

Abstract

Political parties are the corner stone of democratic and non-democratic politics, alike. Both party unity and the consistency in party platforms and manifestos provides political parties with clear and strong party labels so that they can use them to attract voters, keep them informed about their policies, and how they would like to compete on important issues. What is the effect of having highly disciplined political parties on the clarity and predictability of party policy positions? My dissertation research argues that the clarity and predictability of party policy positions not only depend on the incentives that party members face in the electoral arena, but also the structures of party organization in the legislative arena.

I view political parties as vehicles for advancing the goals of political elites. In a nutshell, elites create structures and manage their organizations in order to harness collective actions. In this study, I first rationalize and explicitly model one of the enforcement mechanisms for maintaining unity in a political party comprising ambitious members with heterogeneous policy preferences. For party rank-and-file members, the higher up within the party organization, the more ambitious individuals who hold these influential positions can expect to exercise their influence. Party leaders who try to effectively command the rank-and-file support and achieve goals that otherwise beyond their reach without collective action need to control the ability of individual rank-and-file members to receive important decision-making positions by offering selective incentives (e.g., office perks). However, the

cost of doing this is the long-term policy consequence due to the heterogeneous policy preferences of rank-and-file members.

Anticipating the long-term consequence of party policy positions moving away from their ideal points, party leaders would want to improve the balance of the short-term leadership portfolio. One medication is to institutionalize factionalism within the party. By acknowledging the diversity of individual members' preferences, party leaders allow rank-and-file members to reveal information about their true ideal points and, thus help decide who to appoint and promote to influential party decision-making positions. With such an endogenous institutional choice, party leaders are able to sacrifice the short-term outcome of party unity in return for the long-term outcome of clear and predictable party policy positions.

My dissertation study improves the understanding of the party organization in the legislative arena by adding to the existing literature on political parties, such as, the cartel party theory (cf. Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005), the conditional party government theory (cf. Rohde 1991), the distribution of career advancement opportunities and party unity (cf. Kam 2009), and party factionalism (cf. Laver and Schofield 1990; Mershon 2001). The research methodology of this study also combines theory development, empirical analysis using large-N party-position data drawn from election manifestos, and in-depth case analysis of political parties in Germany, China, and Mexico. Therefore, it is an important step to improve our understanding of party politics and trace the lines between individual party members' policy preferences and party policy positions.