party unit decides independently on a candidacy. A centralised decision-making process may lead to greater gender parity in the nomination of candidates. However, it may equally undermine the local party base if a male candidate enjoys higher levels of support in the local party structure or the electoral district, but the central party leadership decides to nominate a woman instead. This poses a dilemma for intra-party democracy that a political party can circumvent only if: (a) the local, regional, and national party leadership deal with the issue of gender parity well ahead of the elections, (b) they raise awareness within the party on the importance of gender equality, and (c) they provide sufficient support to female candidates. This also includes the elimination of old prejudices that claim women receive less support from voters or are able to mobilise fewer funds



in fundraising activities for election campaigns. As evidenced by many studies, neither is the case.

The proportion of women in politics and parliaments can only be increased if, firstly, the political parties have a vested interest in achieving gender parity and, secondly, if they adapt their internal procedures to meet this goal. The green parties in Europe have done so successfully and today boast an intra-party culture based on the acceptance of gender parity. Many other parties, however, rely on statutory quota regulations to increase the proportion of women among their elected representatives. Such quota regulations work mainly in countries with proportional representation and party lists. In countries with majority voting systems in which the individual constituencies are decisive, such as the UK or many Asian countries, increasing the proportion of women through a quota system remains difficult if the political parties do not change their stance or nomination process.

## INTRA-PARTY ASSOCIATIONS

The so-called intra-party associations, special organisations, or working groups offer a special form of intra-party engagement and participation in programmatic debates and political actions. Political parties with a larger number of party members create internal party organisations that give party members of certain social groups the opportunity to articulate their interests within the party, as well as demonstrate solidarity with specific social classes and groups. Associations play an important role in the political party's representative function as they channel the concerns and demands of different groups of society to the party, which can in turn articulate them in its activities. For example, intra-party labour associations that attract workers and trade unionists can not only be found in social democratic and socialist parties, but also in other popular parties that value good relations with the workforce. In addition to a labour wing, some Christian Democratic parties in Latin America, for example, used to have strong internal party groups consisting of members of the academic middle class (*profesionales*), such as lawyers and university professors. Given the diversity of most societies, political parties that want to appeal to a wider range of voters can use intra-party associations to establish contact with

different groups or individual professional groups, such as trade union members, local politicians, craftsmen, freelancers, small and medium-sized business entrepreneurs, teachers, police officers, as well as demographically defined groups, such as youth, women, and the elderly. Owing to the important role of local politicians for a political party, political parties should consider providing a space in the form of a special organisation or a working group for their local politicians where they can exchange experiences.

It is particularly important for the so-called electoral and popular parties to demonstrate their ability to integrate party members from different social strata and articulate their interests in the party's programme and political proposals. Such political parties already perform the function of aggregating and articulating interests internally. Intra-party groupings can play an important bridging role in programmatic debates and election campaigns.

The position of the specialised organisations within the political party is regulated very differently around the world. For some, party membership automatically takes place upon entry into a party (very often in party youth organisations), whilst for others, party membership must be applied for separately. Some of these associations require separate membership fees, whilst others are free. Most of these associations preside over their structure with their own board of directors. In large political parties, some associations have their own fiscal infrastructure. Depending on the significance of an association, they may play a role in the process of drawing up candidate and electoral lists. Both Germany's CDU and SPD host a variety of such associations, yet base their interactions with these organisations and their party members on quite different statutes.

## Youth organisations of a party

Whilst political parties should pay special attention to their youth organisations, many fail to do so. As the mutual relationship may be difficult at times and there may even occasionally be conflicts, some political parties choose not to provide their youth with an organisational framework of their own or a greater degree of autonomy, instead limiting their role to that of campaign workers. Where political parties have a youth wing, the age limit for membership is usually between 15 and 30 years.

The professionalisation of many political parties has also contributed to the neglect of general party membership recruitment and attraction of young people. However, the advantages of a party youth organisation far outweigh any challenges.

Youth organisations familiarise young party members with the political and ideological foundations of a political party and with party political life. Especially at a young age, such processes are important (Hooghe and Stolle 2005; Rainsford 2018). New members adapt to the group culture of the organisation they join and, after a learning phase, help shape the same. Even if not all political attitudes or behavioural patterns remain stable throughout life, it can be assumed that socialisation experiences made early in life have a lasting influence on future behaviour and attitudes. This also applies to attitudes towards a political party. Participation in a political party at a young age often encourages long-term, if not lifelong, bonds. Furthermore, networks are formed more easily and effectively at an early age and often remain accessible throughout life. Party members who are already integrated into political networks at a young age can be mobilised for political work much more easily in later life – even if it is “only” for the sporadic support of election campaigns. Studies confirm that many of those who were politically active at a young age remain so later in life. It makes it even more problematic that not only have political parties seen dwindling party membership numbers in recent years but so have their youth organisations. Declining membership numbers will shrink the pool of future office holders and supporters.

In most countries, youth organisations are part of the party structure. However, in some places their autonomy is limited, and their chairmen are either appointed by the party chairman, or at least a candidacy takes place in close coordination with the party chairman. Such youth organisations can hardly develop an independent profile. Although they ensure greater homogeneity within the political party, it is questionable whether this will increase a political party’s attractiveness for the younger generation. One can only surmise that limited autonomy has contributed to the decline in membership of many party youth organisations in recent years. This has been observed in Belgium and Sweden, for example, where socialist parties had large youth organisations until the early 1990s but have since seen drastic declines. In the UK, there was an opposite development. Whilst the youth associations of the Conservatives, Labour, and Liberal parties had also lost members over many

years, they experienced an upswing at the turn of the century. In the case of the Labour Party, this was primarily due to the election of Jeremy Corbyn and the politicisation and mobilisation of the public in connection with the referendum on Brexit. However, it is not only political motives that encourage young people to become involved in a political youth organisation. Peer group mentality and the desire for shared experiences are the main motivating factors (and not only for young members seeking to join political parties). It is therefore important that youth organisations not only offer their members the opportunities to participate in political discussions and actions, but also create a sense of community that can be linked to political issues. It has also proven useful if the members of youth organisations (ideally in coordination with the local party leadership) plan and carry out political projects. This is a highly motivational incentive, which can also help to significantly improve the image of the political party in public and its presence in society.

Conflicts between the youth and more traditional party members may arise at times. Young people may sometimes articulate radical demands that do not necessarily correspond with the official party line. Political opponents may then try to interpret such conflicts as an indication of a political party's political unreliability. Nonetheless, a self-confident political party should be able to endure such conflicts. However, serious conflicts may not always be rooted in political disagreements. In the UK, for example, a conflict between the Conservative Party and its youth organisation *Conservative Future* in 2016, ended with the latter's disbandment. This was triggered by personal missteps and conflicts within the youth organisation. A successor organisation is now in place.

Youth associations are treated differently in different party statutes as can be seen in Germany's two relatively strong youth organisations, the *Junge Union* and the *Jungsozialisten*.

The *Junge Union* is formally a party-independent, autonomous association recognised by both the CDU and CSU (which is only active in Bavaria) parties as their youth organisation. With more than 120,000 members, it is the largest political youth organisation in Europe, and has its own office and staff. The members of the *Junge Union* elect their executive committee without the influence of the "mother parties". The association has a great deal of autonomy and regularly issues its own political statements and demands, not all of which have been agreed with the party leadership. Occasionally, this leads to

contradictions and conflicts. Anyone who wants to belong to both the CDU and the CSU must submit separate applications for party membership. The *Jungsozialisten*, the SPD's youth organisation with around 80,000 members, is, in contrast, an integral part of the SPD's party structure. All party members of the SPD who are younger than 35 years automatically belong to the Young Socialists, without having to be active in the organisation. The *Jungsozialisten* or "*Jusos*" also have their own office but are housed in the party headquarters. They are a rebellious part of their party, sometimes making radical demands that go outside the party line. They choose their own leadership, also without the influence of the party executive. The chairmen of the two youth organisations of the CDU/CSU and SPD are invited as co-opted members to the executive committee of the parent party, where they can take part in debates but have no voting rights.

## Other specialised party organisations

### Women's associations

Women's associations have frequently been established as internal political party organisations to attract women and give them a greater say in party work. Key issues of concern to women's associations are the representation of women in internal party bodies and increasing the number of women selected as candidates in elections. Women's associations tend to deal with so-called "traditional" women's issues, even if today many women resist being committed to issues such as family, children, youth, and education. The topic of equality, with its various implications, is usually the most important topic for women's associations, whereby it can address both intra-party inequality and broader social inequality. Accordingly, many women's associations are now fighting not only for equal pay for both sexes, but also for legal regulations to increase the proportion of women on company boards. This can also lead to cross-party coalitions of women's associations from different parties as happened within the European Parliament and some parliaments of EU member countries when quotas were introduced to turbocharge the progress on gender balance in politics and business. Women's associations with many members can clearly shape the image of a political party. Their internal party

autonomy and ability to act mostly corresponds to the regulations for other internal party associations. In some political parties, women can choose their boards and bodies independently and have greater weight in negotiating candidacies. In other parties, the women's department also depends heavily on the chairman, who may appoint its chairperson. This considerably limits the scope of such an association.

## Other party associations and specialised groupings within parties

Political parties can have many other specialised groupings other than youth and women's organisations. Some are listed below to showcase the diversity. In many places, these organisations have their own structure and set-up that resembles that of the associated political party. This means that there are local groups, regional groups, and a national association, each with their own executive committee and committed members. Such associations offer a political party the opportunity to involve their party members who do not belong to the national, regional, or local leadership in internal party debates, or to transfer prominent positions unto them.

Examples of other associations

- ▶ Workers' associations for the gathering and representation of workers within a political party

- ▶ Associations of office holders in local parliaments or councils. This kind of association exercises an advisory function for the local parliamentary groups of the political party, for example, in questions of administrative and local politics, and in the fields of local self-government. Such an association can be very influential in large parties that are represented across numerous municipalities.

- ▶ Associations representing the interests of medium-sized business entrepreneurs, craftsmen, tradespeople, freelancers, and executives, as well as those of smaller industrial enterprises and the general business sector. Such an association is generally committed to the concepts of initiative and personal responsibility as the basis of a free economic and social order.

- ▶ Student associations that fulfil two important functions: on the one hand, it mobilises students and thus future members of a country's elite to

support a political party's goals and political positions, which often results in lifelong ties; on the other hand, universities are a recruiting pool for future staff of parliamentary groups or individual MPs and, last but not least, for the future candidates that a political party presents to the electorate.

► Senior citizens' associations that take account the growing importance of the group of older citizens, especially those who are no longer employed, but who want to remain politically active and engaged.

► Working groups: In addition to the associations, many political parties build working groups on specific thematic issues, which bring together interested party members, but which do not have the same status as an association. For example, a political party may have working groups of women lawyers, health workers, teachers, or other professional groups and specialist areas.

## POLITICAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF PARTY MEMBERS

Democracy does not work by itself; it must be learned. In a democracy, the decision-making power does not lie with a few bureaucrats, technocrats, autocrats, or the military, but ultimately rests in the hands of the people. Their participation is not limited to voting in elections. Instead, every democracy depends on the political commitment of a significant part of its citizens who are involved in political parties, social associations, federations, the media, and wherever else there is an open and public discourse on the shape of society. However, commitment alone is not enough. Rather, citizens must know how the institutions are organised, how elections work, and which rights and obligations the government and parliaments have. Citizens should also have a basic understanding of current affairs in order to assume their political citizenship role responsibly. Prerequisites for this include not only freedom of expression and information and the transparency and readiness of the government and other state and private institutions, but also the willingness of citizens themselves to acquire information and knowledge. In every country on earth, even the mere participation in elections requires at least rudimentary knowledge about the functioning and competencies of politics and the

political body being voted on. This applies equally to municipalities, regional authorities, the central government, and the national parliament (and in Europe, the European Parliament). Indeed, younger people with easy access to electronic and audio-visual media are incessantly confronted with information that is edited and prepared by rarely unbiased intermediaries from the mass media, Internet, and social media. These sources have become an increasingly influential player in the political power system about which they not only inform, but also represent and, at times, manipulate. In addition, most Internet users or social media followers do not search very systematically for reliable content and information on political or social events. Many users are not critical enough when accessing information via social media platforms, thus making them susceptible to fake news and manipulated data. Finally, evidence suggests a link between the level of civic education among the citizens of a country and the extent of corruption. Countries with low levels of corruption have citizens who are better educated in political issues.

Where do citizens learn how a democracy is organised and how it works? How do they find out about the competencies of individual representatives and institutions in the political system and how these interact with and against each other? What rights does the individual citizen have? How can citizens participate in politics? How can citizens access the media and protect themselves from manipulation? And finally, how can citizens acquire essential traits that are hallmarks of a democratic political culture, namely tolerance, the recognition of the right to different political views, the right to express one's own opinion, and the acceptance of defeat after a democratic vote?

All of these are topics and attitudes that can be learned and practised through political education. The central questions of political education relate to the basic problems of political life. Indeed, a democracy needs the support of political education. This must not be limited to formal school lessons but also extend to other areas of extracurricular youth and adult education. In many countries, however, there is no systematic and state-funded political education programme, not even in schools. In some places, this is a result of the indoctrination measures of previous authoritarian regimes. After the transition to democracy, the democratic governments do not want to expose themselves to the risk of being accused of conducting a new form of political manipulation. In other countries, there is simply a lack of resources. Very of-



ten, however, there is a lack of understanding of the need for political education. The lack of systematic efforts and offers of political education is a failure that can cost a democratic order dearly. Civic education requires financial support through state resources, yet despite its importance, politicians and political parties are often reluctant to approve state support.

The need for targeted and sustained efforts in political education applies not only to a democratic civil society in general, but also to the political parties themselves. It requires committed and informed party members and representatives in the municipalities, in the regions and, of course, at the national level. Faced with complex thematic issues and a complicated decision-making system, career politicians need in-depth knowledge on a vast range of political issues, not to mention moral and ethical integrity. Yet not all politicians live up to these standards. To keep up with the demand for expert knowledge on a growing number of issues, politicians must continuously educate themselves. This applies not only to public officials and parliamentarians at the upper levels of the political and government system, but also to the many representatives of a party who work on a voluntary basis and are involved at the local level. They must also expand their knowledge through regular training to competently represent the positions of their political party in public debates and to take political decisions that are in the best interest of their political party. Finally, local politicians and members of city or town councils who often only work on a voluntary basis require high levels of technical and specialist knowledge that can only be obtained through continuous training.

The political parties themselves must ensure that their party members are given the opportunity for continuous qualification and further training. In fact, politics itself offers the most important form of political education through the political processes at the various levels of governance, general coverage in the media, and participation in debates on factual issues or in decision-making processes. However, the ability to understand and critically assess complex issues, particularly against the backdrop of the fundamental principles of a political party, requires internal training. The onus is therefore on the political parties to offer courses and training, in the form of political education, to their party members. Ideally, the following areas should be covered by the training.

### Subject areas of internal political training

- General policy matters and a broad spectrum of thematic issues to enable party members to assess and represent political issues in line with the party's political positions
- Practical issues related to party work, including event organisation, the organisation and planning of election campaigns, and the implementation of political projects to activate members and strengthen the visibility of a political party
- Communication and rhetoric and the use of new media

Such education and training activities should target a wide range of party members, including (but not limited to) two key groups. The first is younger and, above all, new party members of a political party who, through their participation in educational measures with like-minded people, will also be “socialised” in the interests of the political party (community experiences). The second group is functionaries and public officials, who should be trained on a broad spectrum of topics, ranging from budget planning and management, planning processes, and procurement procedures, to local economic development, as well as social policy, educational policy, environmental policy, and cultural policy.

The qualification of the individual qualifies the organisation. If qualification becomes the rule, political parties will have a broad base of well-trained party members who can take on leadership tasks.

Some countries have created institutes or foundations that carry out political education measures on behalf of a political party, either as part of the official structure or as formally independent but party-affiliated institutions. The events that are organised by such institutions can also be partially open to non-party members. The political (party) foundations of Germany and the US are well-known examples of this kind of institution. However, even in those cases where government grants offer a certain degree of financial security to institutions of this kind (thus also providing them with stability in terms of their work and activities), systematic educational work is often neglected in

favour of *ad hoc* conferences and congresses. Whilst the latter may draw public attention to the organising institution and the affiliated political party, the long-term contribution to the training of the party members is limited. In addition to such *ad hoc* events, training and further educational measures should therefore also be organised more systematically.

### **A political party's commissioner on political education**

To ensure that the education and training of the party members are not neglected, it is helpful to appoint a commissioner who cares about political education within a party. This can be helpful both at the level of the national organisation and at the political party's regional and local subdivisions. The national education commissioner must coordinate the political party's educational activities and ensure that all party branches are aware of the educational mandate. The education commissioners of the regional and local divisions must plan and implement specific measures. Financial resources should not be a decisive constraint as many activities can be implemented with a small budget. It is important though that activities take place with a certain regularity. This requires a level of forward-looking planning, which also allows the party members to schedule the activities in their own calendars.

There are many types of educational activities. For example, Marxist and socialist parties of the past used to set up reading circles to engage with the writings of Karl Marx and other socialist writers. However, this type of educational activity may be out of step with modern times – despite there being plenty of reading material for groups at various points of the political spectrum. Although communal reading may no longer be practised, many topics can be discussed by party members at regular meetings. For instance, a local party member or an invited speaker can introduce a topic and open the floor for discussion. In addition to content-related debates, the community experience also has an important community-building function that must not be underestimated, and that cannot be replicated on a virtual platform. This form of activity may be of particular use to local party branches, which is why they should name one of their members as local education commissioner. Unless overly sensitive topics are being dealt with, local events of political education can also be opened to non-party members.

Workshops or seminars with specialist speakers represent alternative forms of education and may be particularly useful for the training of office holders and party members in local or regional parliaments. Every party official should take part in such a training course at least once a year. In addition to political issues, dealing with modern media competently and critically is an important topic. The reach of many political parties on social media is rather limited in relation to other providers of political information, some of which distribute fake news, or at least news with dubious content. The fact that many political parties can do little to counter this is related to inadequate training opportunities on the use of modern communication tools for their party members and officials.

The fact that many political parties pay little attention to political education is counterproductive to achieving their goals. All political parties should make a more concentrated effort in effectively training their party members and functionaries.

## **POLITICAL PROJECTS AS MOTIVATIONAL INCENTIVES FOR PARTY MEMBERS**

New members but, above all, young members of a political party want to get involved and contribute to the strengthening and visibility of their party. Of course, these party members will not be able to assume political leadership positions straight away or join an electoral list as its top candidates. However, there are other ways of involving young and committed members in party work and giving them the opportunity to make a name for themselves. A tried and tested method of doing so is for them to develop and implement their own political projects. The positive experiences that have been made in the political education work of the Konrad Adenauer School for Young Politicians (KASYP) in Asia, for example, can be replicated elsewhere. Some suggestions and instructions for planning and implementing political projects based on these experiences are given below (Romero 2017).

## What is a party project?

A party project is an activity that aims to promote the political party by introducing and implementing a new idea, action, or process. A project should be of a limited duration and must be well-conceived, planned, and coordinated with all relevant representatives of the political party. Above all, a party project should be realistic and feasible. Young party members may at times be over-ambitious in the scope or expected outcome of the projects. Working within the framework of a party project is also an exercise in learning to be patient and understanding the need for coordination and compromise. As German sociologist Max Weber once said, “politics is a strong and slow boring of hard boards. It takes both passion and perspective.” You may be reminded of this quote when implementing a project at the local level.

### ► Examples of party projects

Party projects can include very different activities, for example, organising training workshops for new or young party members, improving internal party communication (e.g., by editing a newsletter, setting up a social media platform, creating videos or podcasts, or updating the mailing list), or running a local donation campaign.

### ► Preparation of the party project

As a first step, an exchange with the local party leadership should identify the kind of project that is helpful. Second, it needs to be established what type of resources are required for the project implementation and how these can be obtained. Finally, the participants in the project must be identified, and concrete steps for its implementation defined. All these planning steps, including a project schedule, should be recorded in a Gantt chart. Relevant information and instructions can be found on the Internet (see also Romero 2017: 111 ff.).

## ► Strategic planning

The successful implementation of a project requires a strategy, which must include the following elements:

- A clear definition of the project's objective (e.g., increasing the number of party members, improving communication or organisation)
- A so-called SWOT analysis, listing all the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that may impact the implementation of the project. Those who learn early on to use this technique for their political project can later use it for other political purposes, for example, when planning their own election campaign. See Figure 8 for an example.
- The creation of a media plan, provided that the project is suitable for the party's public relations work. For example, the political project of a newcomer to the party may not be appropriate for extensive publicity. However, if the project aims to reach a broader public, a detailed media plan must be drawn up. The plan must contain all important data and information, including a list of the media and journalists on site, as well as who should be informed about the project and possibly even invited to contribute towards specific aspects of the project.
- Above all, the party base should be well informed about the nature of the project to rule out misunderstandings and to mobilise internal support.

## ► SWOT - Planning tool for political projects

SWOT is a matrix to systematically capture the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the implementation of a specific task or project. Anyone planning a political project may adopt this matrix to identify potential risk factors or opportunities and take these into account during the planning phase. The basic matrix of the SWOT analysis consists of the four parts illustrated below.

Figure 8: Basic model of a SWOT chart as a planning tool for political projects.

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>Important strengths of the planned project regarding the political and social environment</p>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <p>Important weaknesses of the party organisation, internally and externally</p>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <p>The most important opportunities for the organisation arising from the political and social environment of the party</p>	<p><b>Threats (Risks)</b></p> <p>The main threats and challenges, internal and external</p>

Source: Romero (2017: 40 ff.).

The above diagram forms the basis for further planning steps, which can also be recorded and displayed systematically. This methodical and systematic approach has the advantage that individual steps on the way to the implementation of a project are recorded and transparent, and everyone involved in the project can quickly see which steps have already been taken and what still needs to be done. Of course, there are many other planning instruments that build on such a SWOT output analysis to plan projects precisely and to harmonise the individual actions with the goals of the party organisation. Proper preparation of party projects is a prerequisite for securing social and political impact. If individual members or groups of members of a political party are given the opportunity to carry out such political projects, this not only strengthens the individual's bond with a party, but also promotes the party's profile. Finally, planning and executing political projects is good training in preparing for one of the most important activities of any party: the election campaign.

### Questions to the reader for critical evaluation

- How are the political parties you know organised: centralised or decentralised?
- How powerful is the national political party leader, and what powers do they have? How often is a chairman elected or re-elected?
- What competencies do the regional or local associations of the political parties have? Can they elect their leaders independently (i.e., without the influence of the national party headquarters) and do they also have a large say in the selection of candidates for the local councils, regional representative bodies, and national parliament?
- How is the membership of the political parties developing? Are there any targeted efforts to recruit new party members?
- What advantages do the members of a political party enjoy? Are they involved in internal party decisions or only informed about them? What forms of participation are there in the election of the national leader, the nomination of candidates, the decision on political programmes, and current political issues?
- What role do women play in the political parties? What is the percentage of women in parliament? What is the percentage of women in leadership positions within the political parties in your country?
- What procedures (if any) are in place to increase the proportion of women in the political party, in leadership positions in the political party, and in parliament?
- What is the significance of intra-party associations or specialised organisations? How are they organised? Are there associations of youth, women, local politicians, and others? What degree of autonomy do they have?
- How important is the political training of their party members and elected officials to the political parties? Which further training measures are being undertaken?
- Are there examples of younger party members carrying out their own political projects?



# 5

## Local Party Organisation and the Importance of Local Politics for Parties

Local politics is a key area of democratic governance. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for a political party to be present in cities and municipalities with local branches and to have party members in local parliaments or councils. When a political party is firmly anchored in the local community and demonstrates an ability to govern cities and towns, it has a positive correlation with how it is perceived at the national level. Being close to the local electorate and conducting politics in an efficient manner builds trust among the electorate. New political parties have a greater chance of enduring if they are able to participate in local parliaments. This applies especially to political parties in young democracies (Obert and Müller 2017). Building on successful local politics, they can gradually achieve success at the national level as well. Immediate electoral success at the national level without prior proof of the ability to act in local politics is still rather rare. In presidential systems, “outsiders” can successfully run for office at the national level, as shown by the example of Volodymyr Zelensky, who was elected president of Ukraine in 2019 after having been known only as a showmaster and, to the surprise of the public, declaring his candidacy without being anchored in a political party. But where such outsiders cannot rely on a political party with a broad communal political base, their political scope for action and success will remain limited.

Local politics is the “cradle of democracy” in a double sense. First, democracy emerged out of local communities. Since the earliest forms of human settlement, people have had to make decisions on how best to live together. These settlements were cities and the original form of the state. The Greek word for city is *polis*, which is the root word of politics. The ideas, norms, and procedures that emerged from ancient Greek cities – above all Athens – are still fundamental to the democracy of the present.

Second, many politicians take their first political steps in local affairs. Numerous politicians on the national stage cut their teeth politically at the local level by being members of local councils or mayors before becoming state governors, national deputies, prime ministers, or heads of state. For example, Konrad Adenauer was mayor of Cologne, Germany for many years; Boris Johnson was mayor of London, UK for two terms; Joko Widodo was first mayor of Surakarta City and then Governor of Jakarta, Indonesia; Rodrigo Duterte was mayor of Davao City, Philippines; Andrés Manuel López Obrador was mayor of Mexico City, Mexico. In Sweden, Finland, and Norway, traditionally, more than half of national ministers have experience in key local government offices before reaching national office. Even if the aforementioned politicians represent very different political styles, these examples show that for those who want to learn the political business, local politics is an ideal training ground. The transition from local to national politics is facilitated by the fact that in most parliamentary democracies, national parties are also the dominant actors in local politics. Only in a few countries are national parties hardly or not at all represented at the local level. In Canada, local politics is almost entirely dominated by independents or members of local lists. In Australia and New Zealand, local political parties without national claims are the more important actors in local politics, as are the lists of non-party candidates in Italy or Japan. These countries notwithstanding, the national parties of most countries play a central role in local politics.

## THE PURPOSE OF LOCAL POLITICS

Local politics addresses all of those issues that affect people most directly. These include the most ordinary aspects of life, such as living, eating and drinking, shopping, commuting, the workplace, safety, education, leisure, health care, and the burial of the dead. Translated into the language of politics, these aspects of life are referred to as the provision and affordability of living space, consumption, goods and services of all kinds, infrastructure, a safe environment, the distribution of energy, waste disposal, planning for as well as the construction and maintenance of kindergartens, schools, universities, hospitals, sports facilities, and cultural and youth facilities, and care for cemeteries. No field of politics is as intimate as local politics.

Local politics must therefore:

- Identify and solve problems at the local level;
- Preserve and protect available local resources;
- Promote development processes at local level through efficient mobilisation of resources; and finally,
- Carry out all local measures in close coordination with the citizens.

In some countries, many of the local actions are decided by the national government through ministries and other agencies or by regional government and agencies. However, within the framework of democracy, it has become apparent that the decentralisation of political and administrative decisions increases efficiency as centralised governance becomes overwhelmed by the diversity of tasks at the local level. Local and regional administrations usually understand the problems and needs of their communities much better than the national government. Additionally, it is less costly if local or regional governments independently carry out as many tasks as possible that affect the immediate interests and concerns of citizens. Of course, a central government must not shirk its responsibilities and must support municipalities and regional governments in their tasks whilst also avoiding encroaching into what should be local decision-making. In order for this division of tasks to function effectively, the administrative level to which the corresponding competence is transferred must then also assume the legal (and, if applicable, political) responsibility for the tasks (“ownership” and “accountability”). The principle of this approach to governance is known as subsidiarity.

### Principle of subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity holds that a social or governmental task should, as far as possible, be carried out by the lowest governance level. Only when the local unit is unable to perform a task efficiently should this task be taken on by the next higher unit. For states, the principle of subsidiarity is important for the relationship between the municipality or other self-governing bodies and the central authority. In federal states, this entails municipalities first and then the federal states second perform the public tasks whilst the central government only fulfils those functions that other units of governance are unable to perform, such as foreign policy and national defence. For the European Union, the principle of subsidiarity is a central concept for the distribution of responsibilities and decision-making authorities among its member states and community institutions. The principle demands that the authority to make decisions is retained by member states if the intervention of the European Union is unnecessary.

## PARTIES AND LOCAL POLITICS

Local politics was not always considered a domain of political parties. In many places around the world, there was a prevailing belief that local politics was more about administration or non-political self-government, and that this was outside the scope of inter-party differences. Today, however, there is consensus that local politics extends beyond administration as many decisions even at the local level require political legitimation through political debates and democratically generated decisions. In addition, the modernisation and multiplication of lifestyles and production have provoked new questions and conflicts about the shaping of local coexistence, even in cities and smaller municipalities, so that the need for political parties to articulate and settle these conflicts and decide them through elections has increased in local politics as well. Political parties therefore have a firm place in local politics worldwide today.

For political parties, local politics is both an opportunity and a challenge. Local politics is very intimate as it is the most direct contact individuals will have with the state and its services, and this interaction will influence the way the electorate feels about specific political parties. Positive impressions are made if political parties are seen to be attentive and responsive to local issues whilst negative views develop when concerns are ignored or when corruption arises. In principle, political parties fulfil the same functions at the local level as on all other political levels. For instance, they aggregate social interests, draft political programmes, draft a party position on individual issues, mobilise, communicate, attend to public relations, run election campaigns, recruit new party members, recruit and nominate candidates for elections, formulate and implement guidelines, participate in the formulation of local laws and regulations, and assume the responsibilities of local government.

Analyses of political parties in young democracies show that the degree of their presence in local politics, in addition to their ability to recruit new members and the professional work of their headquarters, are key factors not only for their survival but also for their electoral success and their ability to present a united front in parliaments (Gherghina 2009). In addition, analyses of election results of national parliaments show very clearly that candidates for the national parliament are particularly successful when their party is well positioned locally and pursues successful local politics.

The strong presence of a political party in the major cities of a country is particularly important. Cities are – especially against the backdrop of urbanisation that is taking place around the world – a laboratory for social change. The lifestyle in the big cities influences the way of life in the rest of the country over time. What happens in cities will extend to the more rural regions a few years later. This is especially true for youth culture, lifestyle choices, and the political attitudes of the youngsters. Over time, urban attitudes towards politics and individual parties will strongly influence the attitudes of youngsters and adults in an entire country. It is therefore important for a political party to continuously seek and maintain contact with young people, especially in larger cities. Political parties will have to aggregate social interests and may then have to show flexibility in their positions to attract young voters and to retain them permanently.

