

Nicholas Aylott, Magnus Blomgren and Torbjorn Bergman, *Political Parties in Multi-Level Politics: The Nordic countries compared* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

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As the result of changes in European governance, the environment in which national parties operate has been unambiguously modified. The complexity of European structures has put additional pressure on national parties and forced them to adapt to new challenges. The emergence of sub-national level has created new arena for national parties to perform their customary functions such as candidate selection, formulation of party manifestos, government formation etc. Yet, the sub-national level stipulated by other institutional structure differs significantly from the national one. The democratic deficit intrinsic to the EU institutions affects and changes the internal organization of national parties. Aylott, Blomgren, and Bergman aim to fill this research gap by investigating the impact of European integration on democratic accountability within Nordic political parties. The authors seek to uncover “the black box of party organization” (p. 2) through the lens of modified delegation and accountability procedures on both national and European levels.

As an explanatory model, the authors embark upon the principal-agent approach by explaining delegation relationships. Transferring this template to party organization, Aylott, Blomgren, and Bergman define three different levels of control mechanisms within party structure: party membership to party leadership, party organization to parliamentarians, from the parliamentary group to individual parliamentarians. Within each level, the authors operationalize various forms of intra-party delegation on national and European arenas, differentiating between *ex ante* and *ex post* control mechanisms. Thus the first channel of delegation include the selection of party leadership by the party organization through the screening procedure, the formulation of party programme as part of contract design, and the policy committees as institutional check. From the second channel onward, the authors begin to juxtapose the forms of delegation and accountability on national and European levels. They examine candidate selection, manifesto formulation, pre-electoral candidate contracts as *ex ante* mechanisms, and voting instructions and reporting requirements as *ex post* mechanisms. The forms of delegation from the parliamentary group to individual parliamentarians comprise role allocation, maintenance of party cohesion and coordination between MPs and MEPs.

The main findings conclude a difference in power distribution between national and European levels. Whereas the control mechanisms within domestic arena are tight, the delegation relationships on sub-national level give more room for deviation and self-determination for the parliamentarians. The juxtaposition of the two levels

established that MEP's freedom of maneuver is larger than of the national parliamentarians (p. 77). In countries where only the small number of MEP's is delegated to the European Parliament (EP), it is difficult to treat them as a delegation but rather as individual candidates. The authors observed that the candidate selection to the EP is more centralized and personalized. As country being treated as one constituency, the selection proceeds through the top-down recruitment. The control mechanisms on the European level are rather weak. The national parties lack both ability and desire to exercise such controlling functions as they accept different nature of institutional context and therefore the possibility of MEP's deviated behavior. The coordination between two levels is impeded by conflicting schedules, so that MEPs rarely attend the meetings of the national parliamentary parties. Additionally, MEPs possess considerably more freedom in using their subsidies. As the final conclusion, Aylott, Blomgren, and Bergman claim that national institutional settings are of importance by shaping party organizations.

Generally, the book is structurally well elaborated, representing the findings on country case study approach. Analyzing Danish, Finish, Norwegian, and Swedish mainstream parties, each chapter precedes with the introduction to the electoral and party systems, EU-country relationships, and party stances on the European integration. The core of analysis is focused on abovementioned forms of delegation and accountability. The embeddedness of research into the national context is much of help by analyzing the differences in party organizations. The book is written in an invigorating manner providing succinct titles by the description of country's findings. Focusing on internal party mechanisms, Aylott, Blomgren, and Bergman successfully covered so far under investigated domain of the impact of European integration. Whereas the previous studies have predominantly concentrated on programmatic and/or organizational facets of parties, the authors of the book have shifted the focus to intra-party mechanisms in terms of delegation and accountability. Methodologically, the book represents an innovative approach to examination of power distribution within party structures. The application of the principal-agent theory gives a novel viewpoint on the functioning of political parties and their toolkit of control instruments.

Despite numerous positive sides, there are a couple of flaws the the research design and argumentation suffer. First, the country case selection is disputable as to whether it corresponds with the research goal to gauge the impact of European integration. Reasonably, the authors craft the case selection in line with the "most-similar-system" design's logic to control country specific variables. However, it raises lots of question, how the case of Norway can contribute to answering the research question. Aiming to distil the "net impact" by inclusion of non-EU member states, the authors have actually missed the core part of causal mechanism. If a country does not belong to the EU, there is no boundary expansion and no challenges for political parties to adapt to. In line with this logic, the juxtaposition

of national and European levels is merely impossible, so that the analysis of Norwegian case simply boils down to the analytical narrative of national party politics. From this point of view, the Norwegian case is much of domestic politics analysis with no additional value in terms of comparison.

Secondly, conceptualizing their toolkit of control mechanisms, Aylott, Blomgren, and Bergman have defined three channels, where the first one – party membership to party leadership – has been again exclusively rooted into domestic party politics. As we are interested into the detection of the impact of European integration, the only way to gauge it is the juxtaposition of the same control mechanisms within the same channels. In this case, the first channel merely describes the peculiarities of intra-party affairs within country context. As the truly analysis starts with the second channel, the first channel seems to be abundant. Thirdly, the normative statement is prone to certain analytical flaws as well. The authors' starting point begins with the statement that political parties in Nordic countries are perceived to be mass-party model with internal party democracy. Based on this assumption, they build their principal-agent model with controlling mechanisms. However, during the course of the book, there are several references to the "stratarchical" structure of Nordic parties (p. 165). Stating this, the authors weaken their starting assumption. The stratarchy as internal party structure indicates the independence between party levels and points to the lack of linkage with grassroots thus undermining the mass-party model. The last critical point regards the poorly formulated concluding chapter. There is certainly some room for enhancing the final remarks. It seems lacking of the overarching comparison – both cross-channel and cross-country. Instead, the chapter immerses into the discussion of party decline debate, thus recurring to the point of normative statement and omitting the discussion of the findings.

Overall, the book is an essential analytical contribution to the domain of Europeanization of party politics and will certainly find broad interest among party researchers and academics with focus on the European integration. The book touches upon vital current developments in party organizations and offers a promising template for the tracing of implications in the future.