

Workshop Proposal Outline form for prospective Workshop Directors for the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops

Please complete this form, providing the requested additional information in order to support your Joint Sessions Workshop Proposal. Further information can be found on the [How to Propose a Workshop](#) and [Information for Workshop Directors](#) pages of the [ECPR website](#).

Title of proposed Workshop:	Political parties as arena for descriptive representation
------------------------------------	---

Outline of topic:	<p>Political parties in Western democracies are thought to be in crisis the last few decades. Especially aspects of the party in relation to the broader society, the so-called ‘party on the ground’ in Mair’s (1994) terms, appear to have been seriously weakened. Features of this crisis include a decline of trust in parties (e.g. Dalton & Weldon, 2005), increased electoral volatility (e.g. Drummond, 2006) and a decline in the number of party members.</p> <p>This latter aspect (decline in membership figures) has already been extensively documented in several studies (e.g. Van Biezen et al, 2012). One aspect that has been underexposed in this kind of research is to what extent party decline has also affected parties’ representative capacity (exceptions being Widfeldt 1999 ; Scarrow & Gezgor, 2010 ; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2012 ; and Allern, Heidar & Karlsen, 2015).</p> <p>Representative capacity may relate both to descriptive (background) representation and to attitudinal (policy) representation. Focusing on descriptive political representation, this can be scrutinized in parliament, as has mostly been done for instance in mapping the number of women MPs and detecting barriers they are confronted with (a.o. Matland, 2005 ; Krook & Norris, 2014). But also in other arenas representativeness could be assessed, as Saward (2006) stated in his path-breaking work on representative claims.</p> <p>In political parties, several representative relationships are established, for example between rank and file members and conference delegates, between members and the party elite, between voters and the party elite and between party members and the population at large. One can doubt to what extent these relationships are representative in descriptive terms, i.e. to what extent these representatives share characteristics of those who they intend to represent. In other words, whether women, blue collar workers, young people, ethnic minorities, etc. are present in (one of the layers of) the party.</p>
--------------------------	---

It seems logical that owing to a general decline in membership figures, also this descriptive representation is put under pressure. But the few studies undertaken in this area question the general assumption of an automatic link between declining membership figures and declining descriptive representativeness. Scarrow & Gezgor (2010) for instance found only for age a decreased representativeness over time in a number of European parties. In addition, levels of party membership vary between countries, so that even parties that have experienced dramatic falls in membership could still have comparatively high membership levels. The puzzle is whether massive membership loss will trigger a crisis in parties' representativeness. This will not necessarily be the case (cf. Allern et al. 2015). Alternatively, the crisis of party representativeness is – as indicated by the political participation literature (e.g. Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 2002 ; Mariën et al, 2010) – intrinsic to all high intensity participation modes.

Descriptive representation is highly relevant as due to the general decline of parties, their ties to civil society have weakened. Decline in descriptive representation may also be followed by a decline in policy representation. A weakening of this linking function carries a threat to party-based democracy in general: parties rule more than they represent, and consequently channeling demands to policy makers and, conversely, the justification of government decisions to the population are put under pressure. This could have far-reaching consequences for the political system in terms of legitimacy. It could also be a danger for parties themselves, who risk being out of tune with the opinion and visions of the population, resulting in unpopular decisions and electoral defeats. Finally, the presence of people from social categories in parties is highly relevant for these groups themselves. Research has found that descriptive representation has an impact on the extent to which their interests are defended, the chances these groups enjoy in the candidate selection process, etc. (e.g. Caul Kittilson, 2013).