However, there are some special circumstances at the local level that make it difficult for political parties to act in a similar way as at the national level. These include:

- Competition of many actors. In a municipality there are significantly more actors who compete with political parties in the sphere of opinions and in proposing solutions for local issues and problems than at the national level. These actors include representatives of civil society, clubs, and associations and, finally, many individual citizens who profess to know or actually know local issues well. The varied voices place high demands on the professional competence of the party representatives. In addition, there are also the officials of the local administration, to whom citizens have much more direct, sometimes even personal, access. Therefore, there is a feeling that parties are not necessary as intermediaries.
- More direct participation of citizens. In many countries, there has been a trend towards more direct participation of citizens in local affairs. This should be considered positively as it indicates an expansion of democratic participation. For political parties though, this is a problem insofar as they are no longer perceived as the chief mediator and spokesman for local interests. This creates the impression – especially in smaller communities – that political parties are not really required when it comes to articulating and representing local issues. Of course, this also has a knock-on effect on the local membership of parties.
- A different form of communication. Being close to the electorate requires a different and far more personal form of communication. Whilst local party associations must use social media to communicate their messages, provide information about campaigns, and invite people to events, a personal presence is vital for politics at the local level. Local politicians are part of the local community and they must prove this by being active in local clubs and associations. Engagement in social projects can affect the political sphere. For example, though sports clubs or cultural associations have no intrinsic political goals, membership in such communities gives a politician a feel for what citizens are interested in. Above all, the presence of the elected representative

conveys to citizens that “this local politician is one of us”. The most important communication tool here is therefore personal presence and integration into the local community. This creates both awareness and credibility.

- Other forms of political conflict. Not only are the issues contested in local politics different from the larger issues of national politics but so is the style of political conflicts. Representatives of moderate parties at the local level should take great care to ensure that political disputes do not escalate into personal disputes. Issues at the local level tend to become personal far more quickly than larger national issues. In addition, experience shows that citizens do not approve of disputes over political issues developing into personal conflicts.
- A decreasing willingness of citizens to participate in the formal procedures and institutions of political representation. As willing as many citizens are today to get involved in local initiatives or ad hoc groups to voice a particular concern, to air their grievances in citizens’ meetings or to quickly comment online on local events, in quite a number of places there has been a decline in the number of those willing to participate in the formal procedures and institutions of political representation. Getting elected to a local council, studying administrative documents, and attending committee meetings require a willingness to invest a lot of time in political engagement. This is not only tedious but is also rarely fully appreciated. The consequence for many political parties is that they cannot field enough (capable) candidates in elections and are thus less attractive when it comes to receiving votes. Where citizens refuse to participate in the political bodies, this is not only a challenge for the political parties, but also a danger for the preservation of local self-government.

## Additional challenges for the party organisations in the municipalities

As important as the commitment and presence of the political parties in the municipality are, they are often faced with specific problems, such as:

- A weak local party organisation and lack of permanent staff;
- Limited resources, with no funding from the political party for local associations of parties;
- Low technical expertise of the local party representatives in municipal representative bodies; and
- Lack of mechanisms for greater accountability and consultation between the party elite and the grassroots.

In addition, local party organisations are in some places affected by phenomena such as oligarchical decision-making processes, personalistic politics, ideological fuzziness, and limited internal-party debates about political alternatives. Patronage networks and factionalism can affect party loyalty and personal relationships, and cause possible divisions. In addition, local party associations, which often have few resources at their disposal, must refuse any attempt to influence political decisions through donations or other contributions. Money politics (i.e., decisions in favour of individuals or companies that show appreciation for local politicians via financial means) is not uncommon at the local level because decisions here affect the interests of individuals or companies far more directly than decisions made at the national level.

In some countries, given the small number of party members, it is difficult for political parties to nominate sufficient and, above all, competent candidates for electoral offices. In addition, especially in local elections, they also face non-party candidates and electoral lists unburdened by the negative image of political parties. Therefore, it is imperative for candidates at the local level of politics to prove their ability to serve as competent representatives of citizens' interests.

Whilst national parties continue to dominate local politics in most parliamentary democracies in Europe, a tendency towards the strengthening of local parties and independent candidates without any connection to national



parties has been observed in some European countries (Rahat and Kenig 2015: 73 ff.). The reasons for this are two-fold. First, there is increasing scepticism towards political parties and, second, a stronger localism or regionalism has developed in response to the complexity of national and supranational politics. Certainly, such reactions can inspire many citizens to become more interested in political participation but there also is a risk that local lists are guided by individual, private, or clientelist interests. In addition, the short lifespan of non-party and independent lists makes it difficult to pursue long-term projects and interests in a municipality.

## PUBLIC RELATIONS OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN LOCAL POLITICS

Public relations are a key tool for a political party at all levels of its organisational structure to build understanding and trust. It is not merely about advertising but involves creating an understanding of the political party's position, developing trust in its reliability and performance and, above all, building a lasting relationship between the political party and its target groups. In local politics, in the same way as for other levels of politics, public relations must:

- Communicate well so that citizens know what a political party stands for;
- Engender support from the electorate;
- Provide information to help citizens understand the issues informing the party's positions on specific issues and problems;
- Represent interests;
- Build trust by justifying a political party's decisions and making decision-making transparent; and
- Spar with political opponents because political competition over possessing the better programmes and proposals and the more competent and representative politicians is a central component of democracy.

A political party must continuously conduct strategic public relations because of its contribution to attaining the public's acceptance and electoral success. Public relations should have the following goals in mind (Märting 2009: 16):

- Attract attention;
- Increase awareness;
- Increase popularity;
- Give orientation;
- Win support; and
- Shape relationships in the long term.

A variety of instruments are available to help with the achievement of these goals. Political parties at the local level should be as creative as possible in their approach through, for example, press releases, posters, brochures, the publication of the political party's own local newspaper, the sending of a newsletter to local party members and other interested citizens, mailing campaigns, advertisements, canvassing, all forms of digital communications via different platforms, and direct contact with citizens. When a political party has the resources to do so, it can plan local public relations to target specific groups with bespoke messages for each of them. Unfortunately, local party associations with a small budget or few active party members will find it difficult to continuously prepare and send out such messages. Chapter 6 of this book deals with further aspects of political communication that are equally applicable to a political party's local public relations.

## POLITICAL PARTIES IN LOCAL PARLIAMENTS

A political party's local standing depends largely on its participation in decision-making in local affairs. Whenever a political party is the party of the mayor or other important officials of a municipality, they significantly cultivate the image of the political party through how they exercise their duties as well as through their personal appearances and interactions with the citizens. In addition, the work of the representatives in the local councils – whether at the city or municipal level – plays a major role in shaping the image of the political party. Local councils are usually the highest decision-making bodies in a city

or municipality. With their decisions, they lay the foundations of the work carried out by the local administration and play a decisive role in controlling the local government, the mayor and other officials, and the administration. Even if their tasks and decision-making powers are generally less than those of national parliaments, the local councils are authentic organs of representation of the electorate. Its legitimacy – just like that of a national parliament – is based on direct, free, equal, and secret election of its members carried out at regular intervals of usually four or five years.

In many places, the members of local parliaments enjoy some special rights. These rights include those related to parliamentary functions, such as the right to speak in the council during debates, to present statements, to submit proposals individually or in a group, to formulate proposals on individual issues that are voted on in committees or in the plenary of the local parliament, to vote on the mayor (who is elected by the local parliament in some countries), and other important personnel decisions requiring parliamentary approval.

In addition, council members have the right to receive timely and comprehensive information from the local administration both about internal processes and matters that affect the interests of a municipality. In addition to this right to information, council members in some countries have the right to take an inside look into certain files of the local administration, such as those on issues regarding legal disputes in a municipality, real estate transactions, or tenders in connection with the award of public contracts. This right to inspect files often depends on a minimum number of requests from council members.

This summary of the tasks and rights of members of local councils drives home the importance of council members possessing a good breadth of knowledge of various areas so as to be able to conscientiously carry out their duties and make decisions responsibly. When nominating candidates for local elections, political parties must therefore ensure that their candidates represent the broadest possible spectrum of knowledge and experience so that they can then perform their work in the council competently as elected representatives. Continuous training of council members should therefore be an integral part of local party work. The intra-party alliance between the local politicians of a party discussed above can play an important supporting role.

The need for continuous training in addition to the actual council work is an additional burden for the local parliamentarians, especially when council

work is not a full-time job. Aside from Brazil, for example, very few countries have full-time municipal council members endowed with generous salaries, offices, and assistants. Such an arrangement, however, does come with a price as it tends to encourage the emergence of networks of local patronage and the gradual alienation of the elected representatives from regular citizens. Local council work should therefore remain voluntary everywhere and council members should be dissuaded from caring more about their own income than the interests of their community. In fact, employing council members on a full-time basis with the appropriate remuneration is only justifiable in large cities where decisions involve complex matters impacting upon millions of people. This is because, in addition to the requirement for professional qualifications, a municipal mandate is associated with a high demand on time, which considerably restricts the exercise of a profession. Where the work of the council is largely carried out on a voluntary basis, there is often a kind of compensation or allowance to ensure that no member of a local parliament is out of pocket because of their political responsibilities. Most local politicians take it for granted that private interests usually play second fiddle to political commitments. However, arrangements should be in place to allow them to exercise the mandate without further hindrances. This includes, for example, protection against dismissal from existing employment, a transfer to another place of employment or any other disadvantage, as well as the leeway to leave work to attend meetings of the local parliament or its committees.

## Political groups in the local parliament

As at the national level, representatives of a political party in a local council form factions to coordinate their parliamentary activities, proposals, and voting behaviours.

The parliamentary group should be organised democratically. It usually consists of a chairman and (depending on the number of members) an executive committee, whose rights and obligations are expressly laid down. When such groups receive cash or some other forms of benefit (e.g., subsidies for material costs and the payment of employees), the income and expenditure must be accounted for and audited to avoid the misuse of public funds.

Particularly in the larger local parliaments of large cities, individual parliamentary groups form working groups tasked with preparing for the meetings of committees or the parliamentary plenary. In addition to council members, other members of a political party who do not have a seat in the council, as well as competent citizens, may be invited to participate in such working groups. This helps to raise the profile of a parliamentary group and its political party.

Public relations work is also part of the range of tasks required of political groups as citizens have a right to be informed about the actions of their council and its members. No political party or parliamentary group may leave the dissemination of information about the work of the council to the local administration or the mayor alone. It is particularly important at the municipal level that the political parties heighten their profile through the provision of information.

## CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE COMMUNITY

Coexistence and, above all, the quality of life in a community depend not only on local institutions performing their tasks effectively but also on healthy civic engagement by its citizenry. This is the foundation of a lively, diverse, and advancing local society. The municipalities (i.e., the local administration) can support civic engagement through various programmes and projects by promoting and introducing a wide range of initiatives and by engaging citizens when important decisions about local affairs are to be made. In some countries, citizens' participation is even required by law. If, for example, decisions are to be made on important infrastructure projects or changes to building or landscape plans, calls for tenders and plans must be made public and interested citizens must not only be kept informed, but also have the right to object to proposals. Advisory councils, citizen assemblies, and other forms of meetings are just some ways in which citizens can be brought into the decision-making process outside of the local council. These venues, along with virtual places on the Internet and social media, permit the mayor, other decision-makers of a municipality, and citizens to discuss proposed projects.

A political party that wants to have a significant say in local politics must consciously promote this civic engagement. This does not restrict its political scope for planning and action but rather expands and strengthens it. Citizen forums or other forms of civic participation, sometimes also referred to as co-operative democracy, can certainly not replace the decisions of the local councils and their elected officials (usually largely made up of political parties) as only they are democratically elected and represent the entirety of the citizens of a municipality. At the end of an electoral period, it is the political parties who face the vote and not those who are particularly active in citizen forums. Furthermore, in the legal and constitutional sense, the representativeness of the decision-making processes guarantees the accountability of the decisions made. Hence, political parties must strive to consider the opinions and suggestions expressed by citizens and possibly to translate the suggestions into concrete policy proposals. This is the classic party function of the aggregation of social interests. When suggestions are considered, decisions on the way forward must be based on the interests of all the community rather than those with the loudest voice.

### Forms of citizen participation in local politics

**“Knowledgeable citizens”.** In order to support the work of committees of local councils and to harness the experience and expertise of citizens for individual topics, well-informed, “knowledgeable” citizens can be appointed to an advisory function without voting rights. Such citizens are usually invited by political parties and this guarantees a pluralism of opinions and prevents the representation of unilateral interests.

**Citizens’ petitions and referendums.** Petitions and referendums are instruments to bring about a vote on a certain issue. If a minimum number of citizens petition for an issue, a form of referendum takes place, with which a measure that has already been decided upon can be reversed or a new measure implemented. Such a referendum takes the decision out of the hands of the elected community representatives and has the same quality as a resolution by the local council.

**Residents' request.** If it meets certain requirements and is supported by a specified minimum number of citizens, such a request can oblige a local council to discuss a specific matter in a public session without committing to a decision being made on the matter.

**Advisory boards.** These groups give certain groups of the population or stakeholders the opportunity to provide expert advice to the municipal council or the local administration. In German municipalities, for example, there are youth, senior, foreign, and disabled advisory councils. They are elected either directly by the resident population concerned or by the local parliament. The composition, competence, and organisation of advisory boards vary considerably from place to place.

**Advisory councils for foreigners.** Foreigner or migration and integration councils have existed in German municipalities for around 50 years. As pure consultation bodies, they offer residents who do not have the right to vote in local self-government the ability to participate in politics.

**Municipal right to vote for foreigners.** The municipal right to vote for foreigners is a special form of political participation at the municipal level offering foreigners the right to vote. Since the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, for example, all EU citizens enjoy the right to vote and to stand for election in the local elections of their main residence, regardless of which member state they are citizens of. In almost half of the EU member states, citizens from non-EU countries are also allowed to actively participate in local elections and, in several countries, they can also be elected to municipal offices.

**Self-administration of community facilities.** Many communities own various facilities such as schools, hospitals, sports and leisure facilities, theatres, and other cultural facilities. It is not uncommon to transfer the operation of such facilities to local associations or other supporting organisations, with the communal administration only ensuring that proper management is carried out.

**Self-help organisations.** There are associations and initiatives for many areas of personal and community life established to help individuals or groups facing specific challenges – such as health issues, drug

addiction, disability or unemployment – or to enable citizens to pursue common interests such as sports or culture.

**Digital participation.** Digital participation is becoming more and more widespread and there are now various tools and processes constantly being developed. So far, digital elections have only been possible in a few countries, such as in Estonia, but digital citizen surveys are becoming more common, especially on topics debated in municipal bodies. When it comes to surveys with specific questions (for example, suggestions for the expansion of traffic and cycle paths or the use of certain open spaces or real estate), there has been a relatively high participation rate of citizens. However, as with other forms of citizen participation, there is a risk that such surveys are not representative of the whole population but only those who actively use the Internet and social media.

These various forms of citizen participation in politics do not restrict the political parties' room for manoeuvre so long as they know how to navigate and exploit them for their own political goals. This applies especially to digital forms and formats of participation.

Parties should not ignore the youth. The youth should not only be viewed as a resource for recruitment since many have a desire to work on specific projects that have a direct influence on their living environment. When political parties do not try to interest and inspire young people in politics, many youths will fail to recognise and appreciate how political parties can enable them to influence politics in a practical manner. No political environment is better suited for inspiration than local politics. Here, young people both learn and test out ideas that can shape society politically in a sustainable manner. The experience gained contributes to the quality of a democracy in a country as young people learn through political engagement in the municipality to actively articulate and negotiate their needs and interests in the political arena. In countries such as Germany and Great Britain, individual cities and regions maintain specific funding programmes for youth parliaments to interest young people in local political issues and to encourage their participation in local projects (Rau 2017). Even if such initiatives come from the administration,



political parties can also pursue this approach and try even more intensively to involve young people in specific projects.

Another way political parties can introduce the youth to politics is by nominating them as candidates in local elections and, depending on electoral law, putting them up as constituency candidates or giving them promising places on candidate lists. In this way, political parties can deepen the political education of youth members and at the same time ensure that an important part of the local community is visibly and directly involved in political decisions. With the transfer of important offices and functions to young people, a political party is internally invigorated and more attractive externally, especially to young voters.

## Limits to citizen participation

As important as the diverse forms of citizen participation are, and as much as political parties should support them, they cannot replace existing forms of representative and direct democratic decision-making. It must be remembered that only elected representatives in local parliaments are legitimised by general elections. The composition of a city or municipal council adequately reflects the political preferences of the citizens for an electoral term. Even if elected officials or local government cede competences to citizen forums, they are ultimately responsible to the citizens, and will be accountable for all political decisions made during an electoral term in the next elections.

## PRINCIPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE IN MUNICIPALITIES

As the acceptance of political parties in the municipalities largely depends on their local performance, it is important to discuss the *12 Principles of Good Governance* published in 2018 by the Council of Europe, an association of 47 states providing guidance to local governments on how to better serve their citizens. Political parties can also adhere to these principles not only for the management of a municipality but also for the political education and training of their party members, local elected officials, and candidates.

## **Principle 1: Participation, Representation, and Fair Conduct of Elections**

- Local elections are conducted freely and fairly, according to international standards and national legislation, and without any fraud.
- Citizens are at the centre of public activity and are involved in clearly defined ways in public life at the local level.
- All men and women can have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate bodies that represent their interests. Such broad participation is built on the freedoms of expression, assembly, and association.
- All voices, including those of the less privileged and most vulnerable, are heard and considered in decision-making, including decisions concerning the allocation of resources.
- There is always an honest attempt to mediate between various legitimate interests and to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best interest of the whole community and on how this can be achieved.
- Decisions are taken according to the will of the many, whilst the rights and legitimate interests of the few are respected.

## **Principle 2: Responsiveness**

- Objectives, rules, structures, and procedures are adapted to the legitimate expectations and needs of citizens.
- Public services are delivered, and requests and complaints are responded to within a reasonable timeframe.

## **Principle 3: Efficiency and Effectiveness**

- Results meet the agreed objectives.
- Best possible use is made of the resources available.
- Performance management systems make it possible to evaluate and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of services.
- Audits are carried out at regular intervals to assess and improve performance.

## Principle 4: Openness and Transparency

- Decisions are taken and enforced in accordance with rules and regulations.
- There is public access to all information that is not classified for well-specified reasons as provided for by law (such as the protection of privacy or ensuring the fairness of procurement procedures).
- Information on decisions, implementation of policies, and results is made available to the public in such a way as to enable it to effectively follow and contribute to the work of the local authority.

## Principle 5: Rule of Law

- The local authorities abide by the law and judicial decisions.
- Rules and regulations are adopted in accordance with the procedures provided for by law and are enforced impartially.

## Principle 6: Ethical Conduct

- The public good is placed before individual interests.
- There are effective measures to prevent and combat all forms of corruption.
- Conflicts of interest are declared in a timely manner and the persons involved must abstain from taking part in making the relevant decisions.

## Principle 7: Competence and Capacity

- The professional skills of those who deliver governance are continuously maintained and strengthened in order to improve their output and impact.
- Public officials are motivated to continuously improve their performance.
- Practical methods and procedures are created and used in order to transform skills into capacity and to produce better results.

## Principle 8: Innovation and Openness to Chance

- New and efficient solutions to problems are sought and advantage is taken of modern methods of service provision.
- There is readiness to pilot and experiment new programmes and to learn from the experience of others.
- A climate favourable to change is created in the interest of achieving better results.

## Principle 9: Sustainability and Long-term Orientation

- The needs of future generations are taken into account in current policies.
- The sustainability of the community is constantly taken into account.
- Decisions strive to internalise all costs and not transfer problems and tensions – be they environmental, structural, financial, economic, or social – to future generations.
- There is a broad and long-term perspective on the future of the local community along with a sense of what is needed for such development.
- There is an understanding of the historical, cultural, and social complexities in which this perspective is grounded.

## Principle 10: Sound Financial Management

- Charges do not exceed the cost of services provided and do not reduce demand excessively, particularly in the case of important public services.
- Prudence is observed in financial management, including in the contracting and use of loans, the estimation of resources, revenues, and reserves, and the use of exceptional revenue.
- Multi-year budget plans are prepared, with consultation of the public.
- Risks are properly estimated and managed, including by the publication of consolidated accounts and, in the case of public-private partnerships, by sharing the risks realistically.
- The local authority takes part in arrangements for inter-municipal solidarity, fair sharing of burdens and benefits and reduction of risks (equalisation systems, inter-municipal co-operation, mutualisation of risks, etc.).

## **Principle 11: Human Rights, Cultural Diversity, and Social Cohesion**

- Within the local authority's sphere of influence, human rights are respected, protected, and implemented, and discrimination on any grounds is contested.
- Cultural diversity is treated as an asset, and continuous efforts are made to ensure that all have a stake in, identify with, and do not feel excluded from the local community.
- Social cohesion and the integration of disadvantaged areas are promoted.
- Access to essential services is preserved, in particular for the most disadvantaged segments of the population.

## **Principle 12: Accountability**

- All decision-makers – collective and individual – take responsibility for their decisions.
- Decisions are reported on, explained, and can be sanctioned.
- There are effective remedies against maladministration and actions of local authorities that infringe civil rights.

(Council of Europe, 2018)

### Questions to the reader for critical evaluation

- What role do political parties you know play in local politics? Are they present and active in municipalities?
- Are young party members (up to 30 years of age) also represented by political parties in the local representative bodies? If not, why not?
- What kind of public relations work do the political parties in the municipalities carry out?
- How do they involve their party members in political action?
- How do they interact with citizens?
- How do citizens participate in the making of local policy decisions?

# 6

## The Financing of Political Parties

Democracy has its price. Political parties need to ensure adequate funding to perform their functions effectively, acquire expertise, develop and disseminate their programmes, maintain a stable organisational structure, maintain communication with members, and conduct election campaigns on an equal footing with other parties. Ideally, political parties are financially independent and financed through membership fees without depending financially on a person, a company, an interest group, or a government grant/s. This ideal case only applies to smaller political parties or the business parties that depend on their benefactor. In Europe, where members of political parties traditionally pay membership fees, these fees are usually not sufficient to adequately finance party work. Larger politically dominant parties with many party members need additional financial allowances. However, the need for additional funding may lead to considerable problems in many places that can permanently impact both the reputation of political parties and that of democracy. Mismanagement and corruption have already been mentioned as sources of funding for election campaigns. In addition, in Latin America, criminal organisations are known to exert an unhealthy influence on political parties and politicians. In North America and Asia, there are big corporations and wealthy individuals that do likewise. In Africa there are clientelist networks and, in some places, drug traffickers who increasingly play a role in political party funding.

Whilst there is state funding or the subsidisation of political parties in various forms in Europe, clientelism, corruption, and organised crime also play a role in the financing of political parties and election campaigns.

Political party funding, the laws regulating it, and the elimination or at least limitation of illegal sources of funding are challenges for all democratic countries. The challenge of attaining and managing funding is a special challenge for political parties as they are significantly involved in the legislation and implementation of laws controlling how party financing is regulated, implemented, and above all, carried out in a country.

In many countries, this task has only been fulfilled to a limited extent or not at all, as numerous scandals and corruption cases show. Of course, national political, economic, and financial contexts play a role everywhere. Perhaps of greater importance here is the attitude and will that political parties have towards operating their financing, the way they distribute state funds, and the extent to which private financing should be permitted. Most critical here is their position on transparency and proper management, coupled with a conviction to punish those who violate the rules of party financing.

However, political party funding suffers not only from inadequate legislation and the lack of will on the part of the political parties, but also from the general public's lack of understanding of the need for adequate political party funding. In many places, the media tends to react negatively when political parties debate and decide funding. Certainly, politicians in many places enjoy an above-average income in light of their responsibility. If every debate about the funding of political parties and politicians is scandalised, it may encourage the search for alternative (and possibly illicit) ways of financing.



Table 12: Sources of income for political parties in Europe.

Country	Member-ship fees		State subsidies		Private donations		Total income	No. of parties	Year(s)
	Million Euros	%	Million Euro	%	Euro / M	%	Euro / M		
Austria	7.61	12.2	46.22	73.8	1.56	2.5	62.61	5	2010
Belgium	2.65	3.1	64.76	76.8	0.45	0.5	84.29	12	2012
Canada	31.9	41	21.11	27.1	-	-	77.82	5	2011
Czech Rep.	2.65	6.3	16.98	40.3	5.75	13.7	42.13	5	2011
Denmark	2.98	10.6	12.95	46.1	10.66	38	28.08	8	2011
France	15.87	13	53.06	43.6	28.79	23.6	121.78	2	2012
Germany	181.37	41.7	137.57	31.6	53.55	12.3	434.92	7	2011
Hungary	0.75	8	7.48	79.3	0.9	9.6	9.44	4	2011
Ireland	0.75	5.9	9.31	73.2	2.57	20.2	12.71	5	2010-12
Israel	0.04	0.1	18.6	75.7	-	-	24.56	10	2011
Italy	30.47	21.1	107.04	74.3	3.95	2.7	144.14	5	2011
Netherlands	19.63	42.9	13.36	29.2	0.8	1.8	45.74	11	2012
Norway	7.94	10.2	53.33	68.3	6.28	8	78.08	7	2011
Poland	1.09	3.9	16.17	58.3	0.94	3.4	27.71	6	2011
Portugal	14.09	33.1	28.53	66.9	-	-	42.62	6	2011
Spain	35.85	13.5	211.28	79.8	5.23	2	264.92	5	2011
Sweden	2.12	3	47.08	64.6	1.95	2.7	72.93	8	2010-11
UK	13.24	14.9	10.09	11.3	39.13	44	88.97	7	2012-13
Mean		15.8		56.5		9.4		N=118	

Source: van Biezen and Kopecký 2017: 87.

## CHALLENGES OF PARTY FINANCING

In striving to achieve adequate funding for their organisation and political activities, political parties face various challenges and circumstances (IDEA 2014; van Biezen and Kopecký 2017), including:

**High election campaign costs.** Almost everywhere in the world, the costs and expenses for election campaigns have increased continuously in recent years. This is, among other things, a consequence of the increasing professionalisation of politics, as a result of which political parties and candidates spend more money on opinion polls, political advisers, and media advertising. The entire US election campaign of 2020 – that is, the campaigns of presidential candidates as well as members of congress – cost almost 14 billion US dollars, or almost twice as much as the election campaign costs in 2016. Presidential election campaigns are generally much more expensive than election campaigns in parliamentary systems, in which the focus is less on the individual candidate than on the political parties. But even in the parliamentary systems of Western Europe, election campaign costs have risen significantly in relation to the running costs of maintaining the party apparatus in recent years. The high cost of the election campaign means that political parties and candidates seek additional funding from a variety of sources. Unless income and expenditure are strictly regulated, political parties and candidates tend to become dependent on large private donations, increasing the risk of undue influence from such donors.

**Lack of support from party members.** In the past – at least in Europe – membership fees were a relevant source of funding for political parties, but there has been a decline in financial support to parties, despite the increased costs. In other regions, membership fees have never been a major source of party funding as even a modest membership fee can mean a comparatively large sacrifice for individual party members in poorer countries. By not collecting membership fees, a distorted view of a party may result. In Spain, for example, many political parties boast impressive membership figures, but many members make practically no financial contribution to the maintenance of the party. Whilst party leadership may proudly highlight membership figures, this does not often translate to mass support. The fact that political parties themselves do not trust such membership figures is exemplified by the fact

that only those who have paid a membership fee can participate in internal elections. Wherever financial support from party members is not available, a political party is reliant on corporate donations or other organised interests, public money, or illegal finances (or, in some countries, money from individual party leaders or candidates).

**Mutual dependence between businesses and politics.** Private enterprises require the support of politics to function smoothly. They thus have a practical reason to support political parties both outside of and during an election campaign. Moreover, it is not uncommon for them to support a particular political party whose manifesto they feel aligned with. Some companies support all relevant political parties in proportion to the weight of their votes in parliaments; on the one hand, to make a general contribution to democracy, and, on the other hand, to maintain good contacts with various political forces. Donations, which must be limited by legal regulations to prevent the undue influence of individuals on a particular political party – should not be criticised when they are handled legally and transparently. Problems arise when the wealthy gain disproportionate influence on political parties through donations and other contributions.

**Unequal access to finance.** Ideally, political parties should participate in elections on an equal financial footing, though this is easier said than done. Greater parity can be achieved through public funding. As the amount allocated to parties is often in proportion to electoral success, a successful party will always have a higher share of state funding. Furthermore, as some political parties may be more successful at canvassing for donations, they will continuously be more privileged than others – a situation that makes the regulation of donations very important.

**Abuse of government resources.** Incumbents in government always have a competitive advantage over those not in power. This advantage extends beyond material advantages to include, for example, higher media presence or special access to information. This clear competitive advantage (that realistically cannot be prevented) may become problematic if the incumbent misuses its advantages, such as employing civil servants for election campaign activities during working hours, using state-owned vehicles and phones for party and election campaign purposes, and above all, influencing publicly funded state and private media (radio/television) and social media companies for better or more positive coverage. In Mexico, for example, many radio and

print media exist solely on the abundant advertising fees paid to them by state or semi-state agencies and companies for awareness-raising campaigns. In return, government-friendly reporting is of course expected. It is also an indirect abuse of public resources when the members of a political party fill many posts in state or semi-state companies and institutions, and the beneficiaries of such appointments are compelled to donate part of their wages to the party fund. This practice is common for MPs around the world and is an important source of party funding in some places. Consequently, democracy is weakened when a ruling party alters the legal framework of the country for its own benefit or to persecute the opposition. Moreover, a vicious cycle may develop. Opposition parties are unable to win elections as a remarkably high bar is set for election success. Following from this, the failure to win elections then prevents opposition parties from a share of state funding (owing to poor performance in the election), which may lead to continued electoral defeats.

**Lack of enforcement of rules.** Abuse is common even in countries with relatively strict regulations on party funding. This is partly because those charged with overseeing the finances of parties and candidates mostly neither possess the power nor do they have the capacity to perform their role effectively. Moreover, they sometimes lack the independence required to exercise control. In Western Europe, control of political finances is often in the hands of the parliaments, so funds legally raised and spent are guaranteed to be cross-checked by various political parties to ensure their competitors do not enjoy any advantage. However, this cross-checking is unable to distinguish between legitimate funding and illegal financing through abuse of office by, for example, receiving kickbacks for awarding public contracts, excessive bills, or use of front companies. These are criminal practices that must be prosecuted and punished by the judiciary, which is only possible if they come to light. In countries with high levels of corruption, the culture of impunity is also widespread. In some places, for example in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, there are strict rules, but they are only applied against the opposition. Of course, that has nothing to do with the democratic rule of law. Another shortcoming for democracies regarding the enforcement of rules occurs when disproportionate penalties are imposed for the offence.

