

## **ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Granada, 2005**

### **Workshop proposal**

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### **Dominant Parties and Democracy**

The rise of dominant parties in many new democracies and the return to power of dominant parties in several established democracies have renewed interest in the relationship between one-party dominance and democracy. It is often assumed that domination by one party and the resulting lack of political competitiveness in a polity affect the performance of democracy in mature democracies and threaten democratic consolidation in emergent democracies. Typical cases are the Liberal Democrats in Japan (LDP), the former Christian Democrats in Italy, and the ANC in post-apartheid South Africa. Dominant parties are held responsible for reducing party competition, for excluding some groups from representation and from political power, for blurring the lines between party and state, for encouraging corruptive and self-centred behaviour, for preventing policy innovation and blocking political initiative, and for promoting systemic sclerosis and causing citizens' indifference to politics. However, there has been little comparative research on these claims. Pempel's (1991) volume on one-party dominance is limited to six Western democracies (Sweden, Britain, Israel, Japan, Italy, and West Germany) and a recent collection edited by Giliomee and Simkins (1999) only looks at a small number of non-Western countries (most prominently South Africa, Mexico, Taiwan, and Malaysia). As political parties are core institutions of contemporary democracy and the rule of dominant parties has wide-ranging implications for the functioning of democracy, it is important and timely to re-examine the phenomenon of one-party dominance by investigating the relationship between dominant parties and democracy across mature and new democracies.

Within the general theme of dominant parties and democracy we are particularly interested in four issues: 1) party dominance as an analytical concept: its nature,

characteristics, measurement etc.; 2) the conditions under which dominant parties rise and fall; 3) the internal life of dominant parties; 4) and the broader consequences of one-party dominance for the quality and durability of democracy. Each of these four aspects can be approached from at least three different analytical perspectives: methodological/theoretical, philosophical, and empirical, either separately or in combination. The four questions and three approaches provide the workshop with a unifying framework that allows for comprehensive but differentiated and variegated discussion.

1. *The nature and measurement of one-party dominance.* What constitutes one-party dominance? A methodological/theoretical answer would focus on different definitions of dominant parties and dominant party systems in an attempt to demarcate the boundaries of the concept (See Bogaards 2004). A philosophical answer could reflect on the tension between populist/majoritarian vs. Madisonian models of democracy. We also welcome comparative and conceptual papers which propose different ways of characterising, evaluating, and measuring party dominance and which help unpack the concept through different indicators and dimensions (Boucek 1998), hopefully resulting in disaggregated indices with a strong discriminatory power. Students of party politics may benefit from conceptions of domination and concentration employed in different fields of political science and economics.
2. *The conditions for the rise and fall of dominant parties.* Why and where do dominant parties emerge, succeed, fail, prosper, and decline? Some of the longest serving dominant parties have lost power in the last decades (like India's Congress Party), while others have made a comeback (like the Liberals in Canada). Empirical analyses are not limited to the national level as there is abundant experience with dominant parties at the regional level in countries such as the USA, Canada, and India. One line of enquiry might be to focus on structural determinants. But parties are rational actors and of special concern is the temptation for dominant parties to buttress their position through manipulation or undemocratic means. So, we would like to identify when and under what conditions dominant parties turn into authoritarian or even

hegemonic parties (Sartori 1976). Knowing how to track this change, and ultimately how such trends can be countered, perhaps through institutional design (Bogaards 2000) is of particular interest.

