

Call for papers: Disintermediation: A Pattern of Party Change in New Parties?

ECPR General Conference, Hamburg, 22-25 August 2018

Chairs: Cecilia Biancalana [cecilia.biancalana@unito.it] and Daniela R. Piccio [danielaromee.piccio@unito.it]

Section on ‘New Parties in Europe: A Comeback for the Parties or Just another Symptom for their Decline?’

Abstract

Disintermediation can be considered as an increasingly relevant phenomenon in contemporary society. When one thinks about the changes that have occurred in commerce, business, journalism, or communications, it is impossible not to notice a growing trend towards more direct and less mediated relationships, fostered also by the Internet. Such a trend is affecting political party organizations too. Indeed, in recent years, party scholars have pointed to some apparently contradictory developments, which have often been treated separately. On the one hand, a concentration of power and visibility in the hands of the leader has been acknowledged (i.e.: the personalization and presidentialization of politics); on the other hand, scholars have also observed the increasing opening up of internal decision-making procedures to members, or even supporters, through “direct democracy” mechanisms and/or the use of the Internet.

The result of this dual trend is what we define as disintermediation: the creation of an (apparently?) direct linkage between party leadership and supporters and, more broadly, between citizens and political power. Disintermediation, in other words, implies a transformation of the forms of political mediation towards more direct and unmediated relationships, challenging political parties as organizational structures between citizens and the state and as agents of political representation.

New parties seem more likely to take advantage of such changes. They are not bound to the traditions of the structured mass parties, and they often emerge in overt opposition to the older decision-making structures of party organizations. The aim of the panel is to focus on the rhetoric and practices of disintermediation in new parties and to explore the organizational responses enacted by both old and new parties in order to bypass the classical mediated practices of party organizations.

Through the comparative analysis of certain case studies, we will try to evaluate the heuristic capacity of the concept of disintermediation. Does disintermediation affect all the parties likewise? What are the similarities and differences between them? What is the role of the spread of digital media in these processes? And, finally, does disintermediation bring forward a genuine direct linkage between leaders and supporters, or does it favour some actors at the expense of others?

Both theoretical contributions as well as comparative analyses and in-depth single case studies (on a single political party or a national case) are welcome. To propose a paper, please send an abstract of 250- 500 words to cecilia.biancalana@unito.it by 31 January 2018.