**Self-regulation by parties and politicians.** Without the correct attitude, the best government regulations are of little use. If control of their financing is monopolised by the political parties themselves, there will always be conflicts

of interest that benefit some political parties and ruin transparency and fairness. Therefore, all political parties must design an operating framework that opens up control of the political parties' finances to the scrutiny of the judiciary, the media, and civil society. The publication of an annual financial report with the sources of income and donors of a political party is only the minimum standard expected.

### Legal forms of income of political parties

- Membership fees. These are the least controversial source of income. They are an expression of the affiliation of the party members with "their" party.
- Reimbursement of election campaign costs. This is a common practice of public political party funding. Generally, the reimbursement of election campaign costs is linked to the election results of a political party.
- Contributions by parliamentary group members and similar regular contributions by the officials of the political party. In addition to membership fees, party members may also pay levies to their political party because they owe their mandate or office in public administration to it.
- Income from assets, events, etc. Some political parties maintain companies (e.g., printing houses for the publication and distribution of party documents or newspapers) or carry out other activities from which they generate income. In principle, they should be publicly accountable for all their income from such activities and for their assets.
- Donations. These are the most controversial form of party funding in the public eye. Large political parties derive an important part of their income from donations. Care must be taken that a political party does not become dependent on large donors.
- Loans are an important source of income for some political parties. However, debt is a major problem. Therefore, political parties should also publicly file accounts for their liabilities to credit institutions.

## SOME GLOBAL TRENDS IN PARTY FUNDING

One consequence and one success of the global development of democracy is that corruption and abuse in political party funding are treated more seriously. This has led to new rules on political party funding and the control of campaign funding worldwide, even in countries where these requirements were completely absent until recently.

An essential element of the new regulations is the state funding of political parties through direct or indirect grants. Around two-thirds of the world's countries now make direct public funds available. This replaces the decreasing membership fees and achieves a certain equality in the finances of political parties. These rules stem from an understanding that political parties are essential pillars of democracy and investment must be made for the system to function.

Despite these efforts, the amount and scope of government grants is still too small in many places to even come close to covering the financial needs of many political parties. As such, donations or other forms of financing remain necessary, even if this contradicts the purpose of creating a level playing field through the provision of public grants. Poor countries with limited financial resources struggle to finance political parties with public funds. In Peru, for example, political parties were denied public funding due to budget constraints. In Africa and Asia, there is no established tradition and experience with deploying public funds to finance political parties. In Asia, the only noteworthy public funding of political parties is in the more affluent and established democracies of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Nevertheless, there are still many violations of the laws surrounding donations and expenses. In East Timor, Indonesia, and Thailand, state funding for political parties exists but the amount provided is insignificant in relation to expenditure (Ufen 2015). In the countries of South Asia, there is no state funding and parties depend on contributions from companies, private donors, and to a much lesser degree, membership fees (IDEA 2007: 101 ff.). In Latin America, state co-financing of parties has now become established in most countries.

In more affluent countries, a mixture of public and private funding of political parties is common. This is recommended because a one-sided dependence on the state brings new problems for the political parties and for political

competition. In principle, there must be an environment facilitating the emergence of new political parties that is also conducive to the continued existence of the more established political parties even if they lose an election. For political parties to be independent, they must have a degree of independence from the state. In Europe, however, there is a problematic trend that political parties in some countries have become highly dependent on government funding. European political parties now draw an average of two-thirds of their total income from government sources and in some countries the rate is even over 80 per cent (van Biezen and Kpüecký 2017). Such grants are usually used by the political parties to expand their organisation, including the recruitment of new party members. This debunks previous assumptions that state-financed parties would become too comfortable and lose interest in developing their organisation further (Katz and Mair 1995).

State subsidies do not protect against electoral defeat nor against a possible substantial loss of income, as the amount of state funding is usually tied to the election result. That is also why it is important for political parties to use their income to expand their organisation. At the same time, they should be careful to limit their financial dependence on government grants so as to strike a balance between public and private funding. An interesting solution has been found for this in Germany. The political parties here are funded through a matching grants mechanism where the public subsidy can never be higher than the amount raised by the party itself. Also, the amount of private donations has been limited and strict transparency rules have been introduced to ensure that the political parties' income and expenditure (as well as the election campaign costs) are generally reasonable.

Of course, it is not possible to establish a fixed amount for state party funding. Financial demands come from a variety of sources, such as the structure of the political party system, the electoral system, and many other national circumstances. As a rule of thumb, public funding should only go to political parties that take part in elections and receive a minimum share of the vote. The grants can then be divided according to the percentage of votes received. In addition, they should be linked to expenditure and the accounting of this expenditure. For example, many countries stipulate that the grants may only be used for election campaigns or clearly defined internal party activities such as party congresses, internal party elections, or the promotion of gender equality. However, such rules are not strictly applied, and political parties are

relatively free to decide how they use the money. As observed repeatedly in Europe, especially where state support is high, attempts have been made to influence internal party competition with public funds – an outcome that contradicts the reason for party support by the state.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARTY FUNDING

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) has published numerous studies and publications on the topic of political party financing ([www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)). IDEA has formulated a series of recommendations that should be considered when regulating party financing. These recommendations are summarised here as follows (IDEA 2014):

1. The regulations for party financing should be committed to the goal of strengthening democracy and should correspond to the national character of each country. A country can learn from the experience of regulations in other countries, but its own rules and procedures (as with the reform of electoral systems) must always consider its own national circumstances and, in the case of party support, the role and reputation of the political parties.
2. A mere expansion of the scope of regulation is not helpful if there are no bodies monitoring compliance and sanctioning political parties for rule violations. Of course, the legal framework must be designed in such a way that it defines the limits of acceptable party financing. It is not enough to regulate the control of party finances without subjecting other areas to such control mechanisms. The expansion of a functioning system of public accounting must therefore accompany the financing of political parties.
3. As party members cannot (or do not want) to contribute to the financing of their political party to an impactful degree in most countries, coupled with the need to reduce dependence on private donations, a system of state co-financing should be implemented where public finances allow. Adequately managed and distributed, public funds can act as a good counterweight to private donations, provide access to funds for



a wide range of political actors, and thus, contribute to a level playing field. Public funds can also increase transparency and enable political parties to invest in female candidates. However, there is a risk that political parties will become overly dependent on public funds as well. This dependency should be carefully monitored.

4. In addition to financial contributions, there should be caps on advertising in the media by political parties and candidates. Airtime for advertising on public and private television for political parties should be regulated to ensure that at least some of the airtime is divided equally among contenders.
5. Election campaign costs should be limited and compliance with this limit strictly monitored, with violations punished harshly. Great progress has been made in this area in Brazil in recent years. An independent electoral court examines the parties' election campaign expenses and has already withdrawn the seats of many MPs, senators, and even governors after cases of illegal funding were uncovered. Unlimited spending and expensive campaigns increase the vulnerability of political parties to large donors and illegal donations that threaten the independence of the parties and the holding of fair elections. Corporate donations should also be strictly regulated. Companies applying for public contracts or working on public contracts should be prohibited from making political donations.
6. Tax rebates for political party donations are a special type of party subsidy. This is practised in many places in Europe. Corresponding regulations should also be studied by non-European parties for their applicability in their own country.
7. State co-financing of political parties should be linked to internal party behaviour. This applies not only to the administrative side, such as the disclosure of finances or the timely submission of financial reports, but also to compliance with certain rules of intra-party democracy or the consideration of gender equality.
8. At the state level, non-partisan monitoring and control of political party funding should be established. Ideas may be gleaned from different in-

ternational models. In any case, political party finances should be transparent, i.e., information on the political parties' income, expenditure, and annual accounts should be publicly available and the same standards for information disclosure should apply to all political parties so as to guarantee comparability. This would help increase public confidence in political parties. Major donors should be made public. The privacy of small donors can be protected by setting a threshold for reporting or publication.

9. Gender equality should also be considered in the financing of political parties, in that there should be political commitment to increase female participation and their candidacy for electoral positions as well as to provide them with a higher allocation of internal party election campaign funds.
10. The media and civil society must recognise that adequate political party funding is essential for the functioning of the democratic process, including the quality of elections. Reporting and commenting on the funding of political parties or parliamentarians should be based on this principle. This does not demand an uncritical attitude by the media and civil society. Instead, criticism should be measured, as the blanket criticism of political party funding does not always do justice to the functioning of political parties and their financial requirements.

## Raising funds for the political parties

Political party funding through public funds should neither be the only source of income for political parties, nor should they be the main source of income. Political parties must develop the ability to raise their own funds. As this is a central task for every party, it must also be sufficiently considered in the structure and distribution of tasks within a party. This applies to all levels of its organisational structure.

A strategy for raising funds must be worked out by the party's treasurer, who should coordinate all fundraising activities, including those of the regional and local treasurers. There should be a treasurer at all levels of the party structure responsible for raising funds.

In the same manner as how party members are recruited, personal contacts proves to be the best method to secure donations. At the same time, each political party should pay attention to new trends in acquiring donations that emerge from technological developments. For example, the micro-funding of election campaigns by credit card over the Internet has become increasingly popular in the US since 2008.

### Guide to micro-funding of political parties

1. Clearly explain why donations are important, what they would be used for specifically, and how exactly they will positively influence a specific campaign. How does the donor benefit from a successful fundraising campaign?
2. Use as many (online) payments systems as possible in order to make the decision to donate as easy as possible for potential supporters (i.e., enable payments via Visa, Mastercard, EC card, bank transfer, PayPal, etc.).
3. In addition, publish a traditional donation form that can be downloaded and printed so that it can be easily shared on social networks and filled in by hand.
4. Allow donors to use the payment platform to announce their support (without specifying the amount) on social media after payment (share buttons).
5. Involve multipliers in fundraising campaigns on social media and ask them to support the appeal for donations.
6. Offer a wide spectrum of fixed donation sums on the payment platform (framing), ranging from low to high sums. For example, if you want to achieve an average donation of EUR 20, then only offer very few options below EUR 20 whilst also offering many options above that amount (e.g., EUR 10 - 20 - 25 - 50 - 100 - 200 - 500 - 1,000). These options, however, must be within the country's individual donation limits for political parties.

7. Enable the option of an automated recurring (e.g., monthly) donation until further notice. Before processing the payment, obtain separate confirmation from the donor that the procedure is understood. Ensure that any recurring donation amount does not exceed the legal maximum amount and that information is automatically provided to any watchdog as soon as a certain amount is exceeded.
8. Develop sensible and appealing merchandise that are easy to produce, sell, and deliver so as to bring in additional funds.
9. Promote the fundraising campaign on Twitter, Facebook, and other platforms and, if necessary, purchase advertising on these online platforms if permitted by campaign legislation.

All activities in connection with the acquisition of donations must comply with the statutory provisions and respect the principle of transparency.

### **Local party funding strategy**

1. Establish a mechanism for collecting regular membership fees and donations.
2. Review expenses.
3. Develop a fundraising campaign. What kind of action should be taken? What kind of events should be organised? What is the aim of the campaign? How much money should be raised?
4. Create a fundraising plan that defines budget needs, the time within which the donations must be spent, and funding sources. Identify potential donors and the desired frequency of donations.

5. Divide donor interests into different groups (e.g., corporations, agriculture, doctors, and lawyers) and draw up a fundraising plan for each group. Why should these groups want to donate money to your party? What do they expect?
6. Lay out a schedule for the campaign.
7. Obtain materials that can support the campaign (e.g., party documents, short handouts, or a letter from the chairman).
8. Provide meaningful online materials (podcasts, videos, concise text) on key points that can be easily shared. Promote this on social media.
9. Always send news via your mailing list. Ensure that you offer the opportunity to subscribe to the newsletter on your website.

## EXAMPLE: PARTY FINANCING IN GERMANY

Political parties in the Federal Republic of Germany receive state funds for their financing. However, public funding follows the principle that political parties are voluntary associations of citizens and therefore must raise part of their funding themselves through contributions and donations. It is not permitted to predominantly rely on state funding. Political parties must therefore finance at least half of what they require by themselves. Financing is regulated in the Act on Political Parties (Act on Political Parties 2020, para 18 ff.). Following this act, state funds may not be higher than the income generated by the political party itself in the previous year. If self-sourced funding is less than state funding, state funding is then capped to the amount of self-sourced funding.

State financing of political parties takes the form of an annual partial financing of activities, which political parties are supposed to carry out according to the constitution and the law governing political parties. The way in which the political parties are rooted in society is decisive for the distribution of state funds.

All political parties that have received at least 0.5 per cent of the valid votes of the party list cast in the last Bundestag or European elections, or at least one per cent of the valid votes cast in the last state election, are entitled to partial state funding in a certain year. If a list is not approved for the political party, the party receives state funds if it has achieved at least ten per cent of the valid votes cast in an electoral district or constituency. All votes from the last Bundestag and European elections, as well as the last elections in the individual federal states, are added together. The political parties receive one euro per vote for the first four million votes, and 0.83 euro for each additional vote.

In addition, political parties receive 45 cents a year for every euro they have received as a donation, whether in the form of membership fees, parliamentary contributions, or donations from non-party affiliated citizens, whereby only donations of up to 3,300 euros per person per year are considered. The entitlement to this grant is only obtained if the party has reported the amount of donations received in an annual report for the year preceding the year of entitlement.

However, there is an absolute upper limit on government funds per year, which was 193.5 million euros in 2019. If the calculated total amount for all political parties exceeds the absolute upper limit, the amounts allotted to each individual party will be reduced proportionally.

The income and expenses of political parties are strictly accountable. An annual report that has been reviewed by an auditor or an auditing company containing information on the party's income, expenditure, assets, and debts must be submitted annually to the German Federal Parliament, the *Bundestag*. The President of the Bundestag publishes the report and checks for compliance. Violations of the rules are punished with, sometimes, severe fines and administrative or criminal proceedings against the political parties and those responsible for individual offences.

### Questions to the reader for critical evaluation

- What are the main sources of funding for the political parties you know?
- Who will benefit from party funding? Who decides how a political party's funds are used? To what extent are party members involved in decisions about party finances?
- How is the funding of political parties viewed in public?
- Do the political parties reveal openly and transparently their income, expenditure, and financial sources?
- Who controls the political parties' funding and campaign spending? How effective are such controls?





# 7

## Political Parties and Society

When Alexis Tocqueville from France toured the US in the first half of the 19th century to learn about the first democracy of the modern age, he made one key observation in his report. The citizens of the young state, he remarked, were actively shaping communities through participation in large number of free associations and organisations. For Tocqueville, this formed the foundation of the economic and political development of the first modern democratic state. For him, the lively civil society embodied the advantage and advancement of the democratic form of rule versus the monarchies in Europe. Tocqueville was the first to acknowledge the now undisputed central role of civil society in a democracy. His book is considered one of the most fundamental works on modern democracy (Tocqueville 1985).

The term “civil society” encompasses all voluntary associations of people who come together to pursue common interests and ideals. These associations include interest groups, trade unions, social movements, professional associations, charities, and many more. Even if some of these organisations have political ends, the main difference between them and political parties is that they do not compete for political office. In addition, their political interests are usually concentrated on specific or only a few issues and they do not advocate a government programme that contains proposals for many policy areas. Private organisations like foundations and companies are not part of

civil society. Religious communities, however, can be understood as civil society organisations.

It is hard to imagine modern societies and democracies without the diversity of social organisations, clubs, and associations. A free, active, and diverse civil society is critical to democracy. Association activities promote communicative interactions, both within small groups and among the public. In some countries, even marginalised groups (such as the homeless) form their own associations and articulate their views and demands on issues that are important to them to a wider public. Civil society thus promotes individual and collective self-determination.

Political parties need to pay special attention to civil society. There are three reasons for this: (1) civil society representatives convey important social interests that the political parties need to be aware of; (2) they try to exert influence on the political parties to have their concerns acknowledged and represented on the political stage (the political parties should know though how to deal with such attempts at influence); and (3) some of these organisations may complement the political parties in terms of their roles and functions in promoting democracy, and may even be tempted to replace them.

## POLITICAL PARTIES AS LINKS BETWEEN SOCIETY AND THE STATE

Political parties serve as the link between the state and society, or between the citizens and the institutions of the democratic state (Poguntke 2000: 23 ff. and 2006). To play this role effectively, they must be well anchored in both spheres. Political parties must maintain good contact with the citizens and with the associations in a society and be represented in parliaments, governments, and the bureaucracy. In political science, the connection of parties to both state and society is referred to as the “linkage function”. In essence, it refers to the capacity for two-way communication between those governing and those governed.

For political parties to perform this linkage function effectively, they need stable communication channels with citizens and social associations so as to be able to identify, evaluate, and aggregate their interests and incorporate

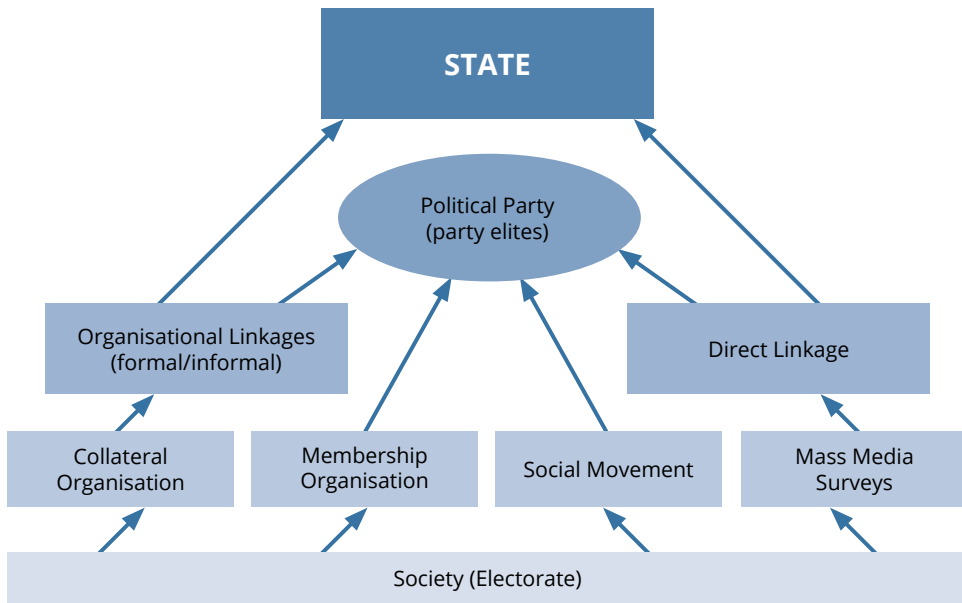
parts thereof into their political actions. At the same time, communication channels allow political parties to explain and justify their own actions towards the electorate. It is important for them to establish, maintain, and when possible, even control solid linkage structures, because the way in which they are connected to the citizens and social associations plays an important role during elections. Evidence suggests that citizens and civil associations that are connected to a political party with fixed linkage structures are more likely to cast their vote in favour of that specific party on election day.

There are two possible forms of linkages. First, linkages can be built through the various forms of communication, whereby the political parties themselves determine the way in which they communicate. This is part of the political communication of political parties, which is dealt with in the next chapter. Second, linkages arise from a particularly formalised or quasi-formalised relationship between the political party and social associations or organisations. This can include business associations, trade unions, interest groups, religious associations, and also special organisations belonging to the party, such as women's and youth associations, as well as the large number of non-governmental organisations and social movements that are committed to a variety of issues. The relations of the social democratic, socialist, and communist parties to trade unions, or those of the liberal parties to business associations, are classic examples of such "linkages".

It is a clear advantage of such robust and continuous relationships that social organisations determine their own priorities without the need for political parties to identify the different interests and priorities of the various groups in society. Through their contact with the associations, political parties receive "sets" of demands and preferences. The political parties negotiate with the associations on these sets of demands and decide which elements they wish to represent in the political arena, in parliament, and in relation to a government or bureaucracy. Such an exchange usually takes place between the political party elites and the leadership of the respective associations. Both sides ensure that their respective organisations will accept the results of the negotiations and either mobilise or withhold support for the compromise that has been negotiated. The higher the organisational integration on both sides, the more likely it is that even those members whose political goals and preferences have not been considered in such agreements can be mobilised in favour of a certain party. As their primary loyalty is directed towards their own

organisation, they will probably follow the recommendations of its leadership. In an ideal case, organisationally mediated linkages allow the political reach of political parties to be expanded beyond their own organisational boundaries.

Figure 9: The political party as a link between state and society.



Source: Poguntke (2005: 46).

The specific nature of this exchange is, however, influenced by two important factors: (1) the nature of the respective organisational environments, and (2) the degree of formalisation of the organisational contacts. For example, if the trade union movement itself is fragmented into different organisations and these have formalised relationships with different political parties, the benefit of a political party's formalised relationship with one of these is limited. In addition, if the contacts are rather loose, it is unrealistic to expect both sides to mobilise support in their respective organisations. This applies, for example, to the relationship between leftist parties and business associations or, conversely, between liberal and conservative parties and trade unions. Political parties must therefore strive to build stable relationships with

organisations that are relevant to their own survival and success as political organisations.

Relationships between political parties and non-governmental organisations, or social movements, are more complicated. The formalisation of the relationship is hindered by the general lack of clear leadership among such organisations or the absence of a clear mandate to enter agreements with political parties. Often it is the thematic focus of such groups that acts as a barrier to formal relations. Above all, however, such movements have only limited sway over the voting behaviour of their supporters.

From a democratic point of view, the relationship between political parties and social associations and lobbyists contains various pitfalls. Nevertheless, good contact is essential for the reasons already mentioned (Allern and Verge 2017). In the past, certain party groups had a particularly close and sometimes even organic relationship with individual associations. This holds particularly true for the ties between socialist and communist parties and trade union federations. It has already been mentioned that in Great Britain, for example, important trade union federations were linked to the Labour Party through a kind of group membership. Such classic ties only exist in very few cases today. Some political parties, however, try to maintain a special relationship with certain social groups, through their internal party associations and special organisations. Whilst the relationship between social democrats or socialists and trade unions remains close in Europe and Latin America, it has lost intensity. The green parties maintain good relations with environmental organisations in Northern and Western Europe and some liberal and conservative parties have close ties with business associations, as economic issues are usually important to them. In many regions, individual political parties have close links to religious associations or churches without being religious parties. Nonetheless, the political influence of religious associations is remarkably high in many places as evidenced, for example, by the growing political influence of evangelicals and their churches in the US. As important as these connections are, political parties must ensure that they are not perceived as one-sided representatives of the interests of individual associations. If they belong to the types of “elite” or “clientele” parties presented above, in the section on types of political parties, this will limit their chances of being elected in a pluralistic society.

In local politics, contact with local clubs and associations is practically indispensable. Similarly, evangelicals parties must avoid becoming the mouthpiece of individual groups only. Close contact with local associations, however, can be decisive for their (electoral) political success. Therefore, evangelicals parties must try to recruit representatives of such local associations as party members and field them as candidates in elections.

## POLITICAL PARTIES AND INTEREST GROUPS

Civil society organisations not only articulate the interests of their members and supporters, but also exert influence on political institutions and decisions, thus fulfilling similar functions to those of political parties. However, they usually focus on a few, primarily sectoral, issues or concerns. This applies primarily to business associations or trade unions, which in most countries have traditionally been among the most influential civil society organisations. They and other associations are characterised by specific organisational and functional characteristics and maintain a special kind of relationship with other actors in the political system, including state institutions, the media, and finally, political parties.

Political parties and individual politicians are important contacts for such organisations in their lobbying activities. All pursue the intention to influence political debates and decisions. Although this is perfectly legitimate, there is always a risk that individual associations (due to their resources in terms of money, their ability to mobilise support, or direct access to political decision-makers) may assert their sectoral interests over the general interests of society and shape political decisions that benefit their own interests. This does not only apply to business associations or unions. The German political party *Die Grünen*, for example, emerged from the various environmental and peace initiatives of the 1980s. Evidently, the influence of its affiliated organisations and associations on the party remained strong even after the party won seats in regional parliaments and, later, the German Bundestag. Political parties themselves should therefore closely and critically observe which interest groups are trying to influence them and which of their representatives and parliamentarians are maintaining particularly close contact with certain interest groups

and are possibly even being (co-)financed by them. This is another reason why it is important not only for politicians' incomes to be transparent, but that rules exist for the activities of associations and that these also strictly fulfil the requirements for transparency (Lijphart 1999: 171 ff.).

In countries with many associations, such as the US or Germany, their prominent role is at times seen to pose a threat to the sovereignty of the state. In fact, the legislative process is sometimes influenced by individual associations, with large business associations exerting more influence than smaller ones. In Germany, for example, automotive associations have a traditionally strong role. Whilst agricultural associations exert influence on the legislative process in Brazil and France, the same can be said for the palm oil companies in Indonesia and Malaysia. However, empirical studies conclude that, in most Western democracies, there is little evidence to indicate a one-sided dominance of individual actors in the legislative process. This is due in part to the control measures related to lobbying activities that have been introduced in many places. At the same time, as many organisations are trying to exert their own influence on political processes, they limit each other's scope of impact. For example, there are more than 200,000 registered organisations throughout the US, of which 20,000 (or 10 per cent) alone are based in Washington D.C., all of which are trying to influence political decisions in line with their specific interests. However, their multiplicity causes a balancing struggle between individual lobby groups.

In many policy areas, interest groups contribute external technical know-how on certain issues, upon which policymakers depend. In the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, governments and parliaments around the world sought advice from virologists, doctors, and pharmacists. When it comes to climate protection, the control of copyrights on the Internet, or complex production processes and standardisation in technical areas, the government needs expert advice just as much as when it comes to decisions on the regulation of euthanasia and other issues that touch upon fundamental questions of human existence. On all these issues, organised interest groups offer their expertise – generally from their own perspective. The decision-makers and elected representatives must then strive to ensure that they are comprehensively, but not too one-sidedly, informed when they familiarise themselves with and decide on new legislative material.

## Lobbyism

The English term “lobby” originally referred to the entrance or reception hall of a parliament. Ever since parliaments have existed, lobbyists have tried to gain access to these halls in order to meet members of parliament, present their concerns to them, and solicit their support. The term “lobbying” has become internationally accepted for this form of interest representation. Interest representatives are therefore often referred to today as “lobbyists” or “lobbies”. Lobbyists may not necessarily contact politicians in the lobby of a parliament but may meet members of parliament on other occasions to present their concerns to them.

Lobbying is not only done by representatives of private interest groups, but also by elected representatives. For example, a mayor who wants to build a bridge or bypass in his municipality invites other politicians who can decide on financial subsidies so that they can better understand the noise pollution, economic necessity, or environmental impact of such projects, and then support such projects financially. Lobbying is therefore a common and legitimate practice in any democracy to influence political decisions.

Nevertheless, lobbying often encounters a certain suspicion among citizens and the media for two reasons. First, an imbalance of influence between interest groups is suspected, but this is only ever the case if a party or a government deliberately places itself at the service of certain groups. In the US during the 2016-2020 Trump administration, for example, the gun lobby National Rifle Association of America (NRA) successfully fought off every attempt to restrict gun ownership because this was also in line with the president’s will. In Brazil, President Bolsonaro has no interest in preserving the Amazon rainforest and has therefore largely given the agricultural lobby a free hand in expanding agricultural land at the expense of the rainforest.

On the other hand, lobbying is sometimes associated with corruption or other forms of granting advantages to politicians. Such methods of influence exist and range from invitations to lavish lunches or holiday trips to an offer to take over an important post in a company. Accepting



such favours is explicitly forbidden for politicians in many countries; at the very least, the politicians are obliged to be transparent when individuals or interest groups try to gain political support for their causes by providing concrete goods or services. Money payments to a politician to lobby for a particular cause or even to vote for it in parliament fall into the category of corruption, which is criminal in any case.

It is useful for a democratic political system that lobby groups represent social interests partly against each other, and partly with each other. In order to set limits to their influence on politics and to create transparency for the public, numerous initiatives (also described as lobby groups) call for codes of conduct and waiting periods for politicians, lobby registers, the disclosure of additional income and party donations, or the balancing of expert groups. Information on different regulatory procedures within the EU can be found on the website [LobbyEurope.org](http://LobbyEurope.org).

## CIVIL SOCIETY AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR POLITICAL PARTIES?

When it comes to the subject of civil society and democracy, many activists and authors often think of advocacy organisations that are explicitly committed to the implementation of human rights and democratic political goals, such as freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. Some civil society organisations are also engaged to monitor the work of politicians and parliaments in some form (“parliamentary watch”), thus exercising a political role that can either complement, or collide with, that of political parties. Important international organisations in this sense are, for example, Freedom House ([freedomhouse.org](http://freedomhouse.org)) or human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch ([hrw.org](http://hrw.org)), Amnesty International ([amnesty.org](http://amnesty.org)), and Transparency International ([transparency.org](http://transparency.org)), as well as countless regional, national, and local associations.

Many analyses of the state of democracy worldwide emphasise the important role of civil society organisations (IDEA 2019, Diamond 2019; V-DEM 2020). Special attention was drawn to the political role of individual groups in civil society when they organised resistance against authoritarian governments and dictatorships, as was the case during the democratisation, or re-democratisation, processes of the 1980s and 1990s. In many countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and later also Central and Eastern Europe, these groups played a pivotal role in the resistance against dictatorships and authoritarian tendencies (Stepan 1985; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). They have since been involved in the consolidation of new democracies by contributing to the social control of the state and politicians, advocating for vertical accountability of governments, and defending fundamental rights. Especially where incumbents have considerable power and political parties and parliaments do not exercise any real control over the government, civil society organisations play an important role as correctors in maintaining democratic principles (Brancati 2016). Rulers that are trying to evade social control so as to maintain their power include the likes of Russian President Putin, former Prime Minister Mugabe of Zimbabwe, former Venezuelan President Chávez, Turkish President Erdoğan, and Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán. It has been observed for some time that organisations considered to be troublesome by those in power have seen their room for manoeuvre curtailed, often through administrative acts and manipulations related to registration or taxation. This poses a challenge for the democratic order of the countries in question, as civil society organisations make an important contribution towards keeping politicians accountable for their actions vis-à-vis the public. Through protests, skilful communication, and cooperation with the media as well as other forms of action, some organisations can generate enough pressure that politicians and governments feel obliged to better explain their position on specific issues and perhaps revise previous decisions (Diamond 1994; Fontoura and Hofmeister 2009; Houtzager and Lavalley 2010; McAdam and Tarrow 2010; Altman 2019).

