Call for papers for an *ephemera* special issue on:

Political parties: Exploring the inner life of party organizations

Issue Editors: Emil Husted, Martin Fredriksson, Mona Moufahim, and Justine Grønbæk Pors

> Most contemporary analyses resist studying parties for what they obviously are: *organizations*. (Panebianco, 1988: 3).

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, to paraphrase Mark Twain, the reports of the party's pending death are greatly exaggerated. Financially at least, political parties have never been stronger. Owing particularly to a significant increase in public funding since the 1980s, parties are today more resourceful than ever before. In fact, most European parties receive more than two-thirds of their income from state subsidies alone (Falguera et al., 2014). On top of this, a range of countries are currently going through a process of 'constitutionalizing' political parties, thereby acknowledging them legally as 'desirable and procedurally necessary for the effective functioning of democracy' (van Biezen, 2011: 187). The combination of growing public discontent and state consolidation have thus created a paradoxical situation in which political parties are as powerful as ever yet increasingly seen as illegitimate representatives of common interests (Ignazi, 2017).

Furthermore, 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. However, despite the abundance of research on political parties, we still know very little about the inner-life of parties, as the scope of research is often limited to questions of formal structure (Krouwel, 2006). 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; Lawson, 1994). In the mid1990s, Peter Mair 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 lacunae' (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.

The absence of empirical studies of 'parties as organizations' is particularly surprising given the fact that classical texts on political parties emphasize the question of organization as crucial to understanding party politics. For instance, Michels (1911) famously characterized his iron law of oligarchy as a problem of organization, rather than of ideological dispositions. Similarly, Duverger (1954: xv) argued that modern parties are distinguished not by their actual policies or by the composition of their membership base, but by the 'nature of their organization'. Of course, such arguments have not gone unheard (Dalton et al., 2011; Katz and Mair, 1994; Scarrow et al., 2017), but most contemporary studies of party organization approach the topic through quantitative methods and by relying solely on official sources of data like organizational charts, statutes, budgets, or membership statistics (Bolleyer, 2016). Hence, within political science at least, qualitative and 'immersive' accounts of party organizations seem virtually non-existent (see Schatz, 2009).

The same is true for organization studies. Here, the problem is not methodological or analytical but empirical: while political scientists have deployed a somewhat restricted understanding of what it means to study political parties, organizational scholars have generally overlooked parties as interesting study objects. Save for a handful of recent examples (Fredriksson Almqvist, 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 special issue is to remedy this shortcoming. We thus invite contributions across academic disciplines that employ qualitative methods to explore the inner-life of political parties. Themes of interest therefore include, but are not limited to:

- Organizational procedures for increasing membership participation
- Managerial practices for keeping members 'in line' and 'on board'
- Modes of power and control in party politics

- Party leadership and followership
- Attempts to build enthusiasm and engagement internally
- Relations between political ideology and organizational culture
- Prefigurative practices and adaptation of social movement techniques
- Oligarchic tendencies and ways of countering these
- New technologies of decision making (i.e. liquid democracy)
- Political branding, image, and identity constructions
- Communication and discursive practices within parties
- Ways of marketing ideology to internal stakeholders
- Methodological challenges to studying parties

While we encourage empirically grounded submissions that focus on the above, theoretical contributions and historical analyses are also welcome. Furthermore, we are equally interested in research that investigates the role and impact of political parties on society (e.g. how do parties organize society?). The crucial thing is that all submissions somehow advance our understanding of political parties as organizations. In accordance with *ephemera's* subtitle, we thus invite authors to explore the intersection between theory and politics in (party) organization.

Deadline for submissions: April 1st 2019.

All contributions should be submitted to the issue editors: Emil Husted (ehu.dbp@cbs.dk), Martin Fredriksson (martin.fredriksson@liu.se), Mona Moufahim (mona.moufahim@stir.ac.uk), and Justine Grønbæk Pors (jgp.mpp@cbs.dk). Please note that three categories of contributions are invited for the special issue: articles, notes, and reviews. However, we are also open for discussing the potential publication of other types of submissions, such as interviews, interventions or documentations. Information about the different types of contributions can be found at: http://www.ephemerajournal.org/how-submit. Contributions will undergo a double blind review process. All submissions should follow ephemera's submissions guidelines, available at: http://www.ephemerajournal.org/how-submit. For further information, please email the issue editors.

references

Bolleyer, N. (2016) 'Political actors: Parties-interest groups-government', in H. Keman and J. Woldendorp (eds.) *Handbook of research methods and*

applications in political science. Northhampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Dalton, R., D. Farrell, and I. McAllister (2011) *Political parties and democratic linkage: How parties organize democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Duverger, M. (1954/1964) *Political parties*. London: Methuen.

Falguera, E., S. Jones, and M. Ohman (2014) *Funding of political parties and election campaigns*. Stockholm: International IDEA.

Fredriksson Almqvist, 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.

Katz, R. and P. Mair (1994) *How parties organize: Change and adaptation in party organizations in Western democracies*. London: SAGE.

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.

Michels, R. (1911/1959) *Political Parties: A sociological study of the oligarchical tendencies of modern democracy.* New York, NY: Dover Publications.

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.

Panebianco, A. (1988) *Political parties: Organization and power.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pavía, J. M., A. Bodoque, and J. Martín (2016) 'The birth of a new party: Podemos, a hurricane in the Spanish crisis of trust'. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(9): 67–86.

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., P. 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. (2012) 'Constitutionalizing party democracy: The constitutive codification of political parties in post-war Europe'. *British Journal of Political Science*, 42(1): 187–212.

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.