

Disintermediation: A Pattern of Party Change in New Parties?

Panel Chairs:

Cecilia Biancalana & Daniela R. Piccio (University of Torino)

This Panel is proposed for the Section on 'New Parties in Europe: A Comeback for the Parties or Just another Symptom for their Decline?'

Abstract:

Disintermediation can be considered as an increasingly relevant phenomenon in contemporary society. When one thinks about the changes occurred in commerce, business, journalism, or communication, it is impossible not to notice a growing trend towards more direct and less mediated relationships, also fostered by the Internet. Such a trend is also affecting political party organizations. Indeed, in recent years, party scholars have pointed to some apparently contradictory developments, that have often been treated separately. On the one hand, a concentration of power and visibility in the hands of the leader has been acknowledged (i.e.: personalisation and presidentialisation of politics); on the other hand, scholars have observed the increasing opening up of internal decision-making procedures to members, or even supporters, through "direct democracy" mechanisms and/or the use of the Internet.

The result of this dual trend is what we define as disintermediation: the creation of an (apparently?) direct linkage between party leadership and supporters and, more broadly, between citizens and political power. Disintermediation, in other words, implies a transformation of the forms of political mediation towards more direct and unmediated relationships, challenging political parties as organizational structures between citizens and the state and as agents of political representation.

New parties seem more likely to take advantage of such changes. They are not bound to the tradition of the structured mass parties, and they often emerged in overt opposition to the older decision-making structures of party organizations. The aim of the panel is to focus on the rhetoric and practices of disintermediation in new parties and to explore the organizational responses that both old and new parties have been enacting in order to bypass classical mediated practices of party organizations.

Empirical case studies focusing on the organizational structure of more recently established parties are particularly welcome, as well as comparative and/or theoretical contributions.

Through the comparative analysis of some case studies, we will try to evaluate the heuristic capacity of the concept of disintermediation. Is disintermediation affecting all the parties likewise? What are the similarities and differences between them? Which is the role of the spread of digital media in these processes? And, finally, does disintermediation bring forward a genuine direct linkage between leaders and supporters, or does it favour some actors at the expense of others?

Both theoretical contributions, as well as comparative works and in-depth single case studies (on a single political party or a national case) are welcome.

To propose a paper, please send an abstract of up to 200 words to cecilia.biancalana@unito.it by 30 January 2018.