Despite their important contributions to the safeguarding of democratic principles and procedures, civil society organisations cannot wholly replace political parties. This refers primarily to the problem of representativeness, which has been elaborated on in the second chapter, and which remains crucial. Social movements – as new collective actors within civil society – claim to contribute to the regeneration of democracy. Through their involvement in the

decision-making processes of a government, it is claimed that these processes become more democratic (Ibarra 2003: 16). Since many citizens are turning away from political parties, social activists claim it would be necessary to introduce new forms of democracy that give higher priority to non-partisan forms of participation and replace conventional patterns of political representation, which are essential for a party democracy (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000: 23).

Most proposals for alternative models of democracy advocate the concept of a “deliberative democracy” with civil society as its core component (Gutmann and Thompson 2004; Bächtiger et al. 2018). As the term implies, this model aims to stimulate a stronger, more permanent dialogue within civil society to reach agreements on future topics and issues. Rational and dynamic discussion in society (as opposed to the representation by political parties) is understood to facilitate a “relegitimation” of the principles of democracy because it promotes civic engagement and social participation.

There are various attempts worldwide to introduce such deliberative democracy. So-called “liquid democracy”, for example, is touted by its proponents as a form of “true democracy for the 21st century” because it would combine the respective advantages of representative and direct democracy (Schiener 2016). Like in a direct democracy, citizens would be given the opportunity to cast their vote on as many issues as possible. However, since they do not have expertise that extends to all areas, citizens may transfer their voting rights to subject-related experts who, in turn, cast a consolidated and weighted vote. This system would guarantee that political decisions are made based on expert knowledge only. Some attempts at introducing this model of a fluid democracy at the local level can be found in California.

Another model is the convening of citizens’ councils or “citizens’ juries”, where a small number of citizens (usually selected at random) are involved in decision-making on issues of local and also national interest. The members of such citizens’ councils receive information from experts and are then expected to make considered recommendations for the relevant political body to take into account when deciding on the issue. Since such a process of citizen participation was used in Ireland in 2018 as part of the constitutional reform in favour of introducing the right to abortion, it has gained new adherents. In France, President Macron formed a committee of 35 randomly selected citizens in January 2021 to advise the national vaccination campaign. In the same month, the Bundestag in Germany convened a so-called “citizens’ council” to

develop proposals for “Germany’s role in the world”. At the same time, it is to “strengthen confidence in politics and give new impetus to representative democracy”, as parliamentary president Schäuble emphasised (Schäuble 2021).

Despite this optimistic expectation, such citizens’ councils have a major legitimacy deficit. As with other forms of deliberative democracy, it is an elite model that takes decision-making out of the hands of citizens and expands the influence of so-called experts. Yet no one can guarantee that all of the different interests of citizens are better accounted for than with elected representatives. The step towards authoritarianism is therefore not far with this model, because all “non-experts” (i.e., “normal” citizens) are threatened at some point with losing their right to vote altogether.

In a democracy, however, political decisions are supposed to account for the different interests within a society. Political parties are the institutions that represent this diversity of interests in parliaments and, through participation in elections, achieve a much higher degree of legitimacy for their exercise of political power than civil society organisations. Whilst civil society organisations can indeed perform certain functions of political parties, they do not fulfil the most important function: participation in general elections, through which political parties demonstrate the degree of representativeness that gives them legitimacy. Civic councils and social movements, however, fail to provide empirical evidence of their actual support in a society. This sets limits to their claim to political co-decision. In some countries, social movements have therefore mutated into political parties themselves, such as *Die Grünen* in Germany or *Podemos* in Spain. They are thus the best proof that, in representative democracy, there is no alternative to political parties as institutions representing the interests of society as a whole.

Despite scepticism concerning their claim to political representation, it should be emphasised that civil society organisations can and often do contribute to political processes and to the stabilisation of democracy in every society. The large number of civil society organisations and their growing importance all over the world show that an important part of the population wants to participate in political processes. Political parties are still not fully exploiting this potential. It should be noted here that similar tendencies can be observed in both civil society organisations and political parties; traditionally strong institutions have weakened and seen dwindling membership numbers or may have split, e.g., trade unions. Many civil society organisations also fail

to meet two key principles that political parties must adhere to, namely transparency of decision-making structures and internal organisational democracy. In addition, they are often poorly organised, many disband after only a short period of time, and the commitment of their supporters is often short-lived. Civil society organisations cannot replace or compensate for the demobilisation of political parties.

### Questions to the reader for critical evaluation

- What role do social organisations you know play in representing the interests of certain groups? How well are they organised? Which are the most important social organisations?
- Are there particularly close relationships between individual parties and certain social associations? Which associations are particularly strongly associated with political parties? What influence do they exert on political parties?
- What is the role of civil society organisations in debating political issues, influencing the government, and defending democracy?
- What efforts are political parties making to address individual social groups?





## **Listening and Talking – Political Parties and Political Communication**

Listening is one of the most important skills required of a politician. The need for aggregation and articulation of societal interests – as one of the essential functions of political parties – demands that political parties and politicians have the ability to collect information about the attitudes and expectations of citizens, and then process it into political proposals and programmes without giving up their own core values and beliefs. Being able to listen is an important prerequisite for this.

Listening can be very tedious and takes patience. Anyone who has ever participated in public discussions, party meetings, or committee meetings will confirm this. Politicians – whether members of a city council or a national parliament – should maintain regular contact with citizens who are (or may become) their constituents. To do this, they must take advantage of many opportunities and events where they can meet and speak to the people. They themselves must also create opportunities and occasions so that citizens can come to them. Such occasions can be local events, parties, conferences, debates, company openings, or the inauguration of new projects, where they can showcase themselves and hold conversations. Such meetings are often not very spectacular as they usually take place with a small number of people and in a modest setting. Regular meetings with the few party members in a locality often take place in small meeting or adjoining rooms and can drag on

endlessly when the positions of the political party are to be voted on, or when candidates for elections or public offices must be proposed. Consultations or town hall meetings offer the opportunity to speak directly to the citizens of a constituency or a municipality, but often on such occasions, a parliamentarian receives more complaints than positive affirmation for his work. Many such meetings take place in the evening or on weekends as most citizens have no time for politics during a working day. And yet such encounters are an indispensable part of political work, especially in times of modern means of communication.

Communication (i.e., listening and speaking) is a key concept of our time and of central importance for political parties. As there are so many forms of listening and speaking, political parties must, if possible, be proficient in all the different forms of communication so as to be aware of citizens' concerns and to convey their own messages. Consequently, political parties can never devote too much attention and resources to communication. Political success depends largely on the ability and willingness to know what citizens think and want, and to then convey one's own message in a targeted and appropriate manner. In doing so, political parties should not merely tell citizens what they want to hear or solely base their messaging on opinion polls. It is important that the political parties convey their own point of view in such a way that they find common ground and, ultimately, acceptance and support for it. Their legitimacy is thus to a large extent linked to a communicative performance.

The acceptance of political proposals is significantly dependent on the way in which they are communicated. Although the personality of the party leader and candidates are relevant for electoral success, without an effective communication system they will not be able to effectively transmit their message and convince their voters. The most popular of leaders need both traditional and new media platforms to garner support. When communication is executed subtly, the public does not notice how skilfully some leaders sell or market themselves. Former US President Barack Obama was a master communicator in this regard. His first run at the presidency was conducted largely via social media. His 2008 election campaign used microtargeting for the first time – a strategy his successor Donald Trump perfected in his 2016 election campaign. Microtargeting systematically creates a database containing specific information about voters, such as political leanings, age demographic, social status, religious affiliation, ethnicity, and language preferences, so as to



craft bespoke campaign messages in line with a group's common characteristics. By focusing on the chief concerns of specific voting groups, candidates are more likely to secure their votes. In addition, each group receives political messages that correspond to their political (and other) preferences. The messages can be sent via various media, but preferably via social media, because individual groups can be reached more accurately than via television or radio. Target-group-specific communication increases the probability of achieving the goal of communication: the gaining of votes. This form of communication also saves resources as one can communicate with supporters and potential voters more frequently and intensely than when communicating with a large broad group of voters.

## POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN A DEMOCRACY

The communication of political proposals and the public solicitation of approval have been central to democracy since its very beginning. In ancient times, rhetoric (the art of persuasive speech) emerged as a science of its own. It aimed to logically gather and present convincing arguments in public through political debate. The importance of rhetoric to a successful political career was mainly introduced by Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC). Besides being skilled at rhetoric, politicians and political parties today must also master all the other instruments of political communication available. To communicate skilfully, it is first important to understand what political communication means, how a country's media landscape has developed, and how it is structured.

Political communication is broadly defined as follows:

1. All forms of communication employed by politicians and other political actors for the purpose of achieving certain goals.
2. Communication directed to these actors by non-politicians such as voters and newspaper columnists.
3. Communication about these actors and their activities as contained in news reports, editorials, and other forms of media discussion about politics. (McNair, quoted in Donges and Jarren 2017: 7)

Somewhat condensed and expressed in social science jargon, political communication can also be described as “the central mechanism for the generation, formulation, and articulation of political interests, their aggregation into programmes that can be decided, and the implementation and legitimisation of political decisions” (Donges and Jarren 2017: 8). Both definitions show that political communication has two sides: on the one hand, it is about influencing politics (i.e., political debates and decisions); and on the other hand, it is about communicating the decisions made by politics to the public.

Political communication cannot be separated from politics, especially not in a democracy where there is no dictator making decisions without having to consider the views of society. In a democracy, political communication provides politics with inputs – proposals, demands, comments, etc. – and helps to explain and justify outputs, such as the decisions made as well as statements by political parties and governments on certain issues. As inputs and outputs both affect the central functions of political parties, it is clear that politicians and political parties must pay special attention to political communication.

For political parties, the media is the most important instrument and mediation body of political communication. Until a few decades ago, in many countries, political parties (as well as other social associations such as the church and trade unions) published their own party newspapers, some even daily. There are still some countries in which daily and weekly newspapers with party affiliations exist, but the affiliation is no longer like that of the past. After the Second World War, the rise of television saw the popularity of political party newspapers fall by the wayside. In many countries, public broadcasting corporations, which are generally formally independent of the influence of the government and ostensibly politically neutral, emerged. In practice, however, governments and political parties have exercised considerable influence on public broadcasters and private media companies. An example of this creeping influence was discussed earlier: in Mexico, government institutions disarmed the media by purchasing advertising space. Nevertheless, the influence of political parties on the media landscape is usually limited today. Many private companies have a diversified media portfolio in the sense that they are active in the radio, television, and print sectors of this industry, which operate primarily in pursuit of private-sector market goals and are less based on political orientation or social obligations. That is why there is often talk of the commercialisation or economisation of the media. This situation, however, does

not mean that private media does not have their own political agenda. The clearest example of this would be the case of the US television broadcaster Fox News – one of President Trump's most important supporters and instruments of propaganda until he lost his presidential campaign during the 2020 elections. Some media entrepreneurs such as Italian Silvio Berlusconi have become politicians themselves. Berlusconi used his media empire to service his own political ambitions and that of the *Forza Italia* party he founded. Conversely, many politicians have become media entrepreneurs in places such as Brazil and the Philippines, having set up local radio and television stations to profile themselves.

The widespread use of the Internet and online media has not only impacted the traditional media industry but also political communication. With the opening of the Internet to private users from 1992 onwards, parties were given for the first time access to and control over a medium with which they could directly and immediately reach an audience of millions. The emergence of social media in 2003 through Web 2.0 considerably expanded the adoption of self-produced communication. Today, through YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other platforms as well as their own podcasts, political parties can reach an audience that is no longer possible via traditional media such as radio, television, or newspapers. They can even multiply their communication insofar as different branches of a political party – be they the headquarters or regional and local offices – can now maintain independent communication channels to conduct both internal communication with the party members from their area as well as non-members. The diversity of party communication is complemented by the fact that many party members, such as locally or nationally elected officials, communicate via their own websites and social media channels. However, with the rise of social media, political parties have also lost some of their control over political communication as the many differing and critical comments on social media can be overwhelming. Hence, as much as political parties benefit from the new communication options, these new options harbour many pitfalls that can be hazardous for political parties and politicians. Professional handling of all media, including a communication strategy, is therefore essential.

## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

To carry out their political communication, political parties require a dedicated professional staff for media work and a communication strategy that should contain at least the following goals (Jun 2015):

- **Creating a positive image to gain acceptance and approval from the electorate.** Political communication has always been an important election campaign tool for highlighting the profiles of political parties and their candidates. With the increased personalisation of politics, personal communication is becoming more and more important. The central goal of political communication is to present a political party's leadership in the best possible light so as to win over the electorate. Politics has become very visual and technological advancement has now made politics much more perceived in terms of people. Almost every politician not only sends regular text messages but also photos of themselves and of their encounters with others. The selection and placement of such photos has become an important element in conveying and reinforcing political messages. Accordingly, this visualisation and personalisation should be carried out carefully and creatively.
- **Asserting those issues in public discussion that are most relevant for a political party.** Very few political parties are perceived to be competent in all policy areas. Rather, they are often perceived to be competent in specific issues, for example, economic policy and internal security, social policy, or environmental policy. Attributing political parties with expertise and problem-solving ability by the voters is of great importance for the parties. It is therefore important for a political party to emphasise those areas where it is particularly focused and knowledgeable in its political communication and to address these relevant issues again and again. Conservative parties will always speak up when internal or external security is at stake; liberal parties will often address economic and corporate issues; social democratic and socialist parties will continually urge social justice and social progress; green parties will focus on environmental issues. Political parties can-

not always determine the salience of individual topics but if such topics suddenly become prominent, attention will increase for those political parties dealing with and communicating the current topics. This was made noticeably clear when climate protection made the headlines in 2019 and helped the Green parties gain political momentum. However, as the coronavirus pandemic and public health dominated the public agenda in 2020, interest in the Green parties waned as they have not been known for competence in these areas. In the Greens' place, political parties in government that emphasised security and welfare issues received a boost.

- **Pushing back issues where a political party does not exercise a competitive advantage.** Political parties generally do not want to discuss certain topics for which they are considered to lack competence, or topics for which they do not have an internal party consensus. This can affect all policy areas, from the debate about a higher income tax or higher defence spending, to socio-political issues such as abortion or same-sex marriage. Admittedly, it is difficult to remove issues from the political agenda when they are discussed in public and in the media. In Germany, for example, the two parties in the coalition government largely avoided the issue of migration in the 2017 election campaign in order not to heighten anti-migration attitudes and to curb criticism of the pro-migrant position of both parties. However, this topic could not be avoided due to public interest, and an anti-migration party then benefited from this strategy of avoidance.
- **Dominating the interpretation of political problems.** Those who determine the direction of a political debate will receive more attention than those who are only reactive to certain issues. It is therefore important for political parties to constantly explore new issues coming on the horizon and to define a position on them as soon as possible. The party that can do so establishes first-mover advantage over its competitors.
- **Avoiding overly portraying political competitors in a negative light.** In politics as in product advertising, it is always better to emphasise the positives of your own product than to focus on what is (not)

offered by others. In politics, this is difficult to avoid as conflict over the various proposals is carried out on the open stage in places such as a parliament, town hall, or debate. To address what opponents are proposing necessarily requires the highlighting of problems with their proposal. Nevertheless, there are ethical and practical limits to negative communication. In some countries, negative communication can be quite common, and attacks on political opponents can be sharp and sometimes personal. Elsewhere, there are political and sometimes legal limits for this. The benefits from a negative portrayal of a political opponent are generally rather limited as it only helps to strengthen positions and emotions among one's own supporters rather than win over new ones.

- **Tailoring communication to be appropriate to the moment and occasion-specific.** Not every topic can be presented and communicated in the same way. Political parties should therefore keep an eye on the public mood in their communication and convey appropriate content, use appropriate language, employ appropriate methods, and make a clear division of institutional communication into strategic, tactical, and operational levels.

To implement these different aspects of a communication strategy, political parties today need professional media staff responsible for internal and external communication. If funds are available, it is also advisable (at least on certain occasions) to work with advertising, communication, and event agencies, opinion pollsters, and Internet teams during and outside of election campaigns. Teams preparing for large party congresses, at which important positions are to be decided, or campaigns at different levels of government, can reach their addressees more effectively with professional media support.

In all of this, the press department of a political party must pay equal attention to all forms of media. In general, television generally still functions as the leading medium although the Internet and social media have become increasingly influential. Print media (daily and weekly newspapers) also continue to play an important role in setting the agenda for all forms of media.

Despite the rising role of the Internet as an information provider, television is still most important for political communication in many countries due to its

wide reach, its ubiquity, and the relatively high level of trust it commands. As important as it is for political parties and politicians to be represented in all media, a television presence remains a high priority as part of a media strategy. As it is scarcely possible to appear on all television channels, the focus should primarily be on channels whose news programmes and political talk shows have the highest ratings.

## INSTRUMENTS OF INTERNAL PARTY COMMUNICATION

Internal party communication must meet the demand of party members. With citizens being exposed to a greater flood of information than ever before, political parties must be careful to communicate their views on certain processes and decisions to their party members so that they can in turn circulate these positions to the outside world. At all levels of the hierarchy, party leaders must therefore strive for continuous communication with their members.

Today, there are numerous technical possibilities for communication with members. Almost every party leader now has a Twitter account and other platforms through which statements, relevant party documents, or even just short comments can be sent. These digital platforms are usually used very intensively. Video talks or video conferences, in which members of a political party can speak exclusively and live on the Internet with their chairman or other prominent representatives of the party leadership, or experts on specific topics, have become increasingly important. This gives party members an information advantage and direct access to top politicians.

In addition, video messages are of particular importance for both internal and external communication. No political party and no political leader can do without it today. Barack Obama was one of the first politicians to make extensive use of this medium. In his first election campaign in 2008, and later as president, video messages were a good way to positively exploit his eloquence and charisma (Heigel and Hacker 2010). The videos were professionally produced and available through his own social media accounts and those of his party. YouTube was the central platform for Obama and continues to be one of the most important global platforms for politicians to publish their

videos. Today, no politician can escape the advantages that this form of communication offers. Angela Merkel, for example, as party leader of the CDU in Germany, regularly communicated to party members about important issues, policies, and processes via public videos. At least once a year, every local party group should share their experiences through internal party communication in order to evaluate and improve upon what has been done. At the local level, it is helpful if there is someone responsible for communication, for example, a press officer. Regarding digital communication, it is also recommended that every local (or at least regional) party organisation has a representative dedicated to social media work.

As important as all these forms of communication may be, one thing is undisputed: the conversations between a regular party member of the grassroots and their neighbours, work colleagues, friends, or club mates are decisive instruments in the political party's daily contact and communication with the rest of society.

## Political parties and social media

Online communication and participation offer a new sphere of party communication. Digital communication offers many opportunities whilst also raising important questions about the future organisation of internal party decision-making and decision-making processes.

The form of communication on social media changes almost daily, given the pace of technological development. For bigger political parties, it is essential that they have employees who are devoted exclusively to communication in social media, follow and react to new technical developments, and respond on behalf of the party in the event of criticism or attacks against it online. In addition, it is advisable to set up an independent task force consisting of external experts, consultants, and experts who are not involved in the day-to-day work of the organisation, to provide solutions for both foreseeable "white swan" events and unpredictable "black swan" events.

Overall, social media offers political parties a wide range of opportunities to convey their goals, messages, and programmes and to communicate directly with different groups of citizens. For example:



- Political parties can set up a social media network with a wide range of contacts, even on a small budget. People who are already connected to the political party through various social media channels can distribute and share its content. Several addressees can be reached via a relatively small network of party members.
- Political parties can collect feedback quickly and directly, allowing them to swiftly evaluate people's reactions to certain issues and problems. Since people can easily respond to published content, dialogue, and well-moderated democratic discourse, it is possible to find solutions and establish clear positions on specific issues. Social media also has a social function: citizens can share their wishes, concerns, and problems directly with politicians and are no longer restricted by the availability of their political representatives. In this sense, these platforms work like an open door.
- Social media can reach out to those interested in politics in a language and format with which they might be more familiar, leading to greater political awareness, especially among young voters. The youth is the key to the future success of political parties. They can build stable foundations for the future by reaching these young people and interacting with them on key issues via social media.

To use this potential and achieve their goals, parties need a structured and well-prepared social media strategy as part of their overall communication strategy. It is important that this strategy has a clear vision and is supported by competent individuals within the political party, so that it can offer well-selected and effective content.

Precisely because not all politicians and political parties have their own (or enough) dedicated staff for media work, they should be aware of some general rules and functions that apply to dealing with the more important platforms (see Table 13).

Table 13: The use of different media platforms for political communication.

Social media platform and its primary functions for politicians and parties	Possible uses
<p><b>Twitter</b></p> <p>Dissemination of short messages</p> <p>Participate in a current event or debate with a brief bit of information or comment</p> <p>Provoke reactions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief exchange with other users who are interested in the event or the topic of the debate</li> <li>• Create your own hashtag</li> <li>• Participate in other hashtags by posting opinions or information</li> <li>• Address those whose posts are shared directly and possibly thank them for positive expressions of opinion</li> <li>• Connect users with similar opinions and interests</li> <li>• Optimise your own short biography</li> <li>• Publish important information (also as an attachment)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Facebook</b></p> <p>Present topics that are of interest to a particular group</p> <p>Provoke reactions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the latest stories and posts are always at the head of the timeline, as older messages descend with the appearance of new ones</li> <li>• Publish as many messages as possible together with videos because they are more likely to be viewed</li> <li>• Prepare posts well and plan their publication</li> <li>• Prepare posts for certain events (e.g., opening of a party convention, or start of an election campaign, comments on important events, etc.)</li> </ul>
<p><b>YouTube</b></p> <p>Publish videos</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate political content, particularly to young people as frequent viewers</li> <li>• Set up your own video channel</li> <li>• Plan videos and present them well and concisely</li> <li>• Plan and prepare “spontaneous” videos well</li> <li>• Link videos to other platforms</li> </ul>

Social media platform and its primary functions for politicians and parties	Possible uses
<p><b>Instagram</b></p> <p>Visibility through photos and videos, interactions</p> <p>Provoke reactions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use hashtags, similar to Twitter</li> <li>• Act strategically and form a community (similar to Facebook)</li> <li>• Use Foursquare when sharing photos so that your own photos can be seen not only by your own contacts, but also by Foursquare users</li> </ul>
<p><b>Snapchat</b></p> <p>Instant messaging service for the short-term publication of photos and other media on smartphones and tablets</p> <p>Arouse interest with short messages and videos and refer to other platforms that offer more detailed information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the advantages of the live broadcast and include the audience in the message and videos</li> <li>• Tell personal stories</li> <li>• Use emojis</li> <li>• Encourage followers to make their own posts and forward their posts</li> </ul>
<p><b>Periscope</b></p> <p>Mobile application for direct video transmission in real time</p> <p>Video transmission of events in real time</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produce videos</li> <li>• As comments on the videos are published uncensored and cannot be checked, there is a risk that criticism and negative comments will spread or even dominate</li> </ul>
<p><b>WhatsApp</b></p> <p>Communication with individual groups on specific topics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form WhatsApp groups and strategically consider which type of groups should be formed for which type of messages</li> <li>• Generate and communicate group-specific messages</li> <li>• Encourage group members to forward the messages they receive to their own groups</li> </ul>

The following chapters on election campaigns and communication by political leaders provide some additional tips on how to effectively use social media.

### Questions to the reader for critical evaluation

- What role does the media play in information about politics?
- Which media are particularly important today for political information and opinion-forming?
- Who has more influence: traditional media (newspapers, radio, television) or new media (social media, blogs, podcasts)? Why?
- Are there examples of political parties being treated unfairly by the media? Are certain political parties favoured or disadvantaged by individual media?
- How does intra-party communication work in the political parties you know? How does the party leadership communicate with its members?
- Are party members regularly, openly, and comprehensively informed about the position of the party, its leadership, and parliamentarians on current issues?
- How do members play an active role in conveying messages from the party? Are they approached by the parties about this role and trained to take on this role?

# 9

## Political Parties and Elections

Democracy starts with elections. They establish a starting point when a government is first elected and maintain a regularly recurring climax with each election cycle. With only a few exceptions, elections are now taking place in almost every country in the world. This is evidence of the widespread acknowledgement of the need for governments to legitimise themselves to their citizens and demonstrate accountability. However, democracy does not necessarily exist wherever elections take place. In many electoral democracies, there is no fair competition between different candidates or political parties. Essential political and civil liberties are restricted or completely suppressed, and in some countries, additional hurdles to an individual's or a party's candidacy (such as the requirement to deposit a large amount of money or to submit large numbers of signatures from supporters) may be seen. The fact that a country holds elections is therefore not proof of its democratic character. As such, it is always important to examine whether an election was carried out freely and fairly. This includes open and equal competition between the candidates and parties, reporting and commenting on candidates and party programmes without restrictions, and the free and secret ballot of each voter.

For political parties, elections are the key to power. Their result determines the parties' potential to implement its political goals and programme. Elections confirm the programme and candidates of a political party and either

legitimise its leadership or force it to resign in the event of defeat. This applies equally to all elections, from local elections in a small village to the presidential elections of a large country. Because state party financing in many countries is linked to the election results of a party, and the elections determine access to political offices and benefices, elections are important for a political party's finances and its ability to take care of its patronage system. Elections and election campaigns are therefore of paramount importance for political parties and must be carefully prepared for in order to achieve the best possible result.

However, it is not just one's own efforts or the level of voter support that decide the outcome of an election. A country's electoral system itself also has a significant influence on the performance of the political parties, the design of the political party system, and the stability and functioning of its democracy. Politicians and political parties should therefore know how their country's electoral system affects their performance.

In most countries, the electoral system is the result of compromises between major social and political groups. This explains the enormous diversity in electoral systems, which is not limited to majority voting and proportional representation as the two basic types. There are numerous variations within these two basic types of electoral systems, as well as many mixed electoral systems that combine elements from both.

## ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

Elections perform different functions in a democracy, including the selection of politicians, the formation of governments, the representation of the political attitudes of the citizens, the factual priorities of future political decisions, and finally, the legitimisation of the political leadership and of the political system. Elections are not just a momentary event; they determine how a community and its political parties will develop over a longer period.

Electoral systems are procedures that translate the votes of the electorate into mandates (Nohlen 1986; comprehensive information on the topic of elections is also available at ACE, The Electoral Knowledge Website: [www.aceproject.org](http://www.aceproject.org)). Even if the distinction between electoral systems on the surface touches on technical aspects or procedural issues, they have considerable political effects (e.g., on the prospects of the political parties to gain, or at

least to share, power after the elections, on the way in which a government is formed, or on the representation of the different social groups and the diversity of interests, ideologies, concerns, and political parties in a parliament). This is important because the legislature is essential as a credible national institution that provides a comprehensive platform for legislation, legitimacy, and conflict management by peaceful means. The impact of an electoral system on the election outcome became clear in the 2016 US presidential elections. With a vote share of 48.18 per cent, Hillary Clinton received almost three million more votes than Donald Trump (46.09 per cent). Still, because the electoral system dictates that the president is chosen by an electoral college composed of state representatives, Trump became president. For the fifth time in the country's history, 2016 saw the election of a US president who had won the majority of the electorate but not the majority of the voters.

The technical regulations of an electoral system usually address various elements of an electoral process beyond the counting of votes and the distribution of mandates. Some other aspects are listed below:

- The way in which the electoral area is subdivided into constituencies, such as single, small, medium, and large constituencies, in which only one, a few, or all mandates of a parliament are up for election; the definition (and reform) of constituencies is particularly important to the impact of an electoral system
- The type of candidacy (such as individual candidates or different lists of candidates), which can be rigid, free, tied to an electoral district or formed independently of an electoral district, etc.
- The voting procedure, i.e., whether and how the voter can cast one or more votes, express preferences, change the preference list of a party, etc.
- The vote-counting procedure, which decides how the mandates are divided among the individual parties, whereby a distinction must be made between various elements such as the standard (majority or ratio), vote calculation (constituency, association of constituencies), the divisor or quota procedure and their respective variants, the possible utilisation of surplus or residual votes, and any threshold clauses.

In addition, there are further regulations that take into consideration certain special cases. This applies, for example, to quota regulations for ethnic or religious minorities or women to guarantee their parliamentary representation.

The two most important basic types of electoral systems are majority and proportional representation. Majority voting systems are almost always based on single constituencies, in which only one candidate from each party competes with the candidates from other parties for the mandate of one constituency. In proportional representation systems, several candidates compete for election in one constituency, most of whom are ranked on a party list. Correspondingly, the constituencies tend to be larger, encompassing provinces, entire federal states or – as is the case in Serbia or South Africa – the entire country.

## The majority vote system

The majority vote system consists of single member constituencies whereby only one mandate per constituency is awarded. To win the mandate a victorious candidate either requires a relative amount or an absolute majority of the votes cast. In the clearest and best-known procedure, one mandate per constituency goes to the candidate with the highest number of votes, whereby a relative majority of the votes cast is sufficient. This process is known as first-past-the-post and has been practised in Great Britain for centuries. It can now be found in many former British colonies or countries influenced by Great Britain, such as India, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and other African countries, as well as Canada, the US, and the Caribbean. A deviation from this procedure is to hold a runoff election if none of the candidates achieve an absolute majority in a first ballot. This procedure is used in most presidential elections with a direct election of the president. It also applies to parliamentary elections in France and several francophone countries. Because of the runoff ballot, this mode is somewhat more complex than the simple majority procedure, because two ballots are necessary. In Mexico, the Philippines and some other countries, there is no runoff election in presidential elections, and the candidate holding a relative majority of votes is declared president. The victorious candidate's share of the vote can be relatively small. In the case of Mexico in the 2012



presidential elections, the relative majority was only 38 per cent. However, if the procedure itself enjoys widespread acceptance, even a relatively disappointing election result does not reduce the legitimacy of the person elected.

The principle of representation in majority vote systems rests with a candidate's or party's success in obtaining the support of a majority in a constituency. The electoral system makes it clear which candidate or which party wins this majority, which then qualifies it to lead the government. The government thus represents the will of the majority of the electorate. In parliamentary elections, however, this is only the case if a party wins the majority of the constituencies. In presidential elections, the entire country typically forms a single constituency. In the US, each of the 50 states forms a single constituency.