3. *The internal life of dominant parties.* It has been observed that many dominant parties, such as the LDP in Japan and Christian Democracy in Italy, have been rife with factionalism. We welcome attempts to explain the prevalence of factionalism in dominant parties (including formal modelling) and to assess whether intra-party factionalism is the inevitable by-product of long office tenure. Often factions are seen as problematic and dysfunctional, but some analysts have claimed that the problems of democratic deficit in dominant party regimes can be alleviated by the presence of intra-party democracy or by competition between sub-party groups or factions inside the dominant party. Factions are said to play a constructive role in transitions to democracy (Waller in Gillespie, Waller and Lopez Nieto, 1995; Goldman, 1993) and to bring some degree of competitiveness and flexibility in dominant party systems such as Italy and Japan (Leonardi and Wertman, 1989; Curtis: 1988). It has also been suggested that factions can solve management dilemmas inside dominant parties to increase consent and prevent exit (Boucek, 2002). Consequently, we would also like to investigate if, how, and to what extent, intra-party competition can ease transitions to democracy and can correct deficiencies in sub-competitive party systems, and thus make government by dominant parties more legitimate. We would also like to examine whether this alternative source of competition is compatible with normative theories of democracy, for instance, whether intra-party factions can act as legitimate vehicles of interest articulation and aggregation.
4. *The broader consequences of one-party dominance for the quality and durability of democracy.* This concern first arose in the context of dominant parties in Western Europe (especially in Greece, Italy, and Sweden) and dominant parties in the American South (Key 1949) and has gained importance with the spread of dominant parties in the world today. Dominant parties may be especially vulnerable to the ‘erosion from within’ that Huntington (1996) identifies as the main threat to third wave democracies and

that Duverger (1959: 312) suggests when he declared that a party's long term rule was inevitably self-destructing. The evidence of historic cases and the recent decline of some notorious hegemonic parties such as the PRI in Mexico and the Kuomintang in Taiwan, paving the way for democratization (Rimanelli 1999), but also the re-assertiveness of former dominant parties in Western Europe provide ample scope for a long-overdue empirical assessment, qualitative and/or quantitative, of the claim that dominant parties lower the quality of democracy and threaten the process of democratic consolidation. In addition, we welcome papers that theorise and model the consequences of one-party dominance and that reflect on its normative implications. The consequences of dominant party rule for democracy is not so much a separate issue as one that gives meaning to all of the previous points and one that places the study of dominant parties in the context of the study of democratic politics. We therefore expect that this concern will inform all papers. Whatever the particular issue focused upon or the mode of analysis chosen, this concern will provide a unity of analysis for the workshop and will allow for a synthesis of the different contributions.

In sum, the workshop on "Dominant Parties and Democracy" aims to bring these different strands of analysis together in a systematic and comprehensive re-evaluation of the role of dominant parties in established and new democracies, based on new empirical research, on theorising, on normative reflection, and on formal modelling. The workshop invites theoretical papers which explore the relationship between dominance and democracy, for example against the background of theories and models of political competition; philosophical papers which reflect on the tension between domination by one party and models of participatory and representative democracy; and empirical studies, especially theory-driven comparative studies (at national and regional level, across different dimensions of the political system, in past and present, using qualitative and/or quantitative methods). Participants may be working in the fields of party politics, democratisation, political theory, public choice and rational choice, or they may be country and area specialists with an interest in the relationship between dominant parties and democracy. The workshop should result in an edited volume that advances our knowledge of this important but under-researched and under-theorised phenomenon.

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**Biographical notes:**

Matthijs Bogaards is professor of Political Science in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the International University Bremen. He obtained his Ph.D. in political science in September 2000 at the EUI and after a position as visiting assistant-professor at the CEU in the fall of 2000, became a permanent lecturer in comparative politics at the University of Southampton between 2001 and 2003. His research interests are in democratization, electoral systems, parties and party systems, institutional design, and democracy in divided societies. His articles have appeared in the *European Journal of Political Research*, the *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, *Democratization*, *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, and *European Union Politics*.

Françoise Boucek is Researcher in the LSE Public Policy Group at the London School of Economics and Political Science where she has been working on focus group research. She is presently temporary lecturer at Queen Mary University of London where she teaches E.U. and West European politics. In her LSE doctorate, completed in 2002, she studied factionalism in long-lived dominant parties and she is working up papers from her thesis for journal publication. Her research interests are in political parties and party systems, party organisation, electoral systems, and neo-institutionalism. She has published in *Party Politics* and contributed book chapters on change in dominant party systems and on trends in French politics.