<p>Relation to existing research:</p>	<p>The topic of this workshop relates to two broad research domains: parties and political representation. Both kinds of literature have not been completely blind from insights of each, but interesting combinations could be more fruitful, as we argue.</p> <p>On the one hand, there is a link to research on parties and party membership. While research on party membership decline (both mapping and explaining this evolution) has been extensive (e.g. Van Biezen et al, 2012 ; Whitely, 2011), only scarce attention has been devoted to the decline in representativeness of party membership over time (Scarrow & Gezgor, 2010 and Allern et al., 2015). Earlier, the general profile of party members has been investigated (e.g. Whiteley et al, 1993 ; Van Haute et al, 2013/2015), but the impact of current evolutions has been far less analysed. Recently, also some research has been conducted on diversity in higher strata of the party, most in particular on female party leaders (O’Brien, 2015 ; Wauters & Pilet, 2015).</p> <p>On the other hand, the literature on political representation has paid considerable attention to diversity, but the main focus has longtime been on parliaments (composition, behavior, barriers) (e.g. Childs & Krook, 2008). Following the launch of Saward’s (2006) concept of representative claims, representation outside parliaments has increasingly been scrutinized. This has induced some research attention for the representative role of parties, but the focus has been mostly on how parties contribute to the general policy representation of the interests of one or more particular social groups. The descriptive representation (or composition of the party and its different layers) has not been completely absent in this kind of research, but has been most of the time only taken a secondary role in most analyses. One could argue, however, that in line with Phillips’ (1995) politics of presence, the presence of descriptive representatives in a party gives an incentive to the substantive representation of social groups such as women, ethnic minorities and blue collar workers.</p>
--	--

<p>Likely participants:</p>	<p>Emerging as well as established researchers are encouraged to participate in this workshop. We aim both at scholars working in the field of party politics, and on researchers on diversity and politics (including scholars working on gender, ethnic minorities, social stratification, youth, etc.)</p> <p>The workshop proposal has been formally endorsed by ECPR Standing</p>
------------------------------------	---

	<p>Group on Political Parties. It was ranked first among five high-quality proposals.</p> <p>In addition, the proposal has been discussed with the MAPP (Members and Activists of Political Parties) Group directed by Emilie van Haute and with the ECPR Standing Group on Gender & Politics (with Liza Mügge, Isabelle Engeli and Elizabeth Evans as convenors). Both are willing to support this workshop by mobilizing their members to participate. As the topic of our workshop directly connects to the focus of their research groups, we expect that many scholars belonging to these groups will apply to participate in this workshop.</p>
--	--

<p>Type of Papers required:</p>	<p>We welcome both theoretical and empirical papers that consider representativeness in descriptive terms in political parties. Both individual case studies and comparative research (both cross-party and cross-country approaches) are possible. Diversity and representativeness is considered broadly and could encompass several social groups including amongst others women, ethnic minorities, blue collar workers, age groups, territorially defined groups, etc.</p> <p>Papers discussing one or more of the following elements are particularly solicited:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mapping descriptive representation within different strata in parties (ranging from rank and file to congress delegates over MPs and party elite to party leaders): comparison between strata and/or with the (voting) population, or in cross-party or cross-country perspective. - investigating causes for underrepresentation or overrepresentation of particular social groups (such as women, ethnic minorities, etc.) including particular selection procedures, the size of the party, general evolutions in party membership figures, organizational features of parties, etc. - investigating consequences of underrepresentation or overrepresentation of particular social groups. These consequences could refer to the substantive representation of a group's interests, policy (in)congruences between parties and their followers, barriers/stimuli in candidate selection processes, etc.
--	--

<p>Funding:</p>	<p>Participants will have to seek funding from their local institutions and project</p>
------------------------	---

	groups
--	--------

Biographical notes:	<p>Bram Wauters is assistant professor at the Department of Political Sciences of Ghent University, where he chairs the research group GASPAR (www.gaspar.ugent.be). His research interests include political representation, elections and political parties. He has recently published on these topics in journals such as <i>Party Politics</i>, <i>Political Studies</i>, <i>Government & Opposition</i>, <i>Politics & Gender</i> and <i>Representation</i>, and in a number of chapters in edited volumes. He has been a regular participant to the ECPR Joint Sessions since 2007.</p> <p>Knut Heidar is professor of political science at University of Oslo. His research includes studies of political parties, parliaments and recent Norwegian political history. He is an author and editor of books on parties, Norwegian and Nordic politics. He has published widely in journals like <i>West European Politics</i>, <i>Party Politics</i> and <i>European Journal of Political Research</i>. He has twice before organized workshops at ECPR joint sessions (with Ruud Koole and Paul Whiteley).</p>
----------------------------	--

