**Political parties: organising for change?**

Emil Husted and Mona Moufahim

As an organizational species, political parties seem to face impending extinction. No matter what yardstick we use to measure their vitality, political parties currently display an undeniable image of terminal crisis. Party membership is approaching rock bottom in most corners of the world, particularly in countries like France and the UK where less than two percent of the population are registered as rank and file (van Biezen et al., 2012). Similarly, voter turnout has plummeted worldwide since the middle of the twentieth century, currently reaching a level well below 70 percent (Solijonov, 2016). Voters' tendency to identify with specific parties is likewise declining due to the reconfiguration of class-consciousness and the emergence of more ‘liquid loyalties’ in the electorate (Ignazi, 2017: 201). Finally, people’s trust in political parties is at an all-time low, with politicians deemed less trustworthy than complete strangers and more dishonest than second-hand car salespeople (Newton et al., 2017). As such, it seems fair to conclude, as many have done, that the party is – or, should soon be – over (e.g. Hardt and Negri, 2004; Holloway, 2002; Rosavallon, 2008; Tormey, 2015).

However, within the past decade, a wave of young radical parties on both sides of the political spectrum has sparked a sense of party revitalization. Podemos in Spain, Movimento 5 Stelle in Italy, SYRIZA in Greece, The Pirate Party in Iceland and Germany, Feminist Initiative in Sweden, and The Alternative in Denmark figure here as prominent examples. Inspired by ‘new global revolutions’ like the Occupy Wall Street and Los Indignados (Mason, 2013), these parties have sought to restore the legitimacy of party politics by introducing a number of organizational innovations meant to increase membership participation. For instance, Podemos have redefined intra-party democracy by structuring its organization around local ‘Circles’ where members and non-members can deliberate about various policy issues (Pavía et al., 2016). Similarly, The Alternative has constructed its entire political program through a bottom-up process inspired by the open-source community (Husted and Plesner, 2017), while Jeremy Corbyn and the Momentum movement have managed to turn Britain's Labour Party into one of the biggest membership parties in Europe (Seymour, 2017). Towards the other end of the spectrum, Movimento 5 Stelle have reconfigured Italian politics by relying heavily on Internet technology for mobilizing support and coordinating events (Tronconi, 2016), whereas the Dutch anti-Islam PVV has gone the opposite direction by creating a party with only one member. Such organizational innovations point to the need for a deeper understanding of how political parties have traditionally organized, and how this new wave of contenders challenge the dominant mode of coordination within party politics.

Despite the abundance of research on political parties within political science, we still know very little about the inner-life of parties, as the scope of research is often limited to questions of formal structure, financing, membership-fluctuations, and candidate selection (Scarrow et al., 2017). This means that classical organizational themes like culture, identity, learning, strategy, decision-making, and management have been surprisingly underprioritized if not entirely neglected by the literature on party organization (see Barrling, 2013; Heidar and Koole, 2000; Krouwel, 2006; Lawson, 1994). In the mid-1990s, Peter Mair famously argued that while there is a number of ‘surprisingly evident lacunae’ within the ‘ever-growing cumulation of knowledge’ of political parties, the 'empirically grounded study of parties as organizations (...) has long constituted one of the most obvious of these’ (Mair, 1994: 1-2). Today, 25 years later, this lacuna still persists as our knowledge of how party organizations work, change, and adapt remains limited.

While political scientists have deployed a somewhat restricted understanding of what it means to study political parties and party organization, organizational scholars have generally overlooked parties as interesting study objects. Save for a handful of recent examples (Fredriksson, 2016; Husted and Plesner, 2017; Karthikeyan et al., 2016; Moufahim et al., 2015; Ringel, 2018), parties completely escape the analytic gaze of organization scholars. The purpose of this sub-theme is to remedy this shortcoming. We thus invite contributions across academic disciplines that study political parties (and political organizations more broadly) from a variety of perspectives, disciplines, and methodologies to further our understanding of parties as organizations and agent of change. To apply for participation in this sub-theme, please submit a 500-word abstract (excluding references, one page, and Word format) together with your contact information to Emil Husted (ehu.mpp@cbs.dk) and Mona Moufahim (mona.moufahim@stir.ac.uk). The deadline for submission of abstracts is January 31st 2019, and we will notify you of our decision by the end of February.

