

Book reviews

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Gianluca Passarelli (ed.), *The Presidentialization of Political Parties: Organizations, Institutions and Leaders*, Basingstoke–New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; xxv + 300 pp.: ISBN 9781137482457, £68 (hbk).

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Only a few scholars would question the thesis concerning the recent increasing importance of the key members of the executive in democracies, a phenomenon related to the centralization of both executive power and the organization of political parties. Many scholars would, however, oppose or dispute the concept of the ‘presidentialization’ of politics that has been developed since the early 1990s to capture such a development. The recent volume edited by Gianluca Passarelli sheds new light on the concept and its analytical potential to unravel the processes of transformation of the organizational patterns of contemporary political parties. The volume covers the conceptual debate as well as 11 country studies. The opening chapter, written by the editor, offers an interesting conceptual introduction which not only provides the framework for the country studies but, above all, increases the analytical potential of the very concept of party presidentialization.

Passarelli doesn’t claim presidentialization to be a general trend encompassing virtually all democratic regimes. On the contrary, the book’s objective is to explain the variations of the trend. Building strongly not only on the classical work by Poguntke and Webb (2005) on presidentialization, but especially on Samuels and Shugart’s (2010) principal-agent focused research on how institutions shape political behaviour, Passarelli adds an important dimension of ‘party genetics’ as one of the key variables explaining the deep, surface or no presidentialization of intra-party organization. He offers a sound conceptual basis elaborating political parties not as mere followers of constitutional changes towards increasing the centralization of politics but as vehicles that can foster or even invoke these processes by changing their internal patterns of functioning and distribution of power to cope better with the changing environment of politics and new tools of political campaigning. The part of the introductory chapter that

differentiates between the concept of presidentialization on the one hand, and the processes of centralization and personalization of politics on the other, is very important; although the reader might wish to see some evidence showing the general idea that personalization can turn to presidentialization once it reaches some threshold of institutionalization in intra-party practices on the way from ‘our’ party to ‘my’ party (p. 14).

The case studies cover 11 countries embodying different regimes: presidential (the United States, Chile, Brazil), semi-presidential and five parliamentary democracies (Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan and Italy). Passarelli uses the slightly problematic concept of semi-presidentialism invoked by Elgie so the basically parliamentary Polish regime is listed as semi-presidential alongside France and Ukraine. Fortunately, the authors of the chapter on Poland (Cristina Bucur and Iain McMenamin) discuss fairly those features of the Polish political system that problematize its designation in the family of semi-presidential democracies. However, it is a pity that they did not compare in more detail the 1997 Polish Constitution with the previous 1992 interim (so-called small) Constitution to show how the Polish political system has actually shifted to a clear parliamentary democracy since 1997. Special praise goes to Thomas Sedelius, writing on the Ukraine, for the elaboration of the hybrid nature of the Ukrainian political regime and analysis of the corresponding constraints given to the ‘normal’ institutionalization of political parties there.

The strong aspect of this particular selection of cases is its twofold diversity: in terms of the diverse area context as well as the choice of different types of political systems. This fits well with the research design of having the constitutional framework and its changes as the independent variable and the endogenous factors of parties’ genetics as the intervening variable. All case studies follow the same structure, so the volume brings together a concise and well-comparable account on presidentialization trends in different areas and regime settings.

It would be interesting to replicate the research within one regime type (a parliamentary democracy as a somewhat limited case with ‘natural’ obstacles to presidentialization, for example) using the parties’ genetics as the only independent variable to explain the different level of

presidentialization. As analysis of the empirical cases (Australia and Germany) shows, the emergence of presidentialization trends cannot be excluded even in parliamentary democracies. This, however, is not a critique of Passarelli's selection, more a call for further research followed by a new volume. What, on the other hand, can really be felt as somewhat constraining is the focus purely on the strongest 'President's' or main opposition parties taking into consideration the fact that other parties can be subject to similar tendencies if the constitutional framework is encouraging the processes of the personalization and centralization of intra-party politics.

To conclude, the most welcome features of Passarelli's new volume are the following. The book clarifies the concept of presidentialization and delimits it vis-à-vis the 'rivalling' concepts of centralization and personalization. It offers rich country studies covering different types of political systems to show divergent trajectories and the varying scope of presidentialization tendencies there. And the most important positive feature that I found was the stress that the book placed on the endogenous processes of shaping and changing intra-party organization and the distribution

of power as important intervening variables explaining the outcome of strong leaders' attempts at presidentialization.

The book is a must for scholars who want to understand recent changes and challenges to the traditional idea of parties as predominantly collective actors. Together with the study of entrepreneurial or business-firm parties, or the marketization and personalization of political campaigning, the concept of presidentialization (especially when employed in such a strict way as in the reviewed book) has a lot to say in the debate about the empirical stance of political parties in contemporary democracies. Passarelli's volume introduces a very sound voice in this debate.

References

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Laurel Harbridge, *Is Bipartisanship Dead?* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015; x + 258 pp.: ISBN 9781107079953, \$55.00 (hbk), 9781107439283, \$29.99 (pbk)

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This review begins with a full disclosure statement: I have published a book with a title identical to the one under current review (Baker, 2014). I will follow it with a confession: Laurel Harbridge's *Is Bipartisanship Dead?* is a far better book than my *Is Bipartisanship Dead?* I say this despite the fact that we come to essentially the same overall conclusion that bipartisanship is not dead.

Harbridge finds it in her exhaustive and highly persuasive analysis of the co-sponsorship behaviour of the US House of Representatives members; I find it in the cooperative behaviour of Democrats and Republicans in Senate committees. There the resemblance ends because, unlike the impressionistic approach of my book, Harbridge does some serious data mining and provides hard evidence that bill co-sponsorships of Democrats and Republicans are not at all uncommon, but she goes well beyond and offers a persuasive critique of that venerable household totem of legislative studies in the United States, the DW-NOMINATE data of Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal (Poole and Rosenthal, 1984) that is based upon roll-call votes on the floor of the House. In their successive work *Congress: A Political-Economic History of Roll-Call Voting* (Poole and Rosenthal, 1997), they present their case in

breath-taking dimensions that the history of congressional voting is one that cleaves decisively along liberal-conservative lines and that polarization is no new thing.

It's hard to challenge a body of work so well executed and so broadly accepted, but there is a growing body of opinion that suggests that it does not tell the whole story. Laurel Harbridge's important work is on the cutting edge of that movement: that accepts the long-established value of the work of Poole and Rosenthal and their followers but makes the point that if the presence or absence of bipartisanship in the US Congress is determined on the basis of votes that take place principally at the ultimate or penultimate stages of the legislative process, it may say much about policy outcomes but less about the presence or absence of bipartisanship at earlier stages. In Harbridge's approach, it is bipartisan co-sponsorship which typically occurs at the dawn of the process.

Perhaps the most persuasive case against Harbridge's approach is to make the observation that a process that might begin with bipartisanship but ends in polarization is a little like defining a warship by the champagne bottle that is broken on its bow upon launching. But if it is the presence or absence of bipartisanship in Congress that you are looking for, Harbridge finds ample evidence of it. Much legislation that ends up starkly bipartisan on final vote is often encoded with bipartisan genes in its earlier stages. The legislative process is far too complex and has too many opportunities for modification for the purpose of picking up backing from the 'other side of the aisle' to dismiss the earlier and often more elusive evidence of bipartisanship.