

Italian Parties and Party Systems (1993-2018)

A quasi-experimental analysis of party change

Blended Intensive Program *Party Change and the Challenges of Political Representation in the 21st Century*

Eugenio Pizzimenti

Pisa, 19/06/2025

Focus of the Presentation

- A critical review of the mainstream literature on party organisation;
 - Outline an alternative analytical framework;
 - Test the framework on a peculiar case: Italy (from 1994 to 2018);
 - Discussion of the main findings;
 - Exploring new approaches to party change.
-
- Reference: Pizzimenti E, Masi B and L. Luperi Baglini (2024), *Party Organizational Development: An Analytical Framework*. In “Italian Political Science”, 19(1): doi.org/10.69101/IPS.2024.19.1.2

The mainstream literature

- Lack of any shared definition of *party organization*;
- Three main approaches:
 - 1) **Environment-induced change**;
 - 2) Life cycle;
 - 3) Discrete change.

Predominance of Party Models (PM): [*ideal-types*] *used to theorize about relationships and processes in the absence of the messy complications of the real world* (Katz 2017: 318).

- **Virtues of PM:** parsimony; PM can travel across cases, in time.
- **Flaws of PM:**
 - 1) Contextualism: the broader context determines party change: parties simply adapt;
 - 2) Organizational Convergence: parties are expected to converge, both within and across countries;
 - 3) Lack of empirical verification;
 - 4) Underestimation of political factors in shaping party change;
 - 5) Lack of an organization-oriented approach;
 - 6) Overestimation of party adaptation.

Towards an alternative approach: COT, SA and NFA

- **Organization Theory (OT) as a guiding discipline**

OT is a multidisciplinary body of scholarly work interested in explaining organizational structure, performance, and survival, through the development of a general theory and analytical tools that can be applied to all types of organizations (Tsoukas and Knudsen 2005)

- **Organizations and their environment (II):**

Looking for a middle-ground: reconsidering the relationships between the organization-level and the context-level in term of the “mechanisms” that bring to their parallel **co-evolution** (Wohlgezogen, Hirsch 2009; Greenwood et al 2014).

- **Organizations and their environment (I):**

Agency-determinism continuum

- Comparative Organization Theory (COT)
- Structural Analysis (SA): focus on organizations as individual units, pursuing different organizational strategies within the same set of pressures.

- **Organizations and their environment (III):**

The Negotiation Framework Approach (NFA)

[The NFA is based] on two operational constructs that can be utilized in empirical research: **negotiation space**, the context in which actors conceive of and implement action; and **negotiation moves**, the acts through which actors attempt to define, defend, or redefine their role and realm of options (Wohlgezogen, Hirsch 2009: 162);

Integrating the NFA with COT and SA

Why are parties so peculiar?

Parties are the main *institutionalization agencies* in liberal-democracies

- Parties contribute to channel the political conflict within a framework of legitimized (and legitimizing) regulative structures;
- Parties promote the values and founding principles of the political community;
- Parties favor the persistence or change of the regulative structures, in time.

Parties are *autonomous* from the broader environment

- Parties are entitled to discipline their own negotiation space:

The laws and rules influencing parties were those that they themselves, as governors, had been centrally involved in writing. Indeed, the parties are unique in that they have the ability to devise their own legal (and not only legal) environment and, effectively, to write their own salary checks (Katz, Mair 2018: 11).

- The control over State institutions makes parties unique: their organizational development is primarily (not entirely) associated with factors belonging to their specific negotiation space (vs contextual adaptation).

The analytical framework

- Building bridges between Organization Theory and party studies by combining COA, Structural Analysis and the rationale of the dimensional approach (Scarrow et al 2017);
- Basic assumptions:
 - Organizational configurations are not predictable a priori: in pursuing its goals through negotiation moves, each organization adopts different strategies and structural templates, being provided with variable resources;*
 - The patterns of interaction with the other actors may show different degrees of stability, depending on cases;*
 - Organizations are entities deliberately projected to pursue specific goals, whose achievement is influenced by the types of relationships developed with their environment, with which organizations exchange fundamental resources in order to survive and to reproduce/modify the existing settings.*
- Three classes of organizational dimensions: extra-organizational, liminal, intra-organizational

Assumptions

- *A1: The stability of the regulative structures and party organizational institutionalization are in a positive correlation.*
- *A2: A high intensity of the regulative structures corresponds to low variance in party organizational profiles.*
- *A3. A high intensity of the regulative structures corresponds to low variance in party structures and resources.*
- *A4. The fragmentation of the party system and variance in party organizational profiles are in a positive correlation.*

Data and methods

- Case selection: Italy (1993-2018);
- Units selection: 7 parties (PDS-DS; PPI-DL; PD; FI; AN-FDI; LN);
- Analysis of parties' official story (statutes, regulations, balance sheets) – TOT: 28 docs;
- Coding (according with the PPDB rationale).
- Some examples: M5S 2009; PD 2015

Why Italy?

- 1992-1993 → Systemic shock: collapse of the party system

5 April 1992 Elections:

<https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/index.php?tpel=C&dtel=05/04/1992&es0=S&tpa=I&lev0=0&levsut0=0&ms=S&tpe=A>

27 March 1994 Elections:

<https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/index.php?tpel=C&dtel=27/03/1994&es0=S&tpa=I&lev0=0&levsut0=0&ms=S&tpe=A>

- First Republic vs Second Republic: [Party system indicators](#)

The Analysed Dimensions and Sub-Dimensions

Dimension	Sub-dimensions	Variable/Indicators	Range
Political System	Stability Regulative Structures	ST: (N° Reforms/N° Years)	0 - ∞
	Intensity Regulative Structures	INT: EL+PFL+PL+PC	0-6
	Focal Population	N° Competitive Parties/Tot parties; N° Institutionalized parties/Competitive parties	0-1 0-1
	Party System Fragmentation	Electoral Fragmentation (EFRG) Parliamentary Fragmentation (PFRG) Government Fragmentation (GFRG)	0-1 0-1 0-1
Party Organization	Strategies	Intra-party Power Concentration (IPC) Party Leader Maximization (PLM) Intra-party Democracy Maximization (IDM) Incentives (INC)	0-1 0-1 0-1 0-1
	Structures	Formalization Index (FORM) Structural Differentiation Index (SD)	0-1 0-1
	Resources	Human (M/V) Financial (SF/TPI) Technical (EE/TPI)	0-1 0-1 0-1

Findings

- Assumption 1: acceptable;
- Assumption 2: acceptable;
- Assumption 3: acceptable;
- Assumption 4: not acceptable.

Conclusive remarks

- Need to build bridges between disciplines (knowing different literatures is much better than being iper-specialized);
- Contributing to “normal science” (Kuhn) is important...but sometimes it narrows our perspectives and inhibits innovation;
- Avoid determinism: thinking in terms of organizational dimensions rather than models helps the empirical verification of our assumptions;
- Need to test the analytical framework on Large N samples.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

eugenio.pizzimenti@unipi.it