**References**

Fredriksson A. M. (2016) 'Pirate politics between protest movement and parliament'. *ephemera*, 16(2): 97–114.

Hardt, M. and A. Negri (2004) *Multitude: War and democracy in the age of empire*. New York, NY: Penguin Press.

Heidar, K. and R. Koole (2000) *Parliamentary party groups in European Democracies: Political parties behind closed doors*. London: Routledge.

Holloway, J. (2002) *Change the world without taking power: The meaning of revolution today*. London: Pluto Press.

Husted, E. and U. Plesner (2017) 'Spaces of open-source politics: Physical and digital conditions for political organization'. *Organization*, 24(5): 648– 670.

Ignazi, P. (2017) *Party and democracy: The uneven road to party legitimacy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Karthikeyan, S.I., S. Jonsson, and F.C. Wezel (2016) 'The Travails of Identity Change: Competitor Claims and Distinctiveness of British Political Parties, 1970–1992'. *Organization Science*, 27(1): 106–122.

Krouwel, A. (2006) 'Party models', in R.S. Katz and W. Crotty (eds.) *Handbook of party politics*. London: SAGE.

Lawson, K. (1994) *How political parties work: Perspectives from within.* Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

Mair, P. (1994) 'Party organizations: From civil society to the state', in R.S. Katz and P. Mair (eds.) *How parties organize*. London: SAGE.

Mason, P. (2013) *Why It’s STILL Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions*. London: Verso Books.

Moufahim, M., P. Reedy, and M. Humphreys (2015). 'The Vlaams Belang: The Rhetoric of Organizational Identity'. *Organization Studies*, 36(1): 91– 111.

Newton, K., D. Stolle, and S. Zmerli (2018) 'Social and political trust', In E. Uslaner (ed.) *The Oxford handbook of social and political trust*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ringel, L. (2018) 'Unpacking the Transparency-Secrecy Nexus: Frontstage and backstage behaviour in a political party'. *Organization Studies*, online first: 1-19.

Rosavallon, P. (2008) *Counter-democracy: Politics in the age of distrust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scarrow, S. E., P. D. Webb, and T. Poguntke (2017). *Organizing political parties: Representation, participation, and power.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Seymour, R. (2017) *Corbyn: The strange rebirth of radical politics.* London: Verso.

Solijonov, A. (2016) *Voter turnout trends around the world*. Stockholm: International IDEA.

Tormey, S. (2015) *The end of representative politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Tronconi, F. (2016) *Beppe Grillo’s Five Star Movement: Organisation, communication and ideology*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Van Biezen, I., P. Mair, and T. Poguntke (2012) 'Going, going, . . . gone? The decline of party membership in contemporary Europe'. *European Journal of Political Research*, 51(1): 24–56.

**Emil Husted (****ehu.mpp@cbs.dk****)**

I am an Assistant Professor at the Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy at Copenhagen Business School. My research is primarily concerned with the organization of political parties and social movements. A secondary research interest concerns the impact of digital technology on contemporary organizations. My work has been published in journals such as *Organization*, *Culture and Organization*, *The Information Society*, *TripleC*, *ephemera*, and in various research anthologies. I am likewise finishing a Palgrave Macmillan textbook on digital organizing (with Ursula Plesner).

**Mona Moufahim (****mona.moufahim@stir.ac.uk****)**

I am a Senior Lecturer in Marketing at the University of Stirling. My current research interests include: Critical Marketing; Religion and Consumption; Religious Travel and Pilgrimage; Identity and organisations; Political marketing; Immigration and Extreme Right Politics. My research has been published in Organization Studies, Journal of Marketing Management, Marketing Theory and Consumption Markets and Culture. I have also contributed chapters to scholarly books on Political Marketing, Critical Marketing and Islamic Marketing.