There are some consequences associated with the majority vote system, especially in parliamentary elections, that one should be aware of:

### Political consequences of a majority vote system

- Some voters will not be represented proportionally in relation to the total number of votes in a parliament. Even if the system produces a clear result and a clear winner in a given constituency, when this pattern is repeated across several constituencies, one or more of the political parties may receive a much higher proportion of mandates than corresponds to their share of the total votes. Parties with less support that do not win any constituencies are then left empty-handed in the distribution of seats, even if they achieved a significant share of the vote nationwide. This was the case in the 2019 British general elections, when the Tories received 56 per cent of seats with 43.6 per cent of the vote. With a 32 per cent share of the vote, the Labour Party received 31 per cent of the seats.
- It promotes the domination of one or two political parties. However, the earlier assumption of a causal connection between the majority vote system and a two-party system is no longer confirmed today. The fragmentation of the party systems cannot be stopped by majority electoral systems, so that in certain constituencies or

regions of a country, different political parties often achieve electoral successes and win parliamentary seats. That too was evident from the composition of the British House of Commons since the turn of the millennium when the two-party system fanned out. In 2019, the opposite effect occurred when almost 90 per cent of the mandates were held by the two parties mentioned, and a further eight parties shared the remaining mandates.

- It promotes stable governments because usually one of two dominant parties leads the government, and it is almost impossible to form majorities opposing them. This happened in the British House of Commons during the turbulent months surrounding the vote about the final agreement with the EU about Brexit in 2019, when, despite the disagreement of a number of Conservative Party MPs, it was impossible to form an alternative government.
- It contributes to political moderation, as the larger political parties compete for the moderate electorate in the political centre and must also assume political responsibility in the event of an election victory. The political parties must therefore align their programme with both the expectations of the moderate electorate and what is deemed politically feasible. Great Britain once again serves as an example here; the radicalisation of the Labour Party under its leader Jeremy Corbyn (2015-2020) did not pay off and his successor appears much more moderate in his political course.
- It encourages change in governance, as small changes in the strengths of the political parties based on the electoral results can trigger large changes according to mandates.
- It strengthens regional parties because they are more likely to win mandates in certain regions. However, this may also contribute to a fragmentation of parliament.

## The proportional representation system

In a proportional representation system, mandates are assigned according to a political party's share of the vote achieved in elections. The principle of representation is the proportional representation of the will of the electorate (i.e., the parties are represented in parliament in proportion to the votes they have won). In a strict proportional representation system, all votes are represented in parliament. This system may be based on lists of candidates that are drawn up for individual electoral districts, although there may be differences between the number of electoral districts and the mandates to be awarded per district. Alternatively, several mandates may be awarded per constituency according to the share of votes of individual candidates. In both cases, the mandates are divided proportionally to the share of votes of individual lists or candidates. However, perfect proportionality is impossible to achieve, if only because there are always remainders that are not considered one way or another. An attempt is therefore made using various mathematical methods to distribute the votes proportionally. The following mathematic models are most common:

The divisor or maximum number method according to d'Hondt, which tends to favour the larger political parties and is used in Albania, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Guatemala, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Switzerland.

The quota system according to Hare and Niemeyer, which favours neither large nor small political parties and is used in Hong Kong, Namibia, Taiwan, Tunisia, and Ukraine.

The divisor method according to Sainte-Lague and Schepers, which also does not allow any preference for large or small political parties and is used in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Iraq, Kosovo, Lithuania, New Zealand, Norway, and Sweden.

A kind of correction of the proportionality results from an electoral threshold. Here, a minimum share of votes is required before a candidate or political party becomes entitled to any representation in a legislature (usually between three and five per cent). This serves to avoid the potential for extreme fragmentation of a parliament. In some countries, like Brazil, such an electoral threshold is strictly rejected because it would violate the principle of equal

representation for all voters in parliament. In other countries, the electoral threshold is set so high that even important parties have no chance of winning a mandate. This is the case in Turkey, for example, where an electoral threshold of 10 per cent applies. In cases with comparably high electoral thresholds, they are probably introduced to weaken the opposition and to ensure that the ruling party retains power. This is no longer compatible with the democratic principle of equal rights. The Republic of South Africa has a system with an exceedingly high degree of overall proportionality. There is only one national constituency for the election of the 400 members of parliament without any electoral threshold, which means that parties that receive as little as 0.2 per cent of the national votes will win a seat in parliament.

Another type of threshold, in the form of a bonus on the election result of the party with the highest number of votes, has been used in Greece and Italy. In Greece, the winner receives a bonus of 50 seats; in Italy, following an electoral reform between 2005 and 2013, the party with the relatively highest number of votes was guaranteed 55 per cent of all parliamentary seats. Of course, this is a clear deviation from the principle of proportionality. The country's constitutional court therefore declared this regulation unconstitutional, so that a new reform became necessary. The disproportionality was then somewhat mitigated and a 3 per cent threshold was established. However, the debate on another electoral reform has not ended there, after a new reform proposal was rejected by Italians in a referendum in 2018.

Overall, there are vastly different rules governing the system of proportional representation. The following differences are the most relevant:

- Closed lists, which are determined by the political parties and cannot be changed by the voters (e.g., Israel, Russia, South Africa, and Spain)
- Open lists, in which the voters can tick their preference for individual candidates and thereby have a say in which candidate will ultimately receive a mandate (e.g., Brazil, Denmark, Finland, Indonesia, and Poland)
- Flexible lists, in which voters can express their preference for individual candidates, but a minimum number of votes is required for a candidate to move up in the ranking (e.g., Slovakia)

The system of proportional representation has several consequences that are worth discussing.

### **Political consequences of a system of proportional representation**

- It leads to the representation of a multitude of opinions and interests in parliament in proportion to their strength among the electorate.
- It prevents “artificial” political majorities that do not correspond to an actual majority in the electorate.
- It encourages negotiation between different political parties representing different political interests.
- It prevents extreme political upheavals, because although new political parties have a greater chance of winning seats, the dominance of any one political party is more likely to be prevented.
- Processes of social change and new political trends are represented more quickly in a parliament.
- It prevents established political parties or dominant parties from forming cartels, in which the cartel parties make democratic change difficult or even prevent it.

### **Mixed voting systems**

In addition to these systems of majority and proportional representation, there are also mixed electoral systems. In principle, these systems see one part of the parliamentarians elected in single member constituencies (often based on a first-past-the-post system) whilst the other part is elected via a party list. Each constituency is relatively small, thus ensuring that voters know who is representing them. At the same time, there is a high degree of general proportionality with all the characteristics and consequences of a system of proportional representation. The possibly dominant role of a political party in winning many direct seats in the constituencies is balanced out by apply-

ing proportionality to the second half of the seats. Germany is probably the best-known example of a mixed system. Other noteworthy examples include Bolivia and New Zealand.

A somewhat different form of the mixed system exists in Japan, Lithuania, Mexico, South Korea, and Ukraine. Here, the combination of two important aspects of the first-past-the-post and proportional systems that mixed electoral systems seek to achieve (i.e., the election of one MP for each constituency and party-proportional representation in parliament) is complicated by the increasing fragmentation of party systems. Strict application of the principle of equal numbers of MPs elected directly and via party lists leads to disproportionalities. Political parties that once won a relatively large share of the electorate now only win many constituencies by a narrow margin. However, this does not reflect their actual strength in relation to political parties with a slightly smaller share of the vote. The latter are therefore allocated additional mandates – so-called overhang mandates – in order to create proportionality between the political parties in parliament as a result of the distribution of the second votes. However, as evidenced in Germany, this procedure can lead to a sharp increase in the number of MPs, which not only drives up the costs of maintaining a parliament, but can also impair its ability to function. There are therefore mixed systems that apply the principle of proportionality less strictly and keep the number of MPs constant by accepting a larger share of directly elected MPs.

## ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND THE QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNMENT

Regardless of their specific structure, all the electoral systems mentioned provide the basic service of translating electoral votes into mandates. However, electoral systems are expected to provide additional functions that address, among others, the accurate representation of voter preferences, the stability of the government, socio-demographic representation in parliament, the personal accountability of members of parliament to the electorate, and finally, the question of good governance (Gallagher 2017: 19 ff.).

Without discussing these points in detail here, some key observations can be shared:

Majority voting systems do not guarantee stable governments, as had long been assumed in political science (Duverger 1963). A quick look at India reveals a highly fragmented party system despite the application of the majority vote system. Here, as in other countries, social, ethnic, and regional diversity, as well as many other factors, contribute to this fragmentation. The effect of the electoral system is limited. Nonetheless, many countries with majority systems and single member constituencies in place tend to have lower numbers of political parties and a higher probability of stable one-party governments. In countries with a system of proportional representation, on the other hand, coalition governments made up of several political parties whose cohesion is more precarious are more likely. A difference in the efficiency of such governments cannot be proven.

Proportional voting systems most accurately reflect voter preferences and the difference compared with majority voting systems is usually noticeably clear. The mixed systems also have difficulties in achieving an actual proportionality between the vote of the electorate and the distribution of seats. In Germany, this is only possible through the creation of numerous additional mandates, which significantly increases the number of parliamentary seats and allows more members to enter parliament via lists of candidates than via the constituencies. The intention of the electoral system to allocate half of the MPs through constituencies and the other half through lists of candidates is thus distorted. In contrast, the number of constituencies in Japan is significantly higher than the number of places on the list of candidates, so that proportionality is clearly missed there. High electoral thresholds also contribute to a distortion of proportionality.

Where the voters have a direct influence on the election of a person to become an MP, this person is more likely to seek feedback from the voters than those candidates who are elected via party lists of candidates. Because a candidate has been nominated by a political party, it is not only their personal commitment that becomes important to the election, but also the political party preference of the electorate. This, in turn, restricts the voters in their choices unless they want to vote for a different political party. In any case, closed list systems offer the voter the least opportunity to demand personal accountability of individual members of parliament.

It is illusory to think that a parliament can perfectly reflect the social conditions of a country. Parliaments are usually composed of members of certain elite groups, even if just in terms of educational qualifications. The electoral systems make no difference here. However, as discussed above, a system of proportional representation with closed lists proves to be more efficient when it comes to increasing the chances of female or minority candidates for election.

A significant relationship between electoral systems and the quality of governance in general has also been claimed in reference to the principle of good governance (Lijphart 1999: 258-300). According to this claim, consensus democracies arising from proportional representation would surpass majority democracies. The balance sheet of governments in a consensus democracy is claimed to be kinder and gentler, which can be traced back to higher social spending, higher levels of aid awarded to developing countries, less harsh punitive measures, and better environmental protection. However, there is no hard empirical data to support this claim of the superiority of an electoral system in terms of good governance.

These brief remarks on electoral systems show that none are able to guarantee a better democracy or a more stable and efficient government. However, the type of electoral system has considerable consequences for the structure of the political party system, as it may lead to possible distortions in representation or give rise to preferences or disadvantages for certain groups of voters. Only those who are familiar with the workings of an electoral system can try to reform it. However, they must be aware of the possible consequences of their interference.

Even if the electoral systems of many countries are similar, peculiarities related to the individual situation of a country, the political tradition and culture, the role of the political parties, the importance of certain regions, the composition of the population, and the political goals associated with a particular electoral system can be found in each case. That is why electoral systems cannot simply be copied and transferred to other countries. Instead, they must be adapted to the national characteristics and should only be changed once a broad consensus between the various political forces on the necessity and form of the reform has been reached.

An electoral system is meant to reflect the will of the electorate in parliament, but often also pursues additional goals. In Germany, for example, the



new Federal Republic wanted to ensure that the country had a stable government from 1949 onwards. The large number of political parties represented in the parliament of the Weimar Republic was seen as the main reason for the political instability of the 1920s and a cause of the collapse of democracy, which led to the takeover of power by the Nazis in 1933. For this reason, an electoral threshold clause was introduced in German electoral law, which (in simplified terms) states that a political party must win at least five per cent of the votes or three direct mandates to be represented in parliament. Associated with this is the expectation that fewer political parties in parliament makes it easier to form stable coalition governments. This assumption has been met for many years. However, in recent years, more political parties are passing the electoral threshold of five per cent, which has made it more difficult to form a coalition government.

In Chile, the electoral system introduced under General Pinochet as the only majority system in the world that allowed for two candidates per constituency was changed in 2015. This previous electoral system ensured that a candidate who received only a third of the votes would also win the second mandate. This system guaranteed the right-wing parties close to the Pinochet camp a disproportionate representation in parliament even after the end of the dictatorship. The 2015 reform introduced a proportional representation system with variable constituency sizes so that, like in Spain, a different number of MPs is elected per constituency. A female quota of 40 per cent on the lists of candidates guarantees a high proportion of women represented in parliament. At the same time, however, the new system further fragmented the Chilean parliament. As the president, who is also the head of government, continues to be directly elected, it seems even more difficult to reach a consensus between the executive and legislative branches after the change in the electoral system. In this case, the reform of the electoral system corrected the representation deficit but made governance more difficult. Perhaps closer, more detailed study of the consequences of individual electoral systems before a reform was undertaken would have been advisable.

It is irreconcilable with democratic principles for a political party to use its strong position to change the electoral system in its favour, as was the case in Hungary in 2011. This is a serious violation of equal opportunity as a fundamental principle of democratic elections.

Following the end of the military dictatorship in 1989, Brazil opted for an alternative path, resisting the introduction of even a low electoral threshold. The adoption of various regulations ensured that many political parties were represented in parliament, including those with only a small share of the vote. Today, twenty or more political parties in the Chamber of Deputies are not uncommon. The electoral system has long been described as particularly democratic by well-known political scientists in the country because it offers a precise reflection of the preferences of the voters in parliament, even if it is more difficult to govern with a factious parliament. The first-past-the-post electoral system of the UK, where many votes (and voters) are ultimately not represented in parliament, would not be accepted in Brazil.

To add another example, the Spanish electoral system is based on the traditional division of the country into provinces. This ensures that at least two members of the national parliament are elected from each province. However, due to the differences in population size and density in the individual provinces, significantly fewer members of parliament are elected in the densely populated provinces and cities such as Madrid and Barcelona than in the smaller provinces. An MP in Madrid also represents significantly more citizens than an MP from the small provinces of Soria or Teruel. Moreover, there have been significant changes in the party system in Spain, especially since the turn of the millennium, without any changes being made to the electoral system.

At the beginning of this chapter, reference was made to the consequences of the electoral system for the 2016 US presidential elections. All countries mentioned subsequently as examples are also established democracies. Their electoral systems are vastly different, and the examples provided indicate the influence of the respective electoral system on the degree of political representation and the formation of government. Despite the differences, however, the electoral systems in these countries are respected by most of their citizens and voters.

## ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

Preparing for elections is one of the most important tasks of a political party and its leadership. Elections usually take place every four or five years and require long-term planning. Election preparations often start immediately after the last election was held, beginning with a sober and self-critical analysis of the election results to understand the rationale for the electorate to cast their vote in a certain way. This analysis will provide important inputs for the long-term planning of future election campaigns. However, party leaders often try to avoid a critical assessment of a disappointing election outcome in an attempt to deflect personal responsibility and to avoid potential repercussions. This can seriously damage the development of a political party and stunt its prospects for future elections. Political parties should deal with their election results honestly so as to lay the foundation for future election success and the effective preparation for the next election campaign.

Two key elements are essential for an election to be successful, namely a good candidate and the right election strategy. A political party that also has sufficient campaign funds, an efficiently organised party apparatus, and an election programme that offers solutions to important issues and problems can look forward to election day with confidence. Of course, an election should never be considered won until the polling stations have closed on the day of the vote and all votes have been counted.

Without the right strategy, even a good candidate will have a hard time winning an election, even if their personality or the circumstances of an election are extraordinary. Aung Sang Suu Kyi, the opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate from Myanmar, was a rare exception. She spent almost 17 years under house arrest and was so popular that she was able to lead her National League for Democracy (NLD) party to victory in 2016 without the need for a sophisticated strategy. However, even exceedingly popular candidates and election winners often lose their shine once they become involved in the day-to-day business of governance. At the next election at the latest, they may be unable to rely on their popularity alone and will need a formal strategy.

The strategy defined at the beginning of a campaign should provide orientation for its entire course. This applies to national as well as local elections,

even if less time and resources are available at the local level to develop a sophisticated strategy. Regardless of the nature of the preceding election, political parties and candidates should start working out a strategy for the next elections at an early stage. There are various factors to consider, including specific ones such as the personality of a candidate, but also numerous others. In general, though, it must be stressed that every election campaign is primarily a battle of communication and shaping the perception of the voters so that one's own party or candidate is perceived to be more competent and personable than the competition. To do this, it is necessary to focus the debate on issues that favour a party or its candidates, and to implement a style of debate that most suits that of the political party and its candidates.

## **The election campaign strategy and next steps in the election campaign**

An election campaign strategy is the general plan of an election campaign, which must be based on a thorough analysis of all the circumstances of an election. It must not rely solely on polls, provided that reliable polling data is available in the first place. In fact, this is rarely the case in local elections. At regional and national level, surveys are often politically tinged, methodologically inadequate, or unreliable for other reasons. Political parties and politicians must therefore endeavour to obtain knowledge and assessments about the situation of a country, city, or constituency that go beyond survey data. Permanent contact with social groups and organisations, and discussions with focus groups, pays off, particularly during the election campaign. Focus groups are groups of citizens from different backgrounds and with different interests who are invited to share their views on political problems or the public perception of the political party prior to elections. The messages derived from such group discussions can provide a party with important guidance for the planning of its election campaign.

An election campaign must be adapted to the character of a political party or a candidate. Even though today's political parties use modern tools of communication and present their message and their candidates in a sophisticated manner, the election campaign must not distort the authenticity of a party or a candidate. Those candidates considered to be conservative, who usually

dress in a grey suit with a tie, should not start wearing colourful dungarees during the election campaign and vice versa. Those who tend to adopt a more measured tone are advised to avoid a sudden transformation towards a more aggressive style of engagement during the election campaign, as such sudden changes in behaviour will only arouse the suspicion of the electorate. The same principle of consistency and authenticity must also apply to programmatic proposals. Candidates should not suddenly put forward policy proposals that they have long opposed. As the election campaign strategy must always correspond to the character of a political party and a candidate, it is they that should have the final say when deciding on the strategy and the individual elements of the election campaign. As important as external consultants may be for the development of an election campaign strategy, they must never determine the path to be taken. This must be the decision of the party leadership or the candidate himself.

## **The start of the election campaign: The diagnosis of the initial situation**

Every campaign should begin with an honest assessment of one's own strengths and weaknesses, which can be determined best with the SWOT method that was mentioned earlier already in the section on political projects (Chapter 4). The SWOT analysis is a particularly useful and frequently applied planning tool for election campaigns. It should be carried out carefully as it is the starting point for all further steps in an election campaign strategy. One should be aware that every strategy – no matter how well developed – carries its own set of risks. An effective election campaign strategy must be structured in such a way that it can be maintained even in the event of unforeseen developments. It must also contain appropriate countermeasures.

Figure 10 shows the basic structure of a SWOT analysis for the purpose of election campaign planning.

Figure 10: Application of the SWOT chart for election campaign planning.

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>What are the strengths and advantages of your political party?</p> <p>In the eyes of the public, on which issues is your political party perceived to hold specific competence?</p> <p>How are the leading representatives and candidates perceived by the public?</p> <p>How is the party organisation prepared for the election campaign?</p>	<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <p>What possibilities exist to improve the perception of the political party and its candidates in public?</p> <p>How can the political party and its candidates react to current trends and attitudes in society?</p> <p>How can the position of the political party and its candidates be distinguished from other political parties, and how is the public to be convinced of its superiority over the competition?</p> <p>What events are imminent for the state or a municipality that can be used for the benefit of the political party and its candidates ahead of the election?</p>
<p><b>Weaknesses:</b></p> <p>On which topics and issues does your political party have unresolved positions?</p> <p>Where does the public expect changes in attitudes towards factual issues?</p> <p>Which areas of party work are viewed negatively by the public?</p> <p>What should be avoided in the election campaign and how can this be achieved?</p> <p>In which areas and in which way should your party or individual candidates present themselves better?</p>	<p><b>Threats (and risks):</b></p> <p>What are the greatest obstacles to election success?</p> <p>How do the political opponents behave, and what chances do they have in relation to their own prospects?</p> <p>What are the strengths of the political opponents and how can you react to, and compensate for, them?</p> <p>Is your campaign well-financed? Can the necessary advertising material be produced and used?</p> <p>Is media work well-prepared; is there a communication strategy; are there enough supporters available for media work?</p>

Source: Own illustration.

Such an analysis will be instructive, both in identifying necessary measures, and in perceiving problems that may be relevant to the election campaign. Every potential candidate can create such a SWOT analysis for themselves to assess their chances in the election and to prepare their own election campaign planning. A SWOT analysis of one's own skills and opportunities is also recommended, regarding the pursuit of other political goals.

It is also important to assess the situation of a country, region, municipality, or constituency, depending on the election for which a campaign strategy is being prepared. If a political party has been in government up to now, it

should ask soberly and honestly what it has really achieved and what needs to be improved. Opposition parties and candidates should also honestly analyse what was weak or flawed about the government and where they themselves can actually offer better solutions. Of course, it should also be asked what voters think of their own performance and what they expect for the future. In this case, surveys can be an important aid, even if they should only be used in a contextualised and reflective manner, and never be accepted uncritically, since it is a statistical model that contains a certain margin of error.

For an honest diagnosis as the starting point for any election campaign strategy, it is helpful to address the considerations compiled in the diagnostic box as honestly and precisely as possible.

### Diagnostic box: electoral framework

- 1. The political context:** the most important issues to the public and media; the internal situation of the government and opposition parties; the last important measures and initiatives taken by the government and the opposition; the relationship of a local government to higher government bodies; important debates in parliament, or city or local council; existing and potential political alliances and coalitions; the strength of the individual political parties in parliament and their balance of power; crises or media events that have a major impact on public opinion.
- 2. The economic and social context:** the main economic and social indicators: unemployment, economic development, social conflicts, etc.; the attitudes of the main social and economic actors towards the government and the opposition; the main social and economic actors and relevant persons in a city, such as doctors, lawyers, artists, former governors or mayors, priests and other religious representatives, business people, teachers, trade unionists; their political attitude and their role as opinion makers; history and structure of a community; important events; structural problems of a municipality or a constituency; migrants and their importance; the main economic

sectors; the socio-demographic characteristics of voters, such as age and occupation, educational level, migration movements, purchasing power, socio-economic status, religious institutions and groups, relevant community organisations; the typical everyday life in a constituency or a city: clubs and leisure facilities, preferred types of sport, local provision of services, opportunities for young people.

- 3. Structure of the electorate:** previous political preferences; the last election winner; developments and changes in the local party landscape; performance of one's own political party in the last elections; information on voter migration; differences in voting behaviour in local, regional, and national elections; amount of voter participation; strongholds and loss zones of one's own political party; electoral alliances and coalitions.
- 4. Political and personal characteristics of a candidate:** political and personal background; positions and functions; personal characteristics such as character, ability to work, political skills, charisma, time for political work, communication skills, intuition, relation to the constituency, anchoring in the political party, leadership style, personal supporters in the political party, relationship with important representatives of the constituency or the local community; personal wealth; past or present legal disputes; resilience; ability to acquire donations or other legal funding to fund the election campaign; experience with social media.
- 5. The role of the media:** the most important media in a constituency or a place; their political orientation; the most important programmes on radio and television; the relationship between the political party and its candidates and the media; individual journalists in the constituency or commune.
- 6. Type of election:** election target of the political party and its candidates; influence of the election system on voting behaviour; strategy of the election campaign.



- 7. The candidate's appearances:** where, how, with whom; what public support can be expected; which supporters should be mobilised; what are the key messages; which media should be used and how; which campaign team is needed; whether professional advice is necessary or possible.

## Comparative advantages

All political parties and candidates must demonstrate to voters their comparative advantages over competitors. This is an important lever to win new votes. These advantages can affect different aspects of a candidate, for example: personality (honesty, professional competence, leadership qualities), political convictions, possible experience in a government office, the early recognition of new topics that become relevant, or practical experience through many years of party work. By highlighting such advantages, a political party and a candidate positively set themselves apart from others. During an election campaign, these comparative advantages must be emphasised again and again, so that the voters compare this offer with those of the other parties and, ideally, conclude that their own offer is better and more convincing. The comparative advantages must, however, be merged with the issues that are important for the voters in order to be decisive for an election. If a political party allows itself to be forced into a debate on issues where it has no opinion, it can become problematic for the election outcome.

## The election targets

All political parties and candidates have one central goal in mind: win the election. However, to be successful, political parties and candidates need to be smarter in defining the real goals of an election. An electoral triumph followed by the assumption of government is not always realistic. The goals must therefore be assessed realistically.

An opposition party that wants to challenge a successful incumbent party that is led by a respected head of government should stay away from overly

ambitious declarations of a political takeover. Instead, a political party must ensure that it formulates realistic election goals, declaring perhaps its intention to increase its number of seats in parliament, or win a certain number of constituencies. If these realistic goals are achieved, the party can announce success after the elections. Whilst this is only a partial victory, it sends a positive signal for the next election campaign. Elections should therefore be thought of as long-term goals with multiple stages. For example, a first goal could be to raise the profile of a candidate in a specific constituency, or to improve the results of a political party and then aim for higher goals next time.

## The concept of the election campaign

After the initial diagnosis is made, the comparative advantages are worked out, and the goals are defined, the actual concept of an election campaign must be drawn up. The concept is the central theme of an election campaign and must be formulated briefly and concisely. It is the guiding principle/s on which an election campaign is based, and which serves as a guideline for all who are involved. The campaign slogan is the translation of the concept into catchy, promotional language. The concept should not only focus on the slogan, but also orientate all other activities, which today include election advertising on social media, press releases, etc.

Barack Obama's entire 2008 US presidential election campaign revolved around a single concept, "change", with a popular campaign slogan, "Yes, We Can". "Change" was also the central theme guiding his participation in debates, engagement with social groups, and visits to companies and other institutions. All campaign activities must be consistent with the theme and must not be distracted by the campaign focus of other political parties. Anyone who wants to win an election must determine the topics himself.

## Who are my voters?

It would be wrong to target everyone during an election campaign. A political party or candidate will never receive the support of the entire electorate and should rather be aware of the segments in the electorate that are likely to support them (and those that are not) in the election. The election campaign con-

cept and strategy must be tailored precisely to those groups of voters who are decisive for a political party. Therefore, political parties and their candidates must identify well their supporters with regard to key demographic indicators, such as age or income, but should also gain insights into their political expectations and attitudes.

In many places today, the demographic context of a country is an important factor in identifying the voters of a political party. In the aging societies of East Asia or Europe, election campaigns tend to focus more on older voters than on younger ones, as the latter are less relevant in terms of sheer numbers. However, a long-term strategy is required to appeal to different sections of voters as they approach the age cohorts on which the party focuses. In the young societies of Africa, Latin America, and South Asia, on the other hand, the election campaign must be very consciously directed towards young and first-time voters. Some political parties consistently have poor results with this group of voters. For some political parties, it may not be efficient to organise a cutting-edge election campaign that runs the risk of alienating older voters, without really gaining a decisive share of the votes amongst the young. Likewise, a political party does not have to make any special concessions to other groups in its election campaign if it is foreseeable that it will not secure votes from these groups. Promising tax breaks to the middle class and rejecting an increase in welfare benefits may be criticised by competing political parties, but it can give one party the decisive votes for an election victory.

## The importance of swing voters

In many countries, the outcome of an election is ultimately decided by a small group of swing voters representing an estimated 15 to 20 per cent of the entire electorate. Any election campaign must focus on appealing to this group of voters both in terms of its programmatic offer as well as at an emotional level. The importance of swing voters is most evident in the US presidential elections, where the election outcome is decided by a relatively small group of voters in a few swing states. This was confirmed again in the 2020 US presidential elections. Political parties and candidates must have a firm understanding of the political landscape and concentrate their campaign efforts in places that promise to yield the highest levels of success. To continue with the example

of the US, the Republican Party hardly spends any resources on election campaign advertising in California, as it knows that its chances of success there are very slim. The same goes for the election campaign activities of the Democrats in Texas, which are equally subdued. It goes without saying that the electoral system has a decisive influence on the US elections and the conduct of election campaigns there. However, similar phenomena can also be observed elsewhere. In countries where the first-past-the-post system is used (as in Australia and Great Britain), political parties often refrain from campaigning in individual constituencies where they anticipate defeat. In some places, they may even choose not to field candidates for election. Nonetheless, socio-political trends and preferences in an electoral district may change over time, thus affecting the electoral outcome, as has been seen in the 2019 parliamentary elections in the UK with the unexpected victory of the Conservatives in some constituencies previously dominated by the Labour Party.

## Setting campaign issues that appeal to citizens

Election campaigns should focus on only a handful of issues. Indeed, political parties are supposed to offer comprehensive political programmes and design proposals that address many policy areas. However, only a few issues will stand out in the election campaign, and it is important that a political party or candidate assert their issues as the ones that are central to the election campaign. These do not necessarily have to concern factual issues but can also focus on a party's or a candidate's leadership qualities or integrity. The fight against corruption has been a central election campaign issue in many countries for several years, often overshadowing many other political issues. A political party or candidate being perceived as corrupt can ultimately decide the outcome of the election, as was the case in Brazil in 2018. The candidate of the Social Liberal Party, Jair Bolsonaro, ultimately won the election, despite not having an electoral campaign concept of his own and openly admitting that his knowledge about economic and social policy was limited. However, what decided the election outcome was the strong rejection of the Labour Party's candidate, due to the party's alleged involvement in numerous corruption cases. Bolsonaro did what every campaigner should do, namely, to shift the focus of the election campaign onto issues that resonate most strongly with the elec-

torate. Focusing on more than two or three issues is likely to overload any election campaign, dilute the party's message, and overwhelm the electorate.

When choosing campaign issues, the following should be considered:

The campaign issue chosen by a political party or a candidate must correspond to their profile and must fit the context of the elections. A politician who is an economics expert should, perhaps, avoid talking about education or cultural policies, whilst a candidate for the mayor's office or a seat on a local council may want to stay away from commenting on the country's foreign and defence policy.

Should a different issue arise and dominate the public discourse as the election campaign unfolds, a party must surely take a stance, yet only after careful consideration of the relevance of the issue at hand to the targeted segment of the electorate.

