

Book Review

Party Politics
2022, Vol. 0(0) 1–2
© The Author(s) 2022



Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
journals.sagepub.com/home/ppq



The Rise of Entrepreneurial Parties in European Politics. By Vít Hloušek, Lubomír Kopeček and Petra Vodová. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 80.00€ (hbk); 53.00€ (pbk), xi+215. ISBN: 978-3-030-41915-8

Reviewed by: Sergiu Gherghina , University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK

DOI: 10.1177/13540688221104230

The electoral success, campaigning strategies and coalition behaviour of newly emerged political parties has been the object of extensive research in the last two decades. This book written by Vít Hloušek, Lubomír Kopeček and Petra Vodová focuses on a specific type of new political party and seeks to understand their support in society and persistence in the political arena. It aims to explain why entrepreneurial parties emerge, function and institutionalise. The qualitative analysis relies on a case-oriented approach to illustrate how several contextual, conjunctural and intra-party developments can influence the political fate of these parties.

The seven chapters of the book start with an introduction that outlines the research gap and the relevance of entrepreneurial parties. The second chapter is theoretical and suggests a typology that differentiates between political entrepreneurs, which is then used to compare and contrast the characteristics of 12 parties in eight European countries. Each of the next four chapters includes empirical evidence on the types, with emphasis on their similarities and differences within each type. The concluding chapter wraps up the analysis and discusses the effects of entrepreneurial parties on representative democracy.

The book makes important conceptual, analytical and empirical contributions to the study of party politics. On conceptual grounds, the authors propose a definition that grasps the meaning of entrepreneurial parties and shows how they differ from other new political parties. One key characteristic is the central role of leaders who launch the party, centralise the decision-making process and make it hierarchical to ensure full control, ensure access to resources and use the party for their personal careers. Party leaders

connect their political and economic interests and build the party as an extension of their business. The voters are considered consumers in an electoral market who can be targeted by professional campaigning adopted from the business model. As such, the economic logic and forms of organisation interact and sometimes get prominence over politics (pp. 2-3). This eloquent definition has two advantages. First, it shows how several characteristics shared by parties can be used to cluster them under an increasingly used umbrella-concept. Second, it allows positioning the entrepreneurial parties in the political space relative to the mainstream and other newly established parties.

The rigorous and systematic development of theoretical arguments results in a typology with important analytical value for further research. The typology uses two criteria: the existence of a firm for entrepreneurs, and the existence of members and territorial branches for the party organisation. These are the lenses through which the book explains how entrepreneurial parties reach the three phases of institutionalisation (identification, organisation and stabilisation), the objectives associated with each phase, and the leadership requirements (p. 25). The supply-side approach covered by this definition is substantiated in the book by empirical evidence, which illustrates how these characteristics are reflected in real-life politics. The rich details, extensive discussions and insightful information are combined in persuasive and captivating narratives about the rise, persistence and (sometimes) failure of entrepreneurial parties in Eastern (Czechia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia) and Western Europe (Austria, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway). For example, with the help of both primary and secondary data, the book describes, in a fascinating manner, the ability of several leaders to create enduring and durable parties against the odds.

This ambitious endeavour has several shortcomings rooted in the trade-off between the depth and the breadth of the research. One of these is the limited theoretical attention paid to leaders' characteristics and leadership styles. Although the leaders lie at the core of the analysis and the empirical evidence touches upon these two components, there is very little in the book about how they could influence the process of institutionalisation. An extensive body of literature covers a broad array of leaders'

characteristics ranging from the psychological dimensions of their personality to their performance or behaviour in office. A similar critique of under-theorisation is applicable also to the personalisation and the presidentialisation of power in political parties. Much of the presented evidence makes implicit references to these two concepts, but explicit links could broaden the spectrum of analysis and the audience. The appropriate use of these concepts could strengthen the analysis by isolating the leaders' effects on institutionalisation from alternative explanations, which are currently mixed in the story told in the text.

Party organisation is covered quite schematically. The book does very well to acknowledge the potential impact of party members and of territorial organisations. However, their potential effects on institutionalisation require refinement and development, which can be achieved through a stronger link to previous research. Several other components of party organisation are either mentioned occasionally or only hinted at without an explicit reference. For example, the text refers extensively to the hierarchical model of party organisation but says nothing about alternative models that involve more than a top-down subordination. There is no explicit reference to the interaction between the party units or about how these units work together to form a cohesive and coherent party. Similarly, the text refers extensively to the centralisation of power but leaves aside the inclusiveness of decision-making, which speaks directly to the involvement of party members. Party

members and territorial organisations may matter less for institutionalisation if they are powerless. Another example refers to the three 'faces' of political parties: the text covers the party on the ground well, but there is limited analysis about the party in central office or in public office. This is surprising since some evidence presented in the book shows explicitly how parliamentarians could alter the parties' acceptance in society.

Overall, the book does not explain in a persuasive manner why entrepreneurial parties emerge, function and institutionalise. Instead, it unveils how all these things happen, focussing on the process much more than on the causal mechanisms. Although the case selection and methods of data analysis require more details, the study provides a comprehensive account of recent developments that informs us about the variation between entrepreneurial parties. The book is a meticulous and extensively documented study that could be useful to both academic audiences and practitioners interested in the formation, persistence and failure of new parties.

Author Biographies

Sergiu Gherghina is a Senior Lecturer in Comparative Politics at the Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Glasgow. His research interests lie in party politics, legislative and voting behaviour, democratisation and the use of direct democracy.