References:	<p>Allern, E. Haugsgjerd, K. Heidar, R. Karlsen & H.M. Narud (2015), <i>After the Mass Party</i> (Lexington Books, Rowman and Littlefield).</p> <p>Caul Kittilson, M. (2013), 'Party politics', in: G. Waylen, K. Celis, J. Kantola & S.L. Weldon (eds), <i>The Oxford handbook of Gender and Politics</i>. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 536-553</p> <p>Childs, S., & M.L. Krook. 2008. "Critical Mass Theory and Women's Political Representation." <i>Political Studies</i> 56 (October): 725–36</p> <p>Dalton, R. & Weldon, S. (2005), 'Public images of political parties: A necessary evil?', <i>West European Politics</i> 28(5): 931-951.</p> <p>Drummond, A.J. (2006). 'Electoral volatility and party decline in Western democracies: 1970-1995', <i>Political Studies</i> 54(3): 628-647.</p> <p>Hibbing, J. & Theiss-Morse, E. (2002). <i>Stealth democracy: Americans' beliefs about how government should work</i> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).</p> <p>Krook, M.L. & Norris, P. (2014). <i>Beyond Quotas: Strategies to Promote Gender Equality in Elected Office</i>. <i>Political Studies</i> 62(1): pp. 2-20</p> <p>Mair, P. (1994). 'Party organization: from civil society to the state' in: Richard Katz & Peter Mair (eds) <i>How parties organize. Change and adaptation in party organizations in Western democracies</i>, pp. 1-22. London: Sage.</p> <p>Marien, S., Hooghe, M. & Quintelier, E. (2010) <i>Inequalities in Non-Institutionalized Forms of Political Participation. A Multilevel Analysis for 25 countries</i>. <i>Political Studies</i>, 58(1): 187-213.</p> <p>Matland, R.E. (2005) <i>Enhancing women's political participation, legislative recruitment and electoral systems</i>. In: J. Ballington and A. Karam (eds.) <i>Women in Parliament, Beyond Numbers</i>. Stockholm, Sweden: IDEA, pp. 93–111</p> <p>O'Brien, D.Z. (2015) <i>Rising to the Top: Gender, Political Performance, and Party Leadership in Advanced Industrial Democracies</i>. <i>American Journal of Political Science</i>, forthcoming.</p> <p>Phillips, A. (1995) <i>The Politics of Presence</i>. Oxford: Clarendon.</p>
--------------------	--

	<p>Rohrschneider, R. & S. Whitefield (2012), <i>The Strain of Representation. How Parties Represent Diverse Voters in Western and Eastern Europe</i>. Oxford: Oxford University Press.</p> <p>Scarrow, S.E. & B. Gezgor (2010): "Declining memberships, changing members? European political party members in a new era", <i>Party Politics</i>, 16 (6): 823-43.</p> <p>van Biezen, I., P. Mair and T. Poguntke (2012): "Going, going,...gone? The decline of party membership in contemporary Europe", <i>European Journal of Political Research</i> 51 (1), pp.24-56</p> <p>Saward, M. (2009), 'Authorisation and Authenticity: Representation and the Unelected', in: <i>The Journal of Political Philosophy</i>, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 1-22</p> <p>Van Haute, E., Amjahad, A., Borriello, A., Close, C. & Sandri, G. (2013). Party members in a pillarised partyocracy. An empirical overview of party membership figures and profiles in Belgium. <i>Acta Politica</i>, 48(1), 68-91.</p> <p>Van Haute, Emilie and Anika Gauja, forthcoming (2015): <i>Party members and activists</i>. London: Routledge.</p> <p>Wauters, B. & Pilet, J-B (2015) "The selection of female party leaders. Does the selectorate make a difference?", in: W. Cross & J-B Pilet (eds), <i>The Politics of Party Leadership: A Cross-National Perspective</i>. Oxford University Press, Oxford (forthcoming)</p> <p>Whiteley, P., Seyd, P., Richardson, J. & Bissell, P. (1993), <i>Explaining party activism: the case of the British Conservative party</i>. <i>British Journal of Political Science</i>, 24(1), 79-94.</p> <p>Whiteley, P. (2011). Is the party over? The decline of party activism and membership across the democratic world. <i>Party Politics</i> 17(1) 21–44.</p> <p>Widfeldt, A. (1999). <i>Linking Parties with People? Party Membership in Sweden 1960-1997</i>, (Ashgate).</p>
--	---

For further information, please contact: [Marcia Taylor](#), Conference Coordinator, ECPR Central Services, Harbour House, 6-8 Hythe Quay, Colchester, CO2 8JF, United Kingdom.