It may also be the case that all candidates and political parties engage on the same campaign issues, as these are the most pressing ones in the country at the time. To distinguish itself, the party must focus its efforts on developing alternative solutions and to present those as superior to those propagated by its political rivals.

A campaign issue may also become irrelevant due to a shift in the public's interests or an unforeseen incident that abruptly changes the agenda of an election campaign. In the first scenario, the political party or candidate should review their analysis of voter interests and preferences to avoid making the same mistakes in future elections. Preparation for the second scenario is impossible. No matter the circumstances, a political party, its candidates, and its campaign teams must be able to quickly grasp the implications of a significant change in campaign issues and develop a strong and convincing position on it.

As the election campaign unfolds, political parties and candidates may decide to change tack and campaign on issues with which they are traditionally not affiliated. Former US President Bill Clinton, for example, changed the focus of his campaign to family values in the face of an impending defeat in the 1994 general election, even though the issue had traditionally been very strongly identified with the Republicans rather than his own Democratic Party. This U-turn in his election campaign focus arguably helped Bill Clinton to win the election. When he left office a few years later, he did so with positive approval ratings as he had placed much greater emphasis on economic development and budget consolidation during his presidency than had traditionally been

associated with the political agenda of the Democrats. In another example, the leader of the Labour Party in the United Kingdom, Tony Blair, began placing greater emphasis on the issue of public security at the end of the 1990s, although this political issue had traditionally been the focus of the Conservatives. Under the slogan “tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime”, Tony Blair managed to appeal to groups of voters who were not traditionally linked to his party. When identifying campaign issues, political parties and candidates must not be constrained by any preconceived ideas but must be able to firmly grasp which issues are of concern to the public and the voters. Only then can they develop a persuasive proposal to address those issues that correspond with their specific political values and beliefs.

## Election promises

Political parties are widely accused of reneging on their election promises once the election is over. Although one may wonder if political parties should refrain from making promises in the election campaign, it must be stressed that elections always contain a certain element of gambling on the future. During elections, the voters pass judgement on the past performance of a government and the political parties. More importantly though, a voter issues a vote of confidence in a preferred candidate or political party to make sensible decisions and to provide strong leadership in the future. Voters base their decisions on the political party's programmes and campaign issues, which necessarily entail the promise to implement the relevant proposals and ideas for the benefit of society. Election promises must contain realistic and pragmatic policy measures to address key issues and to achieve desired results. Election promises may be combined with measurable results, such as the promise to halve unemployment, double economic growth, or increase the number of secondary school pupils and students within a clearly defined time frame. Election promises of this type will allow the political party or candidate to assert competence in certain matters. However, restraint is advisable when it comes to promises that are difficult or impossible to keep.

## Electoral campaign appearances and campaign activities

In addition to the major drafts, concepts, and campaign issues, the everyday work of a candidate on the campaign is indispensable. Importantly, planning an election campaign must include a calendar, detailing all appearances of the candidate, to prepare them effectively. Campaign appearances aim to raise the visibility of the candidate or political party and to capture the public's attention without compromising their authenticity.

Citizens today are much less willing to attend election campaign events or publicly declare their support for a political party or a candidate. Political parties and candidates must therefore find new and creative ways to engage with the citizens. The Internet and social media play an important role, yet these offer no substitute for human encounters. On the contrary, physical events and human interactions provide the strongest links with the electorate. A candidate who takes thousands of selfies with individuals on the campaign trail will appear hundreds of thousands of times on various social media channels. Such encounters must not be limited to rallies or public speeches only. Instead, social media content is most valuable if it documents physical encounters of the candidate with the public, for example, visits to companies and institutions, or the attendance of events and exhibitions. Despite the possibilities provided by digital election campaign tools, door-to-door advertising remains a crucial element of the election campaign activities. Pictures that show candidates engaging with the public have a great multiplier effect. If a candidate is unable to invest a lot of time in personal door-to-door campaigning, it is helpful if a group of his supporters can take on this role on his behalf.

In addition, a candidate must consciously seek encounters with groups that are important in shaping public opinion. A candidate's election campaign team must liaise with key organisations to secure his participation as a speaker at important events, such as annual meetings, congresses, or anniversaries. Political parties and candidates must also initiate platforms for dialogue and exchange with important social organisations during an election campaign. Anyone wanting to win the support of medium-sized companies must engage with the affiliated associations to secure their support as multipliers. In local elections, candidates should engage with a variety of local associations, religious groups, and other community initiatives.

Many events and encounters during an election campaign do not ultimately help to increase the number of votes. However, they are important for the formation of a political party's or a candidate's public image. Even if a political party or a candidate is unlikely to receive support from trade unionists, they should engage with them nonetheless, as they represent an important group in society, and it reflects positively on a candidate's openness to discussions. Flagship events at the beginning or at the end of an election campaign also play an important role, because they convey confidence of victory and mobilise supporters. However, they may be more ceremonial in nature, as the participants at such events tend to be existing supporters of a political party or a candidate.

## Timing of the election campaign

Effective planning also includes choosing the right time and appropriate co-ordination of the various measures taken during an election campaign. Political parties and candidates must develop a scenario as to how the election campaign is supposed to unfold. Just as an Olympic athlete wants to peak his performance curve on the day of the crucial competition, campaigners must also try to get the highest level of attention just before voting day.

Not all voters are equally interested in an election campaign. Most likely it will be easiest to engage with the most politicised and informed citizens early in the campaign. It is only towards the end of an election campaign that those who do not usually take part in political events become more attentive. These people typically respond much more strongly to an emotional appeal, which is why it is important to place any measures aimed at engaging with the electorate on an emotional level at the end of the election campaign. Advertising on television and the Internet plays a major role here. Like a musical performance, an election campaign must end with a strong emotional final chord. At the final rally, therefore, as many supporters as possible must be mobilised to convey a picture of confidence that should inspire the voters to put their cross in the right place on the ballot paper.



## Personal attacks on the opponent are more likely to inflict self-harm

Among others, US election campaigns often see candidates carry out personal attacks against each other. This practice reached new heights with the 2016 presidential elections and Donald Trump's vicious attacks against his political opponents, especially opposing candidate Hillary Clinton. Trump rallies often ended in chants by his supporters of "Lock her up!" In the next presidential election in 2020, his personal attacks against Joe Biden were somewhat more subdued, partially because the Covid-19 pandemic made mass rallies impossible, thus removing the opportunity for emotional addresses to his support base. Similarly, in Spain, the candidates do not shy away from personal degradation in television debates. In many other countries, however, such personal attacks are uncommon and would more likely reflect badly on the attacker. In many places, there is also a broad consensus between the political parties that the privacy of a candidate remains taboo and is not drawn into the public debate. In some countries (including Great Britain), however, the media has few inhibitions and will publish personal details about the private lives of public figures, including politicians. Attacking a political rival is likely to cause great harm to a candidate's credibility and will be seen by most members of the electorate as a weakness and liability.

## Caution when choosing your supporters

A candidate and his political party must find support from different groups in society. However, they should not accept every support that is offered. Encounters with important social associations such as entrepreneurs, trade unions, craftsmen, artists, or athletes are helpful, as they convey an image of broad support. However, it must be noted that the positive impact of such encounters will be limited because other candidates are likely to organise similar activities. In addition, encounters with influencers from the Internet, bloggers, and the like can be immensely helpful today. In any case, one should be careful not to be affiliated with controversial figures as this is likely to alienate voters.

## Election campaigns need the support of all party members

If all party members and representatives support their political party and its candidates, it is a great help for the election campaign. Younger or newer candidates can benefit from the support of their experienced colleagues. If the candidate for the office of mayor enjoys the public support of a former mayor with positive approval ratings, this will reflect positively on the candidate.

Candidates already holding public offices, or membership in parliament, must showcase their contributions to the community. Local elections thus tend to see countless inaugurations of important projects, particularly in the last few months and weeks prior to election day. One particularly curious example comes from Rio de Janeiro, where a candidate for mayor was said to inaugurate pedestrian traffic lights, as he had failed to implement any major projects during his tenure. However, this did not help his re-election campaign.

## Election campaigning as a governing party

For the election campaign, it makes a big difference whether a political party is part of the incumbent government or the opposition. Representatives of government parties will showcase and defend their government's achievements and projects, and they will also receive government support. Nonetheless, most democratic states do not allow government agencies to directly support the election campaign as this would violate the principle of equal opportunities, which forms an important principle for democratic elections. If members of a government or other candidates of a ruling party are campaigning, they are not allowed to receive any personal or financial help that is paid for by government funds, such as personal assistants or advisers, vehicles, computers and other IT equipment, press officers, and other support for the election campaign. Although this principle is violated in many countries, many others take strict care to ensure that the lines between government and political party or election campaign functions are not blurred. Whilst it cannot be prevented that government parties and their candidates have easier access to important information, the opposition parties must, as a matter of principle, ensure that the government parties do not abuse their privileges in the elec-

tion campaign. All public appearances by the head of government or ministers in election campaigns should be paid for from their party coffers, including vehicles and fuel costs. Only the officials who protect the personal safety of such candidates are paid for by the state.

## **Election campaigning as an opposition party**

An opposition party and its candidates will find it easier to campaign if the current government is not in good standing. In this case, they will make criticism of the government and its policies one of their key campaign issues. At the same time, they will place the propagation of their counterproposals at the centre of their own campaign strategy. Criticism of a rival and his performance must always be presented together with one's own alternative suggestions. In addition, the criticism must be focused on the issues that are considered problematic and should not be formulated too broadly. Any government is likely to have a mixed track record, and thus criticism that has been formulated too broadly can easily be deflected with reference to areas where it has performed well.

It is more difficult for an opposition party to highlight its own profile when a government has a good reputation and can show some achievements. In such cases, the opposition should also recognise some of the achievements. This is perceived more favourably by the voters than sharp criticism, which may not be shared by all. Given the volatility of voter behaviour, such a deliberate attitude can motivate one or the other voter to cast a vote for the opposition at the last minute. Many voters honour self-criticism, prudence, moderation, and common sense more than wholehearted promises and cocky speeches. This may primarily have positive long-term repercussions, as it helps a candidate to create a positive image, which may lead to success in subsequent elections.

## **The election campaign for a parliamentary or council mandate**

Few parliamentarians are elected for their own sake. This may be difficult for some candidates to accept, but most voters know full well that an election is about more than just a person's interests. Therefore, every candidate must

relegate his own interests to the more far-reaching goals of his political party and possibly his government. That is an important factor to personal success.

The election campaigns of candidates for the office of state or prime minister, governor, or mayor pursue clearly defined goals which can be easily conveyed to the electorate. The functions of a member of parliament or a city councillor are less clear, and the candidates must design their election campaign accordingly. If the election in question is tied to further offices (e.g., a presidential or mayoral election), this can help the parliamentary and council candidates. The latter are encouraged to seek support from the candidates for higher office and to emphasise that they will team up with them for a successful government. If, however, the parliamentary and council candidates fight only for themselves (for example, because there are no other elections pending at the same time or because a political party has no chance of filling a government office), then they must focus on two points. First, they must convey their in-depth familiarity with the issues and concerns of their constituency, and their commitment to represent them in the political arena. Second, a candidate must be ready to uphold the interest of his own party and, if applicable, defend and promote its performance as the government.

## Prepare for the unpredictable

Even the best-prepared election campaign may be faced with unforeseen developments. Political parties and candidates must have appropriate contingency plans in place. A candid assessment of one's own weaknesses at the beginning of campaign planning is likely to reveal potential shortcomings upon which a political rival may focus. In Germany, for example, about a week before the 2019 elections to the European Parliament, a video went viral that contained criticism of the largest ruling party, the CDU, by a hitherto only moderately known blogger and influencer. The video called for a boycott of the party. This attack took the CDU's election campaign off guard, leaving it scrambling for an appropriate response. The CDU's failure to manage this crisis effectively contributed to heavy losses in the elections. This example illustrates that even large and well-organised parties must be prepared for any eventuality during the election campaign.

## THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Political parties around the world are learning that they need to supplement campaign advertising via traditional media platforms such as radio, television, and newspapers with digital marketing tools on social media to better present their messages and to solicit votes. Digital campaign advertising received an enormous boost with Barack Obama's 2008 election campaign. Donald Trump's 2016 presidential election campaign illustrated the potential and the dangers of digital marketing (The Great Hack 2019).

Many guides and technical tools are available to better understand digital election campaign advertising. However, only a few principles that are relevant to digital advertising are presented here.

### Principles of digital election advertising

- Long-term preparation. Just like the physical election campaign, the election campaign on social media channels must be prepared well in advance. Every party and candidate should familiarise themselves early on with the multitude of social media outlets as well as the technical instruments and requirements of the various online platforms to know how to use them effectively at the start of an election campaign.
- Formulation of identical election campaign goals and topics for all forms of advertising. The key messages must always remain the same albeit being presented in different ways on social media.
- Strong presence on the most important (but not necessarily all) social media platforms. Today, political parties and candidates are encouraged to have a presence on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube as well as on those digital channels that play a role locally in individual countries or specific regions. At the same time, however, if there are not enough resources to serve all plat-

forms adequately, it is better to concentrate on a few and to focus on high-quality content. Social media presence does not have to be expensive, as it is possible to reach a wide audience even without paid advertising. As a starting point, it is important to have a personal account or your own channel, which can be set up on all social media for free or inexpensively. In the 2016 US election campaign, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump mainly ran their campaigns on Twitter, which did not cost the candidates a lot of money.

- Adapting the style of address to the nature of the social media channel. Whilst the central content message should always be the same, the style of posting a message must be adapted to the respective social media channel.
- Having your own team to work on social media channels is essential. No candidate can spend days and nights alone on their smartphone or PC, drafting and posting messages, responding to comments, and increasing the number of their contacts. Even in local election campaigns, it is helpful if a candidate can recruit supporters from within his inner circle who will assist him in the digital election campaign. The team should help define a digital strategy. A digital campaign is just as time-consuming and labour-intensive as a physical campaign.
- Winning over influencers and other well-known partners to support the election campaign. Joe Biden was supported in the 2020 US election campaign by important influencers and artists like Lady Gaga, who passed on his message to their followers in their own words.
- Constant expansion of the target group. Some social media platforms allow users to purchase target-group-specific advertising to increase the reach of their own news. The possibility of doing this naturally depends on the budget of a political party or candidate.
- Identifying the profiles of followers in social media. In some countries, personal user data can be collected or acquired relatively

easily. In other countries, this requires more effort due to data protection and other regulations. Especially where the data of a manageable group of people (for example, the residents of a given constituency) is concerned, a little patience and long-term preparation will yield results.

- Constantly monitoring the digital presence of competing political parties and candidates to see how they address their followers, what topics they offer, and how they do it. This can also inspire your own campaign.
- Provoking feedback from your own followers, whether positive or negative. This can inspire your own posts and you can react quickly to any mistakes of your own. Comments always influence the algorithms of the respective platforms. In other words, the more comments a post generates, the sooner an algorithm adapts to it and shares it with other users of a platform.
- Support from your own supporters. A digital campaign creates many additional statements about a political party or candidate that are not directly suggested by them. Such reactions should be stimulated and supported. Your own supporters should therefore be repeatedly asked to respond to pre-defined calls for action, to be actively involved in the social media campaign, and to act as an intermediary between the candidate and an extended target group.
- Encouraging the formation of support groups on individual topics. This will help expand the reach of your own statements. Such groups of supporters can be formed on all conceivable topics that are relevant to an election campaign. However, do make sure that the support groups remain connected to the election campaign and your own issues. Such measures need to be clear and directional, pursue precisely defined goals, and be moderated to remain constructive.

- Communicating private content only if it fits the political agenda and is meaningful, for example, sporting successes or cultural activities. However, it will also depend on the customs of a country as to what extent private content is permitted and appropriate.
- Produce videos and use the appropriate platforms for their distribution. Analysis shows that videos get the most attention on social media because they are replicated by the platforms more easily, compared to static content such as text or images. Videos allow for the establishment of a form of direct contact with social media followers. Videos are also shared most frequently. They can be produced from all campaign appearances and many other occasions. Setting up your own video channel on YouTube is helpful.
- Showing presence on platforms that form chat groups and discussion groups.
- Noting the reference to campaign websites and social media channels on all documents, letterheads, e-mail signatures, etc.
- Setting up a website for the election campaign, on which the most important content is announced, and posts are regularly updated.
- Use of the digital campaign to appeal for donations.

## Relational organising

Because election campaigns in the US serve as a model for the modernisation of campaigns, they are always followed with particular attention around the world. What stood out in the 2020 election campaign in particular was the instrument of relational organising. This is a strategic instrument that uses data-based technology to identify socio-psychological mobilisation patterns among voters and to make them the central starting point for campaign communication. This means that the campaign planners seek to determine the interests



and preferences of those voters they aim to reach. However, the political parties or candidates no longer send their messages directly to the target groups, but instead use supporters who possess a much higher level of trust from the target groups. These are those who are connected to “friends” or “followers” in the various media platforms. Today, many people no longer get their political information from the abundance of news in traditional media, but rather move within the close communities of social media, and in particular trust the information they receive from their “friends” in these communities. As such, there is a high probability that election campaigners and political parties will reach a broad target audience with their messages, and are also accepted by them, provided they are disseminated by the trustworthy “friends” of social media. This makes the supporters – not the parties or the media – the central multipliers of the political messages. These supporters do not even have to be outspoken or self-confessed supporters of a candidate or a party, but rather offer the possibility of activating messages that are tailored to their personal profile and passing them on to third parties. At the same time, one can mobilise new supporters in so-called “nano-impact chambers”, which are characterised by common interests. In simple terms, people do election advertising without being aware of it. For this to work, campaigners must have as much personality data as possible at the beginning of the impact chain to launch the messages. Of course, there are also supporters who consciously act as mediators of election campaign messages, such as Lady Gaga who campaigned for Joe Biden through her various platforms. She advertised the presidential candidate with her own messages, even though they were inspired by his headquarters. The members of a political party play a special role in this type of campaigning because they deliberately allow themselves to be used as mediators for a candidate or their political party. The goal of the campaign strategists, however, is to ensure that the individual voter receives messages tailored to them personally and thereby gains the impression that a party or a candidate represents exactly what corresponds to their personal interests. Accordingly, they will willingly give them their voice. Such forms of “relational organising” are now supported by other technical instruments and applications. It can be assumed that such procedures will continue to be refined in the future.

## ELECTION CAMPAIGNS OF THE FUTURE

The way election campaigns are conducted has changed significantly since the turn of the millennium, especially with the advent of social media. Today, it is foreseeable that these media tools, alongside the technical advances in artificial intelligence and further developments in the field of electronic data processing, will have an even more pronounced influence on election campaigns in the future. This poses a challenge for election campaign managers who must use these media platforms and instruments as efficiently as possible for the benefit of their candidates and political parties. However, it remains a challenge for democracy. A fundamental principle of elections is that they are carried out in a free manner. What is at stake is the independent decision of the voter or citizen when casting their vote. However, current developments in the field of digital media and artificial intelligence lead to fears that the individual's freedom of choice will be threatened if very subtle attempts are made to influence and control political attitudes or voting behaviours.

As foreseeable or hypothetical developments regarding digital campaigns are not discussed here in detail, only a few points that are likely to play a role in future election campaigns will be mentioned (Bartlett, Smith and Acton 2018; Council of Europe 2018). The political parties and their campaigners will have to deal with these issues in more detail but will also have to consider questions regarding the necessary regulations to ensure the independence of the individual voter and the freedom of elections.

An important element influencing all further measures and options for future digital campaigns concerns the availability of data. Facilitated by an increase in web-compatible devices, the collection of data on demographics, consumer behaviours, and attitudes, including health data and location data, will become increasingly extensive. The technical capacity for data analysis is constantly advancing and offers companies new opportunities to target potential customers whilst also conveying new information about voters to political parties, at least where the collection of individual data is subject to limited restrictions. The permanent collection of data is already an important element of political party work and will be further intensified in the future. It is becoming apparent that the capacity to combine large and disparate data sources will increase. The IoT (Internet of Things) and social media data, geolo-

cation data, and browsing history data, provide the material for combinations of different databases, carried out by companies and governments. It is obvious that this creates serious problems regarding data protection. Besides the functional advantages of data combination, there is a risk of potentially sensitive information being collected. This is particularly worrying given the widespread use of digital consumer applications, including smart TVs or virtual assistants. These household items are equipped with cameras and microphones and transmit data once triggered by certain key words. This allows access to the most private living environment of citizens.

The collection of data is a prerequisite for an additional element of digital election campaigns, i.e., the targeted orientation of advertising messages. Advertising of consumer products will rely more heavily on automated marketing, whereby individuals or groups of consumers are automatically assessed and subsequently targeted with the use of machine-generated content. Facebook and Google already provide several tools that enable companies to dynamically segment their target customers and to address them with tailored advertisement. These tools also allow for the identification of groups of people who display similar traits to existing target groups. Companies that specialise in the collection and analysis of data are working on developing such techniques further, and making them available to their customers, including political parties and politicians.

Artificial intelligence – a further element that will also become increasingly relevant for future election campaigns – is already able to produce original and realistic visual and audio content, blurring the line between human- and machine-produced content. Deep learning techniques enable systems to independently decide how detailed conclusions can be drawn from highly abstract data sets. Insightful information about the users can be drawn from this, even if certain data sets may contain little or no personal data.

The success of election campaigns will continue to depend on factors that are independent of, or only marginally influenced by, the digital possibilities of campaigning. As mentioned earlier, election campaigns do not matter to a large part of the electorate. However, when digital campaigns succeed in reaching a considerable segment of decisive swing voters and influence their voting behaviour, they can become crucial for an election. This was the case with the UK referendum on Brexit, where the “Leave” campaign sent around a billion targeted advertisements on social media, primarily on Facebook. In the

2017 UK general elections, the Labour Party used data modelling to identify potential Labour voters and then target them with specific messages.

Several specialised companies that collect and process data on voters and voter behaviour have emerged to cater to the growing needs of political parties. Among these companies is NGP VAN Inc., a private voter database and web-hosting service provider used by the US Democratic Party and related organisations. However, companies such as Adobe, Oracle, Salesforce, Nielsen, and IBM also offer their services to political parties to address voters in a specific constituency with targeted messages and information.

The most important trends that can be seen regarding digital campaigns are summarised below.

- **Detailed audience segmentation**

Based on extensive personal data, individual target groups can be very precisely segmented, allowing campaigners to address them with messages that they believe could influence voting behaviour.

- **Cross-device targeting**

Cross-device targeting is a key area in advertising technology (*ad-tech*), whereby companies are developing increasingly sophisticated methods, both probabilistic and deterministic, to obtain a user-oriented view of a person and to address them across devices. Cross-device targeting means that data about individual target groups are automatically accessed when using different devices, for example the browser data of a user is merged into a comprehensive user profile across the smart TV, mobile phones, tablets, and personal computers. This technology is already used in campaigns. Target groups can thus be addressed at a certain point in time, via certain terminals, if it is to be expected that they will be able to perceive messages on such a device.

- **Increasing use of psychographic or similar techniques**

Personality tests have long been employed for political purposes. This form of psychographic analysis relies on huge amounts of data. Many advertising companies offer the ability to target consumers (or voters) based on the emo-

tions expressed in their social media activities. Companies are also offering data that link demographic, psychographic, and attitudinal attributes that may be used to address voters digitally during political campaigns. By linking the political preferences of a person with other attitudes, expectations, behaviours, lifestyles, purchasing habits, and media preferences, targeted messages are meant to appeal to the potential voters, both emotionally and rationally.

- **The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to target, measure, and improve campaigns**

In the future, artificial intelligence may help political parties find out who should be addressed, at what time, and with what content to maximise the persuasiveness of an election campaign. AI will help to bring together huge amounts of data from various sources and to identify relationships that are likely to remain invisible to human analysts, as the algorithms develop independently and can make extraordinarily complex decisions in milliseconds. It is not inconceivable that AI-controlled platforms could carry out semi-autonomous political campaigns soon.

- **Use of artificial intelligence for the automatic generation of content**

AI is increasingly able to automatically generate content. This opens the possibility of automatically creating programmatic messages for specific target groups as part of election campaigns, which can then be transmitted in one's native language without the addressee being aware that he is being addressed by an autonomous machine. Using personal data, individual voters receive customised and nuanced advertising messages. Chatbots can even be used to conduct a dialogue with individual voters, whereby the machine analyses additional data that it uploads and uses to target further voters. Such campaigns can combine the interactive element with personal data to place ads that involve reciprocal human-machine interactions, possibly referring to previous interactions or stated concerns, with newly generated content. Logically speaking, this could result in a stream of unique, personalised messages addressed to each voter, constantly updated based on A/B testing.

- **Use of personal data to predict election results**

Political parties conduct polls during the election campaign to determine their approval ratings, the acceptance of their candidates, the impact of their campaign, and the issues that are important to voters. In the past few years, social media has been used to conduct surveys to identify the concerns of the electorate. Research suggests that candidates who were more active on Facebook and Twitter tended to have better poll scores.

- **Use of new platforms**

The use of different platforms for election campaigns has already been mentioned above in the section on social media. Video content that can be viewed on phones and other devices is considered an extremely effective means of conveying emotional content on behalf of brands and marketing campaigns. YouTube has therefore become a central platform for political advertisements. For many voters, the process of shaping their political opinions is no longer confined to the living room and the television set but takes place in what is referred to as “micro-moments”, when they watch video content on their mobile devices. However, this also carries a new risk of manipulation through what are known as “deepfakes”. These use a form of artificial intelligence called deep learning to make images of fake events, thus generating very realistic falsifications of media content. In the political arena, these manipulations are often applied to voices and faces, which enable election campaigners to put words in the mouth of their opponents. AI systems can simplify the creation of high-quality, falsified video footage of politicians saying reprehensible things. Given the high level of credibility that video and audio evidence possess, there is a real risk of recipients of such messages being manipulated.

## Challenges for digital campaigns

The increasing importance of digitisation for future election campaigns cannot be underestimated, even if traditional campaign methods remain relevant. However, digital campaigns will only complement, not replace, physical campaigns. They offer additional opportunities for political parties and their candidates to convey their messages and address voters directly. However, there are also some challenges of which candidates for election must be aware. In many countries, the legal framework for collecting, storing, and using personal data is not sufficiently strict. Political parties must ensure that the collection and use of data is regulated and that the authority responsible for monitoring an election in a country also controls the correct handling of data collected during election campaigns. Second, inappropriate voter profiling and messaging must be avoided. Automatically generated, tailor-made content for each voter and its transmission are likely to become an important part of future political campaigns. This means that election campaigns will become increasingly automated. Besides raising questions of legality, fair political competition, and the risk of conveying false or contradicting messages, such campaign instruments raise additional questions concerning the profile of a political party or a candidate and their political goals and intentions. If machines wage election campaigns against each other and generate messages according to the supposed preferences of the voters, but not based on the principles and political convictions of a political party, political competition is reduced to absurdity. This, in turn, threatens the existence of a democracy. A strict level of accountability must therefore be demanded of political parties, especially regarding digital election campaigning.

Various analyses show that a select number of Internet companies – above all Facebook and Google – are becoming more and more dominant in online advertising, as they hold a vast amount of data about their users. Stricter monitoring and regulation are therefore essential in order not to undermine trust in the fairness and legitimacy of elections (Council of Europe 2018).

### Questions to the reader for critical evaluation

- Which electoral system exists in your country and how does it influence the composition of the political party system?
- Which types of political parties are more likely to benefit from the electoral system and which are more likely to be disadvantaged?
- How accurate are analyses of election results? What are the consequences of performance within individual political parties?
- How do the political parties prepare for elections?
- What are the characteristics of the election campaigns?
- How are social media and other platforms used for election advertising?
- Are the political parties able to organise election campaign events with many participants?
- How will voters be addressed personally?
- How important are the ideology and core values that political parties represent to voters?



# 10

## Political Parties in Parliament and Government

After successfully participating in elections, an essential part of political work begins for political parties, including taking over the leadership of a state and/or government, appointing ministers, filling important positions in public institutions with their representatives, taking part in the debate on laws and, above all, controlling the government. In any case, the implementation process of their ideas and proposals through laws and political decisions begins. However, the period after the elections entails new challenges and tasks that political parties must consider. Both the victorious and the defeated must not only perform their role in the government or the opposition efficiently but also prepare for the next election cycle.

### THE PARLIAMENTARY GROUP OF A POLITICAL PARTY

When a parliament meets after an election, the representatives of a political party usually agree to form a parliamentary group or caucus. The aim of forming a caucus is primarily to develop a common attitude towards the issues to be discussed and the votes ahead. For a political party, its parliamentary

groups are of central importance because they greatly influence its public perception. A close and continuous coordination of the party headquarters with its parliamentary group and members of parliament is therefore particularly important and is often supported by the close interweaving between the political party and the leadership of a parliamentary caucus. Important representatives of a political party are often also MPs and vice versa; leading members of a parliamentary group often have a great influence in their party. Frequently, party leaders are also leaders of their parliamentary group unless they hold a leading government office. Whether or not they are elected members of a party executive, it is advisable to invite them to all important meetings of the party leadership and to coordinate important decisions with them. As not all MPs can work in all committees and acquire specialist knowledge on various topics, the political party's view about individual issues is coordinated within the parliamentary group. Of course, MPs should first and foremost orientate themselves to the programme of their political party. As a rule, the parliamentary caucus agree on a common position on a topic or legislative proposal. Due to their great importance for the political parties, individual aspects of a parliamentary group are described in more detail in the sections below.

## The status of a parliamentary group

A parliamentary group consists of parliamentarians from one or more parties or also non-party elected representatives. Each parliament determines the minimum number of members in order for a parliamentary group to be formed with the appropriate status. This is usually a prerequisite for the allocation of speaking time during plenary debates and benefits such as additional office space or staff. For independent or smaller groups of MPs, it is much more difficult to become visible in a parliament and to get sufficient time in plenary sessions to expose their views. In many countries, the largest opposition group receives not only some special political rights but also additional grants. In Germany, for example, the largest opposition group takes over the chairmanship of the parliamentary budget committee to give it better control of the government. This is not only practised in the German Bundestag (i.e., the national parliament), but also in the regional parliaments and in municipalities. In countries with a parliament modelled on Westminster in the

UK, the appointments of leader of the opposition and shadow ministers come with special political rights. The bestowment of special privileges to the largest faction in the opposition illustrates the important role the opposition plays in the functioning of a democracy.

