

Habilitation thesis:

Multi-level party politics.

How party competition is constrained by the EU multi-level system

Abstract

During the last decades, a more conflictive period over European issues started. Accordingly, the dimension of politics is becoming visibly more relevant within the research field of EU studies. Against the background of a continual widening and deepening of the European Union (EU), followed by an incisive period of crises (such as the financial or the refugee crisis, as well as Brexit), there is increasing scholarly work not only on EU governance, but also on EU politics. This trend should be interpreted as a politics turn in EU studies. However, most of these studies do not take into account what Brigid Laffan (2016) labels aptly as *multi-level politics*. In particular, the study of party politics addresses the complex interactions and repercussions between national and EU level inappropriately. Hence, a comprehensive and systematic study on party competition within the EU multi-level system is still lacking. We do not yet know how political parties emphasize European issues and position themselves towards them under the constraints of the EU multi-level system and are thus prone to misinterpret parties' behavior.

Against this background, the aim of the study is to appropriately take into account the different levels at play and to systematically explore its implications for party politics. In doing this, the study combines three major ongoing debates: party competition, the future of European integration, and political communication in advanced democracies. Theoretically, I draw on the main theories of party competition, combining them with major insights on the implications of the EU multi-level setting. This allows formulating specific assumptions on party competition under the constraints of the EU multi-level system, such as the following examples: One could e.g. assume that political parties put more emphasis on the conflictive European issues in elections to the European Parliament where – according to the second order election model (Reif and Schmitt, 1980) less it as stake than in national elections. Moreover, based on major insights put forward by Peter Mair (2000), another assumption is that EU policy issues are more emphasized at the EU level, whereas political parties put more emphasis on polity issues at the national level. Another important point is to move beyond the party system level and address the question on the diverging role of political parties (e.g. the government-opposition divide as well as party family) in the national political arena compared to the EU level. To explore these and related questions (such as the party-voter linkage), the empirical analysis makes usage of two fundamentally different channels of party communication utilizing manifesto and media data for the two levels at work.

The findings of the study add to different literatures: First and foremost, the study adds to the general literature on party competition in the light of most recent developments, such as an ever deeper union, but at the same time the EU being in times of permanent crises. Second, the findings will contribute to a better understanding of the European integration process itself, since political parties might be the clue to some of the EU's legitimacy problems. Finally, the analytical approach of the study using different channels of party communication, adds to recent studies of how political parties communicate in modern democracies.

Dr Daniela Braun

LMU Munich, Department of Political Science, Chair of Comparative Political Science

External Fellow at the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES)

Daniela.Braun@gsi.uni-muenchen.de