## The rights of a political group

Political groups are very often involved in the governance of a parliament by sending representatives to its presidency. In many countries, being part of a group is a perquisite to being able to introduce legislative proposals that are then discussed by a parliament and its committees. This ensures that a minimum number of MPs support a proposal and that no individual or small group of MPs can paralyse parliamentary operations with proposals that have no prospect of approval. The exercise of the right of parliamentary government scrutiny, that is, to ask a government oral or written questions, is often also related to group status.

## Political groups and their parties

Political parties exert influence over their MPs and parliamentary groups in various ways. Most party statutes contain regulations in various forms that address the relationship between a political party, its elected officials, and its parliamentary groups. Close communication and coordination between the political party and its elected representatives is a minimum requirement. The statutes of the Australian Liberal Party, for example, impose a duty on the parliamentary groups and party leaderships to keep each other informed about political developments and to work closely together. In addition, regular meetings between the parliamentary group and the national party leadership are required. In Sweden's Social Democrats, the group is even responsible for organising party congresses.

The need for close cooperation between the parliamentary groups and party leadership is evident. Such cooperation is best achieved when the chairmanship roles for both the political party and the parliamentary groups are held by the same person. The UK is the best-known example of this. However, this "double hatting" is not common everywhere. For this reason, some po-

litical parties elect or co-opt the parliamentary group leader into the national party leadership. In the New Patriotic Party of Ghana, for example, the parliamentary group's chairman and his deputy are elected by the National Council of the political party and, if the country's president comes from the political party, even they will be asked for their opinion on the group leadership. In addition, the party executive committee evaluates the performance of the parliamentary group and its spokesman every year.

There is, of course, also a close programmatic connection between a political party and its parliamentary group. The political proposals and legislative initiatives of the parliamentarians, as well as their reactions to the initiatives of other political parties, are usually very closely based on the party's election programmes. When introducing and debating political and legislative initiatives, they usually seek coordination not only within their parliamentary group, but also with party committees at the national level, as well as with their regional or local association and their constituency. This guarantees the greatest possible coherence of such parliamentary initiatives with the ideas of a political party and their support, to ensure acceptance by party members. There are vastly different procedures around the world for the form of voting and the influence of the national leadership or other bodies on the substantive positions of their parliamentarians and political groups. In some cases, parliamentarians have little independence from party instructions, whereas in some places, they are given a lot of room for manoeuvre. Each political party must decide for itself how it wants to shape this vote. In doing so, it must always be considered that, in everyday political and parliamentary life, topics and proposals for regulation and legislation come onto the political agenda where party guidance is absent but to which a parliamentary group must react. Especially when a party programme does not provide any guidance in such cases, coordination between the parliamentary group and the political party is essential so as to achieve an agreement on a unified position on new topics and issues.

## Functions of the group's chairman

The office of chairman of a parliamentary group is one of the most important political party offices, not only in a national parliament but also in local representative bodies. The political party and parliamentary group chairperson

is often the same individual, especially when a political party does not lead the government and when the party chairperson, as head of government or a minister, cannot concurrently chair a parliamentary group. In countries with a system of British parliamentarism, there is no actual parliamentary group leader, but rather, there is the “whip” who acts as the chief executive or chief organiser of the parliamentary group. The actual spokesperson role is exercised by the prime minister for the governing party and by their leaders for the opposition parties. The whips, however, ensure discipline within the parliamentary group and play a decisive role in determining the list of speakers and other important issues of parliamentary procedure.

The group’s chairperson and his or her deputies perform various functions that are of great importance for coordination as well as for the style of the work of the group, including:

- To coordinate the elaboration of the political positions of the group on all issues on the parliamentary agenda and to ensure that these are in line with the goals and programmes of their political party. Where the political party has not formulated a clear position on individual issues, they ensure coordination between the parliamentary caucus, the party leadership, and other party bodies.
- To coordinate the sending of members to individual parliamentary committees, although they cannot always meet all the preferences of individual members.
- To decide on the list of speakers for the plenary sessions of the parliament (where not all the preferences of individual MPs can always be considered).
- To determine the subjects to be raised by the political group during the parliamentary question time.
- To coordinate the agenda and other issues relating to the parliamentary session and the parliamentary process with the parliament’s bureau.
- To coordinate with the chairmen of other parliamentary groups on joint projects and joint voting behaviours on individual legislative proposals.

- To agree on pairing with other parliamentary groups, i.e., the waiver of a certain number of members of one parliamentary group from taking part in a vote if members of the other parliamentary group cannot take part in a vote due to illness, parliamentary travel, or other duties. This keeps the general balance of votes in parliament.
- To ensure that the members of their group vote correctly.
- To manage the staff of a parliamentary group and assume responsibility for the general organisation of the parliamentary group's work (up to and including the allocation of offices to members of parliament, etc.)
- To represent the parliamentary group and their party in public.

The abundance of tasks and responsibilities of a parliamentary group leader presupposes that he or she has many years of parliamentary experience, knows the work processes, procedures, and rules of parliamentary work well, enjoys a high level of trust in their own party, and has good communication skills. Group leaders should be outstanding representatives of their party.

In some countries, group leaders not only seek contact with the national party leadership, but also organise regular meetings with the group leaders of their political party in regional parliaments. The purpose of these is to consider the mood and proposals of the regional parliaments in the legislative work of the national parliament. In South Africa, the leaders of the African National Congress (ANC) from the national and provincial parliaments meet regularly with the national party leadership to inform each other about parliamentary initiatives and to coordinate strategic issues.

## Regular group meetings

Despite the importance of the caucus leaders, regular coordination between all members of a group is essential so as to find out about the work in individual committees and to vote on various topics. As there is seldom agreement on all issues on the political agenda (especially in larger groups), the parliamentary group meetings also serve as a platform for debate. Only in a few political

parties and parliaments do party and group leaders have enough power to enforce homogeneous behaviour and silence any dissenting opinion. Most of the political groups therefore meet regularly in plenary. At the end of the debate on controversial issues, there are often votes to determine the group's common position on specific issues. Once the common line has been determined and decided, parliamentary group discipline is required of every member.

## Group discipline

In return for the advantages that individual members of parliament attain by belonging to a parliamentary group, they are usually required to respect the need for discipline. This means that all members of a parliamentary group vote as a united bloc in parliament and articulate a common stance. As most parliamentary groups are made up of members from only one political party, group discipline also means party discipline. Loyalty to their political party and its positions is thus required of the MPs. Only in a few exceptional cases (mostly in decisions of conscience) do the parliamentary groups (and parties) give their members the autonomy to vote according to conscience and not according to parliamentary group (and party) discipline. In parliamentarism, closed and disciplined parliamentary groups are systemically necessary, especially on the part of the governing parties, because otherwise there is no stable government. In presidentialism, the free mandate can be handled more flexibly.

Group discipline does contradict the freedom of conscience for MPs which is guaranteed by the constitutions of many countries. MPs should have a free mandate where they are only obliged to follow their conscience and not be bound by instructions from third parties (i.e., neither their political parties nor their voters). This is to ensure that their work in parliament is strictly factual, and decisions made consider the interests of society as a whole. Authoritarian or totalitarian regimes withhold this possibility from members of their legislatures and subject parliamentarians to strict control, thereby turning debates and votes in parliament into a farce. Whilst most political parties are familiar with these arguments, they nevertheless insist on group discipline so as to implement their own political interests and goals, to guarantee the majority of a group or to demonstrate the unity and strength of the opposition, and to portray a recognisable and consistent political image to the outside world.

One of the main tasks of a caucus chairman is to maintain this unity. Where this is achieved through persuasion and MPs voluntarily submit themselves to the discipline of their group, then the freedom of mandate of each MP is not affected. In any case, many parliamentarians want to stand again in the next election, and this will encourage them to be loyal to their political party and caucus.

The practice of a free vote became apparent in Great Britain during the voting for Brexit in the House of Commons. Neither all MPs of the ruling party, nor those of the opposition, respected a line set by their political party and parliamentary group leadership, but instead accepted or rejected individual proposals from the government and parliament any way they saw fit. This individual behaviour has not helped the political decision-making process. Many MPs crossed the floor to vote together with the MPs of another group. Such a crossing of the floor is also possible in Australia and Canada where it can mean either the one-time approval of a proposal from another political party or the permanent defection of an MP to another parliamentary group.

In some places, disloyal behaviour by MPs can be punished by the withdrawal of party nomination at the next election, fines, and even exclusion from a parliamentary group. In countries with proportional representation, it is argued that switching parliamentary groups goes against the spirit of the system, since voters cast their ballot for a party list and not for an individual MP. Hence, MPs should therefore not be allowed to freely decide on their party affiliation. In addition, frequent crossings to other groups and political parties (as it happens in Brazil or the Philippines, among others) erode the trust of citizens in political parties and in politics because voters may feel ignored and no longer represented. Such a loss of confidence can threaten a country's democracy.

As a result, some countries have even introduced legal sanctions to punish such deviant behaviours. This applies above all to the extreme case where MPs want to leave a parliamentary group. In countries such as Bangladesh, India, Namibia, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, and South Africa, regulations are in place that make leaving a parliamentary group extremely difficult; some countries may only allow a limited window for defection during a legislative period or, in the case of Bangladesh, they may maintain that a defection leads to the loss of the seat. Such regulations were introduced with the intention of preventing frequent party changes in some countries and the associated instabil-



ity of parliamentary majorities that can weaken a government. In countries with a proportional representation system where members are elected via party lists, there is greater pressure not only to exclude dissenters from a parliamentary group but also to withdraw their seat because it is held to belong to their political party. An example of the strict regulation for compliance with both party and parliamentary group discipline may be found in the statutes of the Australian Labour Party. It states: "Policy at the national, State and Territory level shall be determined by the national, State and Territory conferences respectively. Such decisions shall be binding on every member and every section of the Party, or of the relevant State or Territory Branch. On matters that are not subject to National Platform or Conference or Executive decisions, or their State and Territory equivalents, the majority decision of the relevant Parliamentary Labour Party shall be binding upon all members of the parliament" (ALP 2014: National Principles of Organisation 1:14).

Elsewhere, these requirements are far more flexible. As observed in the US, there are regular intra-party divisions. The Democratic Party, for example, only demands party solidarity when voting on the election of a Speaker of the House and the chairmanship of committees.

It is difficult to establish whether dissenting votes are due to a breakdown in party discipline or that the individual MP has an issue of conscience. On the one hand, there is the pressure from governing parties for unified behaviour and for government support. On the other hand, there are always dissatisfied parliamentarians in groups that do not accept individual decisions or feel overlooked in the distribution of offices. When a ruling party has a large majority, it can better absorb rebellious individual behaviour. If the majorities held are close, there will be greater pressure for compliant behaviour on the part of every MP. In opposition parties, breaking ranks is sometimes more frequent because sanctions are limited. In young democracies, there is a greater tendency for MPs from opposition parties to feel frustrated because of their lack of political influence. They are less inclined to follow their chairman. Leaving political parties and changing caucuses are somewhat more common. That is why the discussed rules for sanctioning parliamentary caucus and party defections have been introduced in such countries.

Finally, it cannot be overlooked that switching to another group is often the result of bribery and corruption. Such defections are often condemned by the public and considered opportunistic at best and corrupt at worst.

## Rules of conduct for members of parliament

In most, if not all, of the world's parliaments, rules of conduct for parliamentarians are applied. Some define their rights and duties in great detail and aim to increase the transparency of any professional or other activities, additional income, and gifts made available to them for their political activities. This is to make clear which personal interests parliamentarians may pursue in addition to their mandate or which interest groups they have a particularly close relationship with, which may influence their political work. The publication of such information is intended to guide correct behaviour by parliamentarians and prevent misconduct or even corruption. In some countries, these rules are very broad and their monitoring is not very strict. In other countries, however, there is detailed information not only about the income related to a parliamentary mandate, but also about other incomes and expenses. However, even on the websites of countries that are considered to be particularly transparent, such as Canada, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, or Switzerland, there is hardly any more information about MPs' incomes than the general information about their official payment. Supplementary income is usually not made transparent. In Germany, MPs must disclose their additional income in a scheme of ten levels, so that every citizen can at least roughly know their approximate amounts. Following the misconduct of a few MPs in connection with the procurement of materials during the coronavirus pandemic, this transparency is to be expanded and, above all, donations and donors are to be publicly disclosed even if they involve relatively small amounts of money.

## The financial importance of the parliamentary caucus for a party

In addition to political advantage, political parties can also profit financially from their parliamentary groups. In some countries, in addition to individual grants, political parties benefit from public grants received by political groups to offset the cost of employment of staff, the conducting of research, and the procurement of necessary equipment, provided that they comprise an agreed number of MPs in parliament. In some countries (such as Germany), these funds and the employees financed by them are limited to the parliamentary

group to ensure that no party work (e.g., election campaigns) is conducted with public funds. In other countries (such as Spain), public funds and the personnel paid through these funds can also be employed for party work and the maintenance of party headquarters. As a result, MPs and senators tend to be understaffed and poorly equipped.

Most political parties expect MPs to contribute part of their parliamentary income to the party coffers. This is legal and ethical as most MPs owe their election victories and associated income to their political party. However, there are different provisions varying from country to country regarding the financial gains that a political party can expect from its MPs and parliamentary causes.

## PARTIES AND COALITIONS

Where one political party does not gain a majority in parliament, it must reach agreements with other parties. The most common form of such agreements is coalitions, whereby political parties offer to share power and implement different political goals. However, being part of a coalition demands compromises and concessions to partners. Coalitions are not a marriage of love but one of convenience for a limited period of time. Another form of parliamentary cooperation with other political parties is selective agreements on certain topics, such as the election of the head of government, or the joint support of individual legislative initiatives. In this case, there is a minority government without a clear majority in a parliament that is unstable and more vulnerable to attacks by other political parties depending on the issues. A formalised coalition is a more stable foundation for cooperation between several political groups, even if there are regular differences of opinion between the partners. In a cleverly negotiated coalition agreement, mechanisms will also have been agreed upon to resolve and settle such differences without endangering the stability of the coalition and the government that it supports.

In the past, coalitions were more common in parliamentary systems of government, but recently there has been a tendency to form coalitions in presidential systems as well, even though the president and their government are less dependent on a parliamentary majority. Presidents who are determined

to shape politics usually require parliamentary support. It has been observed in Latin America that, especially where parliaments are strong and endowed with important powers, presidents increasingly seek the consistent support of a part of parliament, in the form of a coalition, so as to be able to govern with a stable parliamentary majority, maintain approval for their legislative proposals, and avoid lengthy negotiations on each individual project (Alemán and Tsebelis 2011). Even if there are clear differences between parliamentary and presidential systems regarding functions and competencies, the need and ability to form coalitions is increasingly proving to be an important element of efficient governance. Political parties should therefore be prepared to form a coalition if they want to lead or participate in a government.

### Different forms of coalitions

**Electoral alliances** are inter-party agreements where a type of vote-sharing is arranged. This arrangement may be one where political parties agree not to compete against each other in certain constituencies, or where the law allows several parties to form a common list. In these cases, an electoral alliance is a means to increase the share of votes and seats to a level that would not be achievable if the parties stood alone for election. When such an alliance has the prospect of forming or participating in a government, the partners should (prior to an election) agree on joint political projects and personnel proposals to prevent discrepancies afterwards.

**Coalition governments** are usually formed when no single political party has a sufficient parliamentary majority to pass laws and form a stable majority. Due to the fragmentation of parliaments in many places, two political parties may no longer be enough to form a coalition. At the same time, a coalition composed of several parties often has greater difficulties to find agreement on policies to be implemented and the distribution of posts, as all partners usually want their own representatives in government. The minor coalition partners in particular fear that their part in a coalition government will not be properly recognised and that they will then be disadvantaged in future elections.

**Grand coalitions** are a special form of governing coalition between the two strongest political parties in a country that are customarily the main opponents in the political arena. Grand coalitions normally come about when coalitions with smaller parties cannot be found due to ideological differences or personal animosities. A national crisis can also lead to grand coalitions if the partners put aside their party differences for reasons of state. Austria, Germany, Israel, and Italy are countries where grand coalitions have repeatedly come about. Elsewhere, in countries like Spain, the two most important political parties have so far not been ready to form a grand coalition, even though some observers believe that the separatism in Catalonia, the Basque Country, and other regions of the country can be resolved more effectively if there is joint action by these two parties.

**National unity governments** are formed primarily in moments of profound political upheaval or during a national crisis. Inter-party conflicts will be put on hold in favour of the common national interest. Political parties often attempt to avert political crises through constitutional amendments or the drafting of a new constitution, but this does not guarantee that conflicts will be permanently resolved. National unity governments existed in Libya and South Sudan, for example, and prior to that in Rwanda, Zimbabwe, and the Republic of South Africa after the end of the apartheid regime.

**Legislative coalitions** are sometimes formed when individual political parties do not want to formally join a governing coalition but make agreements with one or more governing parties to jointly pass laws on specific issues. This guarantees a broader consensus and is particularly important for laws that affect sensitive political areas such as minority rights or the right to vote. Legislative coalitions can prevent serious future conflicts.

Coalitions can be of great benefit to democracy, but they also involve some risks for both those involved as well as the political system. The greatest risk is that coalition partners use their cooperation to change the political rules of

the game in such a way that they override the applicable checks and balances and secure permanent access to political power (e.g., by changing electoral law).

The ability of political parties to form coalitions depends on various factors. The government and electoral system are crucial for the distribution of power in a parliament, as well as the real authority and scope of a government. Equally important are the political culture and attitudes of the actors involved. In those European countries with a long tradition of forming coalitions, such as Belgium, the Netherlands, and Norway, there is little to no fundamental resistance, within and outside the political parties, to form coalitions to arrive at a stable government. In contrast, this is much more difficult in countries with a high degree of political polarisation where not only party members, but also supporters, of a political party view cooperation with other parties with scepticism or even distaste. The formation of governments of national unity in countries marked by violent conflict is even more difficult. In Colombia, for example, the integration of former members of the guerrilla movement into the political system, and their parliamentary representation through their political arm, met with considerable pushback from large sections of the public. Their acceptance into a government coalition would likely provoke new conflicts. Nonetheless, as the experience of Chile has shown, political parties that once fought hard for many years due to ideological and political differences can come together in a broad coalition to rebuild democracy. The common opposition to the old regime facilitated the formation of a coalition.

Table 14: Advantages and disadvantages of coalitions.

Advantages and Opportunities	Disadvantages and Risks
The formation of a stable government and the ability to govern is possible.	The permanent need for consultation and coordination between the coalition partners makes consistent governance difficult.
Political goals that a political party cannot achieve on its own are realised.	Priorities and principles in legislation and government work must give way to compromises with coalition partners.
The interests of different social groups, which are represented by the various coalition parties, are considered in the legislative process and in the government (also in the distribution of offices).	The individual coalition partner's own profile suffers from the permanent search for compromise and consensus, and it is difficult for individual political parties to emphasise their contribution to joint achievements.

Advantages and Opportunities	Disadvantages and Risks
The general public learns that compromise is an important means of resolving disagreements on political issues.	
Smaller political parties can benefit disproportionately from the achievements of a coalition if they succeed in drawing attention to their contributions.	Smaller political parties can be crushed in the public eye by a dominant coalition partner.
The general public learns to be tolerant of the positions and demands of other political parties with whom a coalition may one day be necessary.	The general public and some of the political party's supporters may get the impression that the party is neglecting its own principles in favour of government offices; this results in a greater need for justification for decisions made, both vis-à-vis the public and the party's own supporters.
The political conflict is toned down because another political party may one day be needed as a coalition partner. It is therefore advisable to maintain the ability to engage in dialogue and not burden it with harsh and personal attacks.	Supporters of coalition parties may not accept agreed compromises and may split off from their party.
Individual or all the coalition partners can – with proof of good government results and their competence and ability to make decisions – gain advantages and greater support in subsequent elections.	Disagreements and conflicts within a coalition as well as the mistakes or weaknesses of a coalition partner can be blamed on all coalition parties and worsen the prospects in subsequent elections.
Offices and positions can be filled by representatives of the coalition partners that would otherwise remain unreachable, thus creating an incentive for the political work of the officials and future aspirants.	Grand coalitions can run the risk of marginalising weaker opposition parties; on the other hand, there is a risk that extremist parties will gain strength on the political fringes if there are no strong opposition parties in the political centre.
By exercising executive functions, the individual coalition partners gain experience that would otherwise not be possible, expand their competencies, and become part of future election campaigns for themselves and their political party.	Dominant political parties that do not have to fear defeat can be tempted to co-opt certain groups through coalitions, so as to weaken them or even to eliminate them before they can develop into an alternative.
Even unpleasant government decisions in times of crisis (e.g., the curtailment of personal freedoms as a result of a pandemic) find greater legitimacy more easily if they are supported by several coalition partners.	
A government and the political parties that support it enjoy greater access to the media and broader distribution of their public relations work because each coalition partner uses its communication channels to disseminate the results of government work.	

Source: Own illustration.

Forming a coalition requires not only goodwill and the weighing up of advantages and disadvantages for one's own political party, country, and the democratic order, but also several other considerations. These include:

- *The timeframe available.* In some countries, the constitution or electoral laws dictate the timeframe available for a government to be formed after the elections. Political parties must take this into account before the elections if there is a prospect that they will have to join a coalition afterwards. To prepare for this, they should at least internally determine their priorities for negotiations. The better prepared a political party is for coalition negotiations, the more likely it will be able to set the issues that are important to it in an agreement.
- *The political constellation.* Sometimes a coalition is inevitable even if the partners themselves do not like it. For example, in Germany, there was a grand coalition of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) from 2013 to 2017. At the end of this electoral period, both parties were no longer entirely satisfied and, as the junior partner, the SPD claimed that the successes of the joint government were unfairly credited to the larger CDU. Within the CDU, there was also some discontent because too many concessions had been made to its junior partner. When the votes were counted on the next election day and his party had suffered significant losses, the SPD chairman announced that his party would not enter another coalition with the CDU. In the weeks that followed, the CDU conducted coalition negotiations with the Greens and the Liberals. The latter, however, was/were not prepared for coalition negotiations and ultimately let them fail. Because the German constitution does not allow the election to be repeated easily or quickly, the Federal President urged both original coalition partners to form a coalition government once again. They finally agreed on a new coalition, but only after the CDU made concessions to the SPD in some of its important policy areas.



- *Trust in the future partner.* Despite the rivalries between political parties, trust is required for a coalition to be successful. All political parties will, after all, be competing once again at the next election. It is therefore important that they not only make basic decisions about individual policy areas as part of the coalition negotiations, but also agree on some procedures for dealing with one another. These include:
- *Regular meetings on important matters affecting joint government work.* This can include, for example, a regular meeting of the boards of the coalition parties where joint projects are discussed in advance or conflicts are resolved.
- *A clear agreement and understanding of the decision-making process.* In this context, it is important to agree that no party will introduce a bill without prior coordination with its coalition partners in parliament and that the partners will not agree to the proposals of opposition parties.
- *Clear decisions about roles, positions, and responsibilities of the individual partners.* This includes, not least, agreement on the distribution of cabinet posts or the filling of important positions in parliament, such as the chairing of committees.
- *Willingness to reach consensus and compromise.* These are probably the two most important prerequisites for successful coalitions. Since it may not always be possible to reach a consensus on individual topics and projects, all partners must be ready to compromise. Still, whenever possible, both sides should feel that they have benefited from a compromise, and this should be conveyed to their party members. It is not uncommon for compromises to come about when different topics are negotiated in a package. The overall package consists of individual parts where particular segments are important for only one or some of the partners. Ideally, everyone should be satisfied with the package.

Before the partners of a government coalition can put together such packages, they must complete the following tasks.

### Steps towards forming a coalition

1. Political parties must define their own strategy for coalition negotiations and the subsequent government work, and decide what is important to them and which topics and projects they can possibly postpone. They should also determine at an early stage which of their representatives will take part in coalition negotiations. Often, as part of coalition negotiations, special committees are formed on individual policy areas, to which each party should send its experts. Often, ministers are then appointed from these pools of experts.
2. All potential coalition partners should conduct a formal negotiation on the formation of a coalition, at the end of which (at the latest), a written agreement should be drawn up where the most important goals and projects of the cooperation are laid out. No specific binding legal documentation needs to be formulated here but, if possible, fundamental decisions on individual policy areas should be made and agreed upon.
3. The coalition agreement must be accepted by the main party bodies. For some political parties, it is sufficient for the board of directors to approve a coalition agreement. Others let their MPs vote on it because parliamentarians are supposed to pass the individual laws resulting from a coalition agreement, as well as support the government through the electoral term. Some political parties even carry out membership decisions through coalition agreements. At first glance, this is a democratic process, but like all plebiscitary votes, it carries the risk that voters are not or are only partially aware of the subject being voted on. Not all party members will read a coalition agreement. Above all, some rank-and-file members are less flexible in their attitudes and expectations, and they fail to recognise that a coalition agreement is a document of compromise containing considerable cuts in the original demands of a political party. If party members reject a coalition agreement after lengthy negotiations,

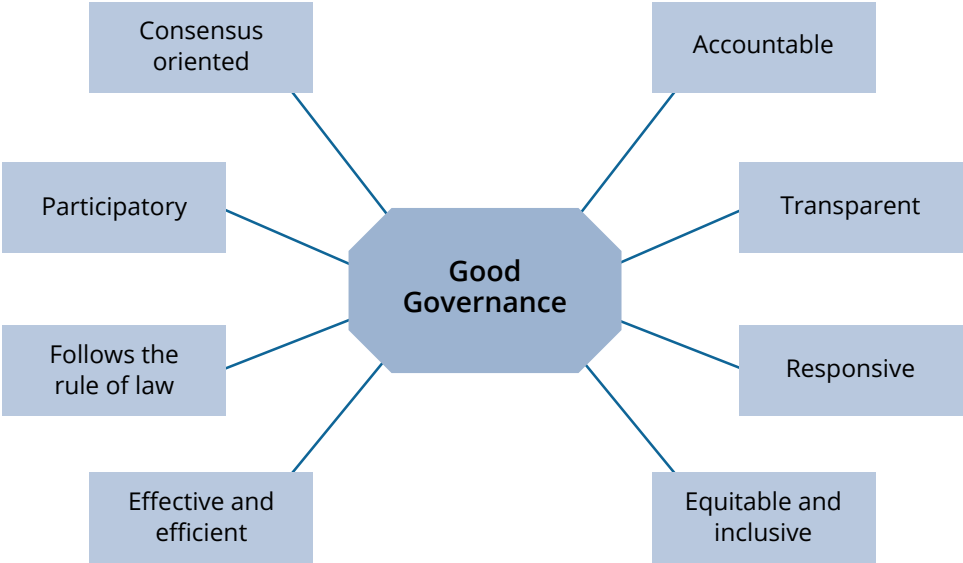
this not only de-legitimises their own negotiators, but can also affect a country's ability to govern.

During and especially after the end of a coalition, each partner should take stock of what it has achieved in the coalition and what lessons can be learned from it for future coalitions.

## POLITICAL PARTIES IN GOVERNMENT

Taking charge of government, or at least participating in government, is a highlight in any political party's life. The political party is now able to translate its political programme into concrete policies. This entails two key challenges that it must meet concurrently, namely good governance and maintaining and developing its own organisation.

Figure 11: Eight principles of good governance (8 Principles of Good Governance by United Nations).



Since the 1990s, good governance has been a term that ideally describes the process of decision-making and implementation of decisions by governments. The United Nations outlines eight general characteristics associated with the concept of good governance (see Figure 11), i.e., participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and following the rule of law. This is to ensure, among other things, that corruption is prevented or at least minimised, that the views of minorities and the voices of the weakest in society are heard, and that both the present and future needs of a society are considered when decisions are made.

**Participation:** People should be able to voice their own opinions through legitimate organisations or representatives. This includes men and women, vulnerable sections of society, minorities, etc. Participation also implies freedom of association and expression.

**Rule of Law:** The legal framework should be enforced impartially, especially with regard to human rights laws. Without rule of law, the strong will prevail over the weak.

**Consensus Oriented:** Consensus-oriented decision-making ensures that, even if everyone does not achieve what they want to the fullest, a common minimum result can be achieved by everyone which will not be detrimental to anyone. It mediates differing interests to meet the broad consensus on the best interests of a community.

**Equity and Inclusiveness:** Good governance assures an equitable society. People should have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being.

**Effectiveness and Efficiency:** Processes and institutions should be able to produce results that meet the needs of their community. The resources of the community should be used effectively to produce the maximum output.

**Accountability:** Good governance aims towards the betterment of people, and this cannot take place without the government being accountable to the people. Governmental institutions, private sector organisations, and civil society organisations should be held accountable to the public and institutional stakeholders.

**Transparency:** Information should be accessible to the public, understandable, and monitored. It also means free media and access to them.

**Responsiveness:** Institutions and processes should serve all stakeholders in a reasonable period of time.

The second task of maintaining and developing one's own organisation is also of fundamental importance for political parties as a prerequisite for future electoral success. After taking over government leadership, or participating in a government, many political parties and party leaders become heavily involved in new official business to the detriment of the amount of time they can spend on party work. In parliamentary systems, the chairman and other key leaders of a party usually have a dual role as the head of government or as a minister. This guarantees the connection between the political party and the government, but it will be a disadvantage for the party if important tasks relating to maintaining the party organisation are not carried out by these individuals.

Assuming government responsibility has consequences for a political party because its leaders and representatives who occupy public offices after an election are no longer only party representatives but are also government officials. Their actions and behaviours as public officials now have an even greater impact on the public's assessment of the party. The party benefits when they do their job well but suffers when they do not. These officials now play a major personal role in the implementation of the party goals, but they also must consider what projects cannot be implemented immediately, where compromises are necessary, and where constraints are involved. Such impediments to the ability to act are not always perceived by the rank-and-file party members, and what they consider to be unsatisfactory implementation of party goals often leads to disappointment or even withdrawal from a party.

As part of a government, a party must primarily represent the interests of the state and not only focus on its partisan interests. Political parties that integrate representatives of different social groups into their inner workings and seek a balance of different interests will find it easier to make compromises and serve the common good.

Of course, participation in a government also has clear advantages for a political party. First, their members in government make decisions about the shaping of politics and thereby they are able, at least partially and gradually, to implement the goals and programmes of their party. Second, the political party can pay special attention to certain groups or sectors from which it will benefit in the next elections. Third, it has access to specialist knowledge and information, which gives it an advantage over political competitors. Even if the state bureaucracy must not be misused for party purposes, a well-functioning state apparatus strengthens the heads of ministries or other public institutions managed by members of the party in government. Fourth, consequently, a political party benefits from the prestige of its representatives in the government if they do their work properly. Fifth, it is common in many places for ministers or other officials to pay higher membership fees to their political party because they owe their offices to party membership.

### Questions to the reader for critical evaluation

- How well do the elected representatives in the parliament behave in a coherent and united manner towards the party line?
- Are political groups disciplined or are there repeated conflicts and floor crossings?
- Are the political parties capable of forming a coalition with one another? What are the most important hurdles to forming coalitions?
- How are coalitions viewed by party members and the wider public?
- How well do the political parties carry out their government duties in accordance with the principles of good governance?
- In which areas are they less effective and where do they fail?

# 11

## Political Leadership

Political leadership entails more than the formal assumption of a leadership role in a political party. For example, political leaders must have distinct personal qualities to attain approval and secure legitimacy through an election. In the last few decades, political leaders have become more important due to the personalisation of political competition and the presidentialisation of political parties. This not only affected the reputation of traditional political parties, but also encouraged entrepreneurs, artists, and athletes to run for political mandates and offices. Besides lacking political experience, these newcomers are often unfamiliar with how political institutions function and what the important constitutional principles in their country are. Moreover, they may fail to understand that the skills required for political leadership are different from those of a business manager. A business leader is considered successful when his company gains a market share of 5 or 10 per cent, whereas a political leader needs to appeal to over 50 per cent of the “market” of votes. He cannot be focused on a small segment of the market but must be able to compromise and win supporters from different social classes whose demands and expectations are not so easy to satisfy after an election. To ensure that this coalition of voters and public support is not quickly lost again, a political leader must constantly struggle to not only obtain the approval of a parliamentary majority but also the public approval. Political leaders are therefore accountable to their party bodies and to the public.

## POLITICAL LEADERSHIP BETWEEN POWER, COMMON GOOD, AND REASON OF STATE

Political leadership has always been a central theme of political life worldwide. The highest political leader is the highest representative of the political system and embodies the power to shape the fate of a country, even if this power in modern democracies is tempered through various control mechanisms.

In ancient times, the political philosophers Plato and Aristotle were concerned with how proper societal order could be attained. For them, politics always had a strong normative character. For Plato, justice was a central element of good and proper order, and political leaders were required to seek justice. However, Plato found rulers to be selfish and preoccupied with establishing laws for their own advantage. Acknowledging that such practices ran against the well-being of a society, Plato argued for political leaders to strive for the realisation of justice.

Later, Aristotle – long held to be the founder of modern political science – maintained that politics revolves around developing a constitution where the happiness of the individual and the happiness of society as a whole are in harmony. Political leadership therefore would be responsible for creating a “good life” for both society and the individual.

In more modern times, politician and philosopher Machiavelli disagreed with this pre-modern image of politics and man. In his more cynical view of human nature, he believed that politicians wanting to do right would ultimately fail as those around them would not share their morality. For him, politics is the continuous drive to gain and maintain power. In his book *Il Principe*, he established a roadmap on how a politician can gain and maintain power. In addition to luck or chance (which cannot be controlled), the likelihood of gaining and maintaining power is largely derived from the ability of the ruler. In his point of view, politicians must be energetic and determined to seize opportunities to gain and maintain power. Princes (autocratic rulers as described by Machiavelli) must, therefore, under certain circumstances, disregard the applicable laws and moral norms. For example, he advised them to break their word if it would harm the state to otherwise keep their word. Machiavelli did not advocate pure self-interest, but instead demanded the ruler to always act for the good of the state. The goal of politics for him was to govern success-



fully. With this view, he founded the modern doctrine of governance, where the *raison d'être* of a leader is to protect the (actual or supposed) interests of the state. The behaviour of politicians like former US President Donald Trump, for example, may appear to be very close to some of Machiavelli's recommendations.

This brief review of political philosophy shows that essential questions about the character of political leadership have accompanied the political debate for centuries. The political philosophical debate is still ongoing. Nonetheless, there is a shared idea that political leaders are held to have a significant influence on the political order of their society. Yet how political leadership can be achieved and what it should be used for remains under question.

In today's democratic societies, there are vastly different ideas about what is meant by political leadership. Accordingly, there is neither a theory nor a collection of teaching modules on leadership qualities that future politicians can easily assimilate to be successful. Good case studies are important here, which is why examples and recommendations from three well-known politicians are presented in the last section of this chapter.

The subject of political leadership is always at the fore when politics is discussed. In general, the challenges of today bring home the fact that good leadership is needed more than ever. This is largely due to the diverse spectrum of challenges faced by liberal representative democracy. Whilst all states face challenges from technological change, climate change, globalisation, migration flows, conflicts, diseases, and pandemics, only liberal democracies struggle to overcome these problems under the public eye. In authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, mistakes and problems are not discussed publicly because their leaders fear that problems could be interpreted as weaknesses or failures. This became clear during the course of the coronavirus pandemic, where some democratically elected leaders were reluctant to admit the complexity of the threat and reacted with a populist denial of the danger. Interestingly, leaders who took people's concerns seriously, publicly showed a willingness to learn, faced criticism from the opposition and media, and acted decisively and competently won special trust from the population.

Besides the increasing pressure from a multitude of diverse issues, the personalisation of politics by the mass media has levitated the importance of good leadership. Political leaders, whether in government or not, do not shy away from this personalisation, as it allows them to present themselves as do-

ers and decision-makers whilst ignoring the fact that decisions in democracies are group decisions.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD POLITICAL LEADER

Political leadership means that a good leader influences people and finds supporters. If a leader is successful, he can persuade, cooperate, make decisions, develop ideas, proposals, and programmes, and possibly also break with long-held and widespread ideas and traditions and gain approval for this as well.

If their power is not legitimised democratically, political leaders cannot achieve anything. Even dictators require a minimum of allegiance for the repressive apparatus to work. In a democratic society, however, a political leader resides within a permanent feedback process and needs to ensure that his approval does not wane, and his group of followers does not fall apart. He must therefore have the ability to correctly assess his own followers in order to foresee possible conflicts and react to them at an early stage.

A political leader must also know the structural conditions and impediments which limit his power. Among many factors are the following:

- **The system of government.** Does a country have a presidential system of government in which a leader can invoke the will of the people as a reason for action, or a parliamentary system requiring closer coordination with his own political party and the need for bipartisan coalitions?
- **The organisation of politics in the state.** Is the state structured federally or is it centralised?
- **The role of parliament and political parties.** Who sets the parliament's agenda? What competencies does a leader have within the system of government? What competencies do parliamentarians have when it comes to decisions affecting their constituencies?

- **The position of interest groups.** What role do they play in enforcing or preventing political decisions and how must politicians deal with them?
- **The topics and taboos that are important for a society and that a politician should know.** Which events from a country's history still have an impact on the present and must always be taken into account not only in political statements within a country, but also in its foreign relations? Which social groups have a right to be treated with special respect by the state and also by politicians?
- **The role of the media in conveying political content and, above all, in soliciting supporters' consent.** Of course, there is also the role of the new types of media channels, especially social media. How do they convey political messages and how do politicians have to react to them?

A successful politician must also have other personal character traits and leadership qualities, such as rhetorical skills, willpower, individual drive, charisma, and the ability to empathise. These qualities are certainly difficult to train but some things can be learnt. Besides being interested in gaining power, another trait should also be added: a personal moral compass led by values and principles that guide political action. This includes respect for the ethical and moral limits of political power. Anyone striving for political leadership should therefore also deal with the ethical questions that political action inevitably demands.

German sociologist Max Weber dealt with this topic and addressed the dilemma between the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility in *Politics as a Vocation*. The ethics of conviction means that an action is based primarily on one's own ethical and moral principles without considering their consequences. The ethics of responsibility considers the ethical and moral consequences of an action. Weber concluded that the modern democratic political leader should not be a leader guided merely by his ethical convictions, but also by a broader sense of responsibility. Besides an appreciation of power, a leader would need sound judgment, charisma, and a passionate devotion to a greater cause.

In summary, the qualities that a political leader should possess are highlighted below.

### Characteristics of a political leader

- Ethical and moral principles and clear political goals on which they base their actions (and which in a democracy must be transparent). Honesty and credibility are central leadership qualities as well as an appreciation of a special responsibility towards the people.
- Political expertise to be able to assess and weigh up individual political issues in terms of their significance for the political process, and their political and social consequences.
- Ability to manage a large political organisation.
- Ability to persuade and convince people of political decisions made and to gain support for them.
- Capacity and power to inspire. Leaders need to motivate others through a compelling vision.
- Ability to provide a vision. Leaders need to break down established thought patterns and convey new insights.
- Innate positive qualities, such as an understanding of human nature, rhetorical talent, political skill, patience, and charisma.

These characteristics are the core requirements for political leadership which will allow an individual to lead a political party, gain the support of citizens, and wield political power.

Political leadership thus involves more than chairing a party committee or functional control over the legislative process. Rather, it is about the ability to pursue political goals whilst convincing others to be part of the project. At the same time, political leadership demands flexibility, i.e., the ability to recognise

the changing demands of the electorate. This sometimes involves walking a fine line between holding on to ideological principles and programmes and adapting to new demands.

## POLITICAL LEADERS AND NEW FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

For political leaders today, the use of social media is a key element in being elected to the leadership of a political party or a country. They are not only important as a means of conveying their messages, but they also create a style and type of leadership who pose, expose, and construct an emotional narrative in a way not seen before to appeal to their followers and a broader audience (Davis and Taras 2020). It is no longer enough for political leaders to make speeches or win the daily battle over the conventional news agenda. They need to tell Instagram stories, be ubiquitous on Twitter, post regularly on Facebook, or, as in the case of former US President Barack Obama, place campaign ads on billboards that appear in video games.

Yet, despite these efforts to be continually present, political leaders may find that they have lost control of their communication. Whilst they are almost guaranteed exposure and headlines because of their position as policymakers and the ceremonial roles they play, they cannot control the message nearly as much as they could before the advent of the Internet. Political leaders must now compete for space in ways that were previously unimaginable. The huge buffet of media alternatives available to people today means that reaching a particular audience and breaking through the chatter is more difficult than ever. In addition, the explosion in entertainment options has resulted in large numbers of people avoiding the news entirely, paying little attention to politics other than elections or sensational stories, and having little knowledge of their community. Many people can only be reached with political messages via “infotainment”, i.e., the mixture between entertainment and information. For example, former US President Obama regularly attended late-night talk shows as he knew that this was the most effective way of reaching important audiences. There is evidence that the abundance of media has produced a less informed, rather than a more knowledgeable, public.

The power of social media is made abundantly clear through the case of former US President Donald Trump. At first, he had been rejected by the Republican Party elite, and was poorly equipped with a small campaign budget, a rudimentary organisation, and little knowledge of fundamental political issues. However, he understood how to use social media for his own gain. He did it through his extravagant personality, his bombastic language, and his simple messages, such as “Make America Great Again”, “Drain the swamp”, and “Build the Wall”. His main social media tool was Twitter, where, with his language and “vulgar eloquence” (Jennifer Stromer-Galley 2020: 34), often insulting and humiliating his opponents, he achieved almost boundless attention. He succeeded in establishing himself as a kind of national editor-in-chief by employing the term “fake news” (M. Scacco and Wiemer 2020). He used Twitter as a platform to refute critical stories, to harshly and viciously attack reporters and news sources he did not like or agree with, and to redirect followers to alternative news sources and facts. In effect, Trump reversed the usual dynamic of the president’s press work. The irony was that his relentless and often ruthless attacks on journalists and news organisations regularly made headlines over actual news. His success has led to other politicians currently imitating Donald Trump’s approach. It is an example of how social media can be useful to populists and used very successfully by them (Gerbaudo 2018). Other non-populist political leaders are also making extensive use of social media. There are some similarities, which are briefly summarised below (Davis, in Davis and Taras 2020: 235 ff.):

## **Bypassing traditional media forms**

Social media is now almost universally used to communicate with specific target groups and quickly bypass traditional news media. As a rule, it is not easy even for well-known and important political leaders to get into the headlines of traditional media, which do not necessarily reproduce the statements of a political leader uncritically. Speakers from parliamentary groups, rank-and-file members of parliament, or candidates who play an important leadership role (for example, at the level of a constituency or a regional party organisation) regularly encounter great difficulties to be heard within the limited space or time available in the traditional media. Social media, on the other hand, offers

a high probability that a politician can reach his target audience with relatively little effort. Whilst traditional media must take into account the membership of their readers or listeners from different classes and a wide variety of interests when compiling news, a politician can use social media to provide his audience with the news they consider to be important and worthwhile.

## Controlling the message

Controlling one's own message is a challenge that comes together with greater independence in its dissemination. This applies to both content and distribution. Unlike traditional media, social media offers full control of the message. In social media, a politician can determine the content of the message without an interlocutor. This direct means of communication is not free from risks as messages have to be true and spoken or written in a manner observing socially accepted norms. Many users of social media are critical of politicians and will check messages for their truthfulness, and it is not uncommon for some to respond with their own theories on certain issues. This can lead to the loss of control of one's own message. Political leaders and their staff must therefore be prepared to respond quickly to reactions to their own messages to retain control of the conversation.

## Setting the agenda

Social media largely determines the topics appearing on the political agenda and dominating public debate. Those leaders who skilfully use social media can have a huge impact on the public agenda. For this reason, there is sometimes intense competition on the Internet to determine which topics should be perceived as important by the public. Climate protection is a good example of this. Should we talk more about climate protection and clean energy, or should we rather talk about maintaining jobs and economic growth? Controversy reigns on the Internet and it draws politicians into the debate. However, the capacity for agenda-setting is closely linked to the role and function of a politician. The more important his position is, the more influence he will exercise on public debate – be it via traditional or social media. Successful agenda-setting is apparent when a politician influences the list of topics in traditional

media through messages in social media, thus increasing the ability to steer the direction of public debate.

## **Framing perception of individual topics**

Politicians and political leaders must constantly deal with difficult issues and make decisions that usually satisfy only a segment of the population. In addition, many citizens will not be able to familiarise themselves with all aspects of a topic as they neither have the time nor the expertise to do so. It is therefore important to have a high level of trust in the expertise of politicians. Responsible leaders usually know the different sides of a subject, and the positive and negative consequences of certain decisions. They know what expectations their voters have, and they also know what aspects they are scared of. When preparing, announcing, and defending certain decisions, they therefore often ensure that only those aspects that are likely to trigger approval from the public will be communicated and highlighted. Thereby they try to influence the perception and future debate on certain topics. In communication theory, this technique is called framing; it is about determining how certain issues are viewed, whereas agenda-setting is about what gets to the centre of a debate.

## **Communication with specific target groups**

Whilst traditional media has a broad audience with different interests in mind, there are many groups in social media that are interested in one or more specific topics, and largely consume news about such specific topics. Many political leaders prioritise such groups to communicate their position on certain topics or to mobilise supporters. For example, the US presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton in 2016 used Twitter as a forum to reach out to and mobilise diehard supporters. She also tried to use Instagram to reach voters who campaign organisers suspected would be less interested in political issues, and who would be more interested in the personal life of the candidate. The specific target group for this branch of the campaign was women, as indicated by the highly gender-specific Instagram messages from the Clinton camp (McGregor and Lawrence 2020). In the meantime, many politicians use the



previously apolitical platform of Instagram to show more personal pictures and provoke or strengthen emotionally positive attitudes.

Journalists are a particularly important audience for politicians. In addition to the previously common forms of interviews and background discussions as well as press releases or press conferences, issues are now addressed via Twitter because this platform is now automatically consulted by journalists when collecting news.

## **Mobilisation**

Communication via social media not only serves to provide information but also to mobilise supporters. In this way, political leaders try to mobilise individuals who not only want information but also want to be involved. Politicians with populist messages are particularly successful in his regard. This applies not only to Donald Trump but also to social movements such as feminist groups and youth organisations that mobilise their supporters with populist messages (Sina Blassnig et al. 2020).

## EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL LEADERS

In the following section, a selection of noteworthy case studies of successful political leadership is shared, which may be of interest to current or future political leaders.

### Angela Merkel (Germany)

Angela Merkel was elected Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany for the first time in 2005 and was re-elected three times in 2009, 2013, and 2017. In Germany, she enjoyed consistently high approval ratings. Not once in the long years of her chancellorship has Merkel's work been viewed negatively by a majority. In 2010, her lowest personal approval rating was 50 per cent. Due to the country's management of the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting crisis, her approval rating rose as high as 83 per cent. She was often considered the most powerful woman in Europe and one of the most powerful leaders in the world. Even her political opponents recognise she has done many things right. There have therefore been numerous attempts to attribute her political success to her leadership style.

Consider, for example, a description of Merkel's management style by Christine Lagarde, President of the International Monetary Fund until 2019, and then President of the European Central Bank in August 2019:

She knows how to strike the right note, and she is especially skilled at playing what I would call the Four D's: diplomacy, diligence, determination, and duty.

#### (a) Diplomacy

That refers to Angela Merkel's relentless commitment to bringing people together (...) As she once put it: "I seek cooperation rather than confrontation." Angela Merkel understands well that we cannot play alone, [and] that we need to be part of a modern international orchestra.

### (b) Diligence

Angela Merkel is always the best-prepared person in the room, always on top of her briefing material. She works methodically and patiently through a problem, splitting it into its various parts, weighing up pros and cons, and crafting a solution step by step, bit by bit. In fact, her diligence goes well beyond productivity numbers, climate statistics, and all the other issues of the day.

### (c) Determination

Angela Merkel has an extraordinary drive and staying power, an incredible inner strength that allows her to stay at the table and push the negotiations over the line. Her objective is always to reach that all-important compromise which, by definition, leaves everyone a little bit dissatisfied but vastly better off. That spirit has helped reshape our world, especially over the last decade. (...)

### (d) Duty

Everyday Angela Merkel is drawing strength from her deeply felt sense of duty – the final “D”. For all her methodical work and rational thinking, Angela Merkel is guided by this sense of duty.

### Conclusion

Angela Merkel is facing up to these questions with an abiding sense of duty, with great humility, and a profound optimism. As she once put it: “Let us not ask what is wrong or what has always been. Let us first ask what is possible and look for something that has never been done before.”

Source: Lagarde 2019.

Two more aspects can be added. First, Merkel exercised her leadership role without being blinded by power. At all times, she has led a simple lifestyle with no extravagance. This resonated with a large majority of Germans for whom it was always clear: “She is one of us”. A successful leader must be able to evoke this feeling of unity. Second, she knows how to listen and hear differ-

ent opinions, and at the same time, she has familiarised herself with different matters by studying files and other forms of information. Due to this methodical study, some decisions took longer to put forward and sometimes ended up being a firm position rather than a proposition for debate. Her meticulous preparation has, on occasions, led to an alteration of views by those that had initially disagreed with her. The example of Merkel shows that successful leadership is sometimes more the moderation of different opinions than an unflinching assertion of one's own point of view.

## **Nelson Mandela (South Africa)**

Nelson Mandela was the leader of the resistance anti-apartheid movement in the Republic of South Africa. He spent 28 years in prison with no opportunity to make political statements until his release in 1990. He was elected president of the country in 1994. He formulated some advice for political leaders that a journalist has summarised below.

### **Nelson Mandela's recommendations for successful political leadership**

Courage is not the absence of fear – it is inspiring others to move beyond it.

A leader must pretend that he is brave, and he cannot let people know when he is not. 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.

Lead from the front – but do not 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.

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.

Know your enemy and learn about his favourite sport.

Keep your friends close and your rivals even closer.

A leader must cherish loyalty, but he was never obsessed by it, saying “people act in their own interest”. He 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 recognised that the way to deal with those he didn’t trust was to neutralise them with charm.

Nothing is black or white. Decisions are complex and there are always competing factors. Looking for simple explanations is the bias of the human brain but does not correspond to reality. Nothing is ever as straightforward as it appears. Mandela was 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?

Quitting is leading too.

Mandela accepted with humility that knowing how to abandon a failed idea, a certain task or a relationship is often the most difficult decision a leader has to make. His greatest legacy as president of South Africa is the way he chose to leave the presidency. 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.

Source: Stengel 2008.

## Mikuláš Dzurinda (Slovakia)

Mikuláš Dzurinda was prime minister of Slovakia from 1998 to 2006. He also served several times as a minister in the Slovak cabinet. During his reign, following the emergence of Slovakia as one of the post-communist states after the peaceful partition of the former Czechoslovakia in 1993, he made great strides in consolidating democracy, achieving a market economy, and taking decisive steps in preparation for accession to the European Union. During an international democracy forum in Madrid in May 2019, he spoke about the requirements and principles for successful political leadership.

Preconditions and principles for successful political leadership

A) A strong, captivating vision for the future, but within a real horizon.

B) A strong, unwavering political will to promote reforms necessary to materialise vision into reality (motto of his life: where there is a will there is a way);

C) A great team of enthusiastic and professional people;

If these three preconditions are respected, political leadership can be successful when it respects a series of additional factors which he called the ten commandments of successful leadership:

1) At the beginning of any endeavour you must have a clear idea of what you want to achieve. You must understand why you want to undergo the pain. You must realise that every change, every reform is painful and you – as a leader – will suffer from the resistance (backlash) of those who are going to lose out (because every reform brings not only winners, but also losers – even though frequently only in the short term).

2) A concrete plan is then needed, a project by means of which the desired vision is to be implemented (in our case, such a project

had been represented by the set of reforms in the economy, social area, healthcare, education, defence, and public service).

3) Once the vision and the project are in place, you need competent people to implement the project. One of the most significant features of a strong leadership is that the leader surrounds himself or herself with the best people – competent and high-principled people.

4) A leader must show trust in their team and steer its work on the project. But he or she should avoid taking over the responsibilities of individual members of the team.

5) Everything about the project is important, down to the smallest detail. As it is justly said, the devil is in the details. But the essential task for the leader is to identify priorities and to subsequently focus on their attainment.

6) For each project, it is especially important to decide the strategy to be used in its implementation. It also includes the identification of external factors that could have an impact on the outcome and result of the project.

7) An important element of each strategy is drawing the “red lines” – the parameters of the project that must be strictly adhered to. Or the boundaries beyond which it is not possible to go.

8) It is particularly important to also identify the “red lines” of your partners (e.g., in the ruling coalition) that could influence or jeopardise the end result and success of your project.

9) The project will be successful if you consistently implement all its important parameters and the project regardless of the immediate reactions of the surroundings or of the general public. The project is successful only as a whole. Half-baked solutions are the worst – you shoulder expenditure, but you miss the profit of

the project. This means not to yield to the pressure of the political opposition or of the media. The media must be respected, but it is equally important not to give in to them.

10) And finally, good communication of your decision is essential. Voters may not always agree with the steps you are taking, but they must be given an opportunity to understand the reasons behind your decision.

Source: Dzurinda 2019.

### Questions to the reader for critical evaluation

- To what extent does the behaviour of politicians and party leaders you know meet the requirements for expertise and respect for ethical norms that must be used as a yardstick when making decisions that affect the fate of many people?
- How do politicians at different levels encounter citizens and voters, and what strategies do they choose to inform about their work?



# 12

## Political Parties Shape Democracy

Political parties permanently live with a kind of schizophrenia. On the one hand, they are a product of the diversity of opinions and the cleavage of their society into different interest groups. They represent the heterogeneity of society and fight to ensure that their interests and those of their supporters are taken into account in political decisions. On the other hand, they are instrumental in shaping the common good for all members of society out of the multitude of group and particular interests. Their supporters expect the highest commitment from them in the political struggle, which is sometimes conducted very bitterly, and at the same time they must be able to compromise, find consensual solutions and form coalitions. It is precisely by fulfilling these seemingly contradictory expectations and tasks that they make a crucial contribution to democracy. They will continue to be needed to ensure the essential elements of a democratic order, i.e., the election of government and the control of political power.

Even if, from today's perspective, political parties cannot be replaced by other institutions or procedures, it cannot be ignored that many political parties have difficulties in effectively fulfilling their functions for democracy by bundling the new and still expanding diversity of interests in modern societies and filtering policy proposals from them that represent the concerns of a large number of citizens. Therefore, it is to be expected that the number of

political parties will continue to increase, each focused on a limited range of interests, yet nevertheless winning parliamentary seats in elections. This does not pose a challenge for democracy on its own, as the pluralism of opinions and interests is in fact a constitutive element of a democratic order. However, the pluralism in the political party system makes the formation of stable governments more difficult, as has been shown in many democracies over the past few years. That applies not only to parliamentary democracies but also to presidential systems of government. Where governability is permanently hindered by the diversity of political parties, a democratic order is in danger, be it through populists taking advantage of the difficulties of the established political parties, thus posing a threat to democracy, or the military, authoritarian leaders, or anti-democratic parties of different political leanings seizing power (sometimes even democratically) and then bringing an end to the democratic system.

Today's societies are characterised by a plurality and heterogeneity of attitudes and lifestyles, also reflected in the different attitudes and expectations towards politics and political parties. Even societies that may still appear to be homogeneous will soon be affected by this development. This is already evident in the changes in urban lifestyles on all five continents. The situation is aggravated by the withdrawal of many people, especially the youth, into echo chambers in which uniform opinions are reproduced and strengthened. This trend is supported by the rising importance of social media tools. This development goes hand in hand with a decline in the willingness to accept differing opinions, or to engage with people of opposing views in an open dialogue.

For political parties worldwide, this results in the difficult task of finding solutions to political issues and problems that are accepted by the largest possible number of citizens. Evidence suggests that those political parties that already allow for a certain plurality of opinions and attitudes within their own organisation (always within the framework of their basic principles), and translate those into policy proposals, are particularly successful at managing these challenges. This presumes that they promote internal debates (and sometimes controversial opinions) among their party members, and at the same time, maintain close contact with the important associations of civil society and with individual citizens. To do so, a political party not only needs established forms of dialogue with such associations, but above all, many active party members who connect the political party to ordinary citizens and feedback the opinion of society to the party.

To be politically successful, a political party also needs a second important element: political leaders who have the practical skills as well as the personal and ethical qualities to lead a large group of people effectively. Levels of personalisation tend to increase after a political party's election defeat. There are numerous examples indicating that, in such situations, a charismatic party leader can prevent the decline of a party and in fact help strengthen it again. Nonetheless, personalisation remains a major challenge for political parties. After all, it requires the work of the political party as a community of people with common goals to effectively streamline and subsequently represent the interests of society, and to integrate those interest in political decisions for the common good. This is true at least for liberal democracy.

What can political parties do to strengthen their role in democracy? First and foremost, they must take care of themselves. That means they must strengthen their organisation and try to improve their performance in all areas addressed in each chapter of this book, namely: representation, organisation, programme, membership, and intra-party participation, party member recruitment and engagement, communication, and contact with civil society. In fact, political parties are in a good position because the election of a parliament and the government will continue to be a central element of democracy, even if the form of the voting procedure may change. Political parties will also retain their central role as mediators between state and society for the foreseeable future. They are the ones who will continue to play a crucial role in democratic elections because they will nominate most of the candidates, hold most of the seats in parliament, and form the government. Representative democracies cannot function without political parties. General and free elections give political parties an advantage over other political actors or different decision-making processes, as they enjoy higher levels of legitimacy. Representative democracies will not exist without political parties.

Nevertheless, political parties will not be able to meet the challenges of the future on their own. They need active citizens who are willing to move beyond the passive criticism of political parties and who are willing to get involved. The more that citizens are willing to get involved in political parties and the more that political parties are willing to let their new party members participate in debates and decisions, the better they will fulfil their functions and the more democracy will become vibrant.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUCCESSFUL POLITICAL PARTY

- ✓ Their leaders and members respect the principles and procedures of free democracy.
- ✓ It has a policy programme where it defines the basic guiding values and principles that steer its political actions which are shared by all party members.
- ✓ Their election programmes and their policies are based on their basic values and offer concrete solutions for various policy areas.
- ✓ It has a robust organisational structure in all parts of the country.
- ✓ It ensures a strong presence in the cities and municipalities of its country by building up local party structures that lead to the election of mayors and members in local representative bodies. Good performance in the municipalities is an important pillar for national election success.
- ✓ The national party headquarters works professionally and supports the party leadership, whilst also aiding regional and local branches, especially in political public relations and communication, planning and conducting election campaigns, and other political campaigns.
- ✓ Its members are continuously, openly, and transparently informed about the political positions of the party leadership and parliamentarians on issues, and about important internal party processes.
- ✓ It promotes gender equality, the election of women to leadership positions in the political party, and the nomination of women as candidates in elections.
- ✓ Its members play an active part in internal party debates and processes, are involved in the nomination of candidates, the election of party leaders, and discussions on political issues, and actively support both the political party

and its candidates in elections. It is especially important that the members of the political party participate in work related to party associations in cities and municipalities.

- ✓ Controversial opinions on individual issues and in the debate about the choice of leadership positions or the nomination of candidates are accepted and not suppressed by a desire for conformity – as long as all participants in the debate respect the fundamental values and principles of the political party.
- ✓ Political public relations work and addresses are based on a communication strategy and use all available outlets. It is prepared to react quickly and appropriately to criticism or false accusations (“fake news”).
- ✓ It bases its financing exclusively on legally acquired funds and gives a public and transparent account of its income and expenditure, especially regarding the financing of its election campaigns.
- ✓ It seeks and maintains continuous contact with social groups and associations to find out their opinions and expectations of politics, assesses them regarding their own values and political goals, and represents interests that are in line with their values and goals within political institutions.
- ✓ Its management staff is distinguished by their expertise and respect for the ethical principles that must be observed when making decisions about the fate of other people.



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**Wilhelm Hofmeister** is a senior political adviser in the field of international cooperation of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation from Germany. He lived for many years in Asia and Latin America and served as the director of political party consultancy and political education projects. He also participated in political training programmes in Africa and the Middle East. He holds a PhD in political science and has published extensively on the subject of political parties and democracy.





How a democracy works depends to a large extent on the behaviour and ability of political parties to represent the interests of citizens and to develop political alternatives. To do this, political parties must develop their programmes, build effective organisational structures, offer their members active participation in internal party decision-making, put their funding on a sound and transparent footing, maintain close contacts with social groups and associations, report openly on their goals and intentions, plan election campaigns effectively and, last but not least, be guided by leaders who are competent and respectful of the ethical principles required for the exercise of politics on behalf of citizens.

This book provides a comprehensive and easy-to-read introduction to the world of political parties. Based on his rich international experience, the author is able to compare developments in different countries and regions of the world and to formulate concrete practical recommendations for political party organisation and possible party reforms.

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