

# The dynamics and dimensions of intra-party conflict: Introduction to the special issue

Party Politics

1–3

© The Author(s) 2019

Article reuse guidelines:

[sagepub.com/journals-permissions](http://sagepub.com/journals-permissions)

DOI: 10.1177/1354068819836048

[journals.sagepub.com/home/ppq](http://journals.sagepub.com/home/ppq)**Sergiu Gherghina** 

University of Glasgow, UK

**Caroline Close**

Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium

**Petr Kopecký**

Leiden University, Netherlands

## Abstract

Existing research on intra-party unity and conflict has mostly focused on (dis)unity within the legislative branch of the party at the national level, while neglecting conflict between the different faces or at different levels of the party. Intra-party unity and conflict have also been routinely defined and operationalized through *ideological* homogeneity or distance, although intra-party conflicts are multidimensional and dynamic phenomena. The articles included in this special issue seek to address these shortcomings in the literature. Their contributions are threefold: (1) they theorize intra-party conflict as a dynamic and multifaceted concept; (2) they explore conflicts across and between several party faces, and among different intra-party actors; (3) they investigate the determinants and management of conflict at several party levels.

## Keywords

intra-party conflict, party cohesion, party organization

## Objectives of the special issue

Intra-party conflicts are inherent to party life and occur frequently both within and between the different faces of the party organization. Intra-party conflicts can play a great role in shaping political parties' policy stances, electoral strategies and success, coalition behavior (Pedersen, 2010), and government survival. They also matter and impact on parties' representativeness and accountability to their voters (Carey, 2009). Scholars also question the role that intra-party conflict could play in reinvigorating the democratic debate within parties and in improving congruence between voters and their representatives' preferences (Farrell et al., 2015). Exploring intra-party conflict is therefore crucial to understand the democratic process as a whole. This special issue contributes to a better understanding of the processes, causes and management of various dimensions of intra-party conflicts.

Political parties are not monolithic organizations. They aggregate coherent or divergent views, include amateurs

and professionals, gather members and sympathizers, and are organized along hierarchical or stratarchical structures (Bolleyer, 2012; Carty, 2004; Gherghina, 2014; Katz and Mair, 1992; Panebianco, 1988; Scarrow, 2015; van Haute and Gauja, 2015). Due to this diverse party composition, intra-party conflicts occur frequently between and within the party units: party members' dissatisfaction with their local section; divisions at party congresses surrounding the elaboration of the party platform or leadership selection; disunity of legislators in voting behavior; conflicts between party parliamentary caucus and ministers in government. An extensive body of literature has focused on unity and conflict within the legislative branch of the party and

---

Paper submitted 23 January 2019; accepted for publication 24 January 2019

### Corresponding author:

Sergiu Gherghina, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK.

Email: [sergiulor@yahoo.com](mailto:sergiulor@yahoo.com)

mostly at the national level (Andeweg and Thomassen, 2011; Bowler et al., 1999; Carey, 2007; Hazan, 2006; Kam, 2009; Sieberer, 2006; Stecker, 2015). However, somewhat less attention has been paid to conflict between the faces or at different levels of the party, despite the fact that, as Katz and Mair (1994) showed, types of party organization can be associated with distinct and conflictual relationships between party-on-the-ground, party-in-central-office, and party-in-public-office. We also know relatively little about how parties manage these conflicts. Moreover, while unity and conflict in the party-in-public-office (i.e. party MPs and ministers) have usually been defined and operationalized through *ideological* homogeneity or distance (Ceron, 2015; Proksch and Slapin, 2012), intra-party conflicts are multidimensional and dynamic phenomena.

The articles assembled in this special issue address these gaps in the literature. The collection includes seven articles that make a threefold contribution. First, they conceive intra-party conflict as a dynamic and multidimensional concept. Second, they examine conflicts across and between several party faces and strata of intra-party actors. Third, they analyze the determinants and management of conflict at various intra-party levels.

## Content of the special issue

The special issue starts with the conceptual article of Close and Gherghina, which reviews how intra-party cohesion has been seized across three fields of research (legislative studies, party factionalism, and Hirschman's theory of "exit, voice, loyalty" applied to intra-party dynamics). It then identifies major challenges in the study of intra-party cohesion and uses Hirschman's theory to establish a framework suitable for the study of intra-party cohesion and intra-party conflict. The framework helps drawing attention to types of conflicts occurring within each face of the party organization, beyond the legislative arena, but also between these faces. The framework aims at systematizing the analysis and measurement of intra-party conflicts, also as dynamic phenomena.

The following articles build on this framework and tackle empirically the multifacets of intra-party conflict, their relationship and their determinants. The work of van Vonno explores two attitudinal facets of intra-party conflict, "disagreement" and "(dis)loyalty," among legislators across levels of power in the Netherlands (local, provincial, national). Her article highlights different mechanisms and determinants of these two facets across levels of government. She sets forth the role of various factors at several levels of the polity (government, party and individual), such as party group characteristics, legislators' career, background and attitudes. Her study also evaluates the role of legislators' "principals" (Carey, 2007) and internalization of norms of party solidarity and unity.

Using survey data collected in Croatia and Slovenia, Kukec focuses on an ideological type of intra-party conflict, that is, ideological incongruence, between local councilors and their national party. His study thus provides one of the first empirical examinations of conflict between a party and its local councilors, which are under-studied but still decisive intra-party actors. He focuses on ideological incongruence between local councilors and their party as a dependent variable and observes the influence of party-level (intra-party competition, candidate selection) and individual-level factors (resources, socialization, and ambition). The analysis specifically underlines the role of ambition and intra-party competition in reducing conflict.

The article of Wauters, de Vet and Poletti examine the disloyalty of party members, expressed through voting occasionally for another party than the one they belong to. Their study uses survey data collected in Belgium and Britain and analyses the effect of multiple factors at several levels: individual-level considerations linked to ideological concerns and perception of the leadership, party-level characteristics, such as electoral performances, and system-level features, such as the electoral system. Their findings highlight empirical relationship between different dimensions of conflict: disloyal voting behaviour would be affected by ideological distance as well as by dissatisfaction with the leadership.

Ceron and Greene look at ideological conflicts between intra-party factions during party congresses and examine how these conflicts do impact the content of party manifesto. They investigate the case of the French Parti Socialiste (PS) between 1969 and 2015. Using automated content analysis, they analyze how intra-party group motions and individual speeches given during national party congresses might exert an agenda-setting effect on party programmes. Their findings suggest that manifesto content does reflect compromises made between competing intra-party factions during party congresses.

Nikolenyi considers party switching (in the legislative arena) as an ultimate step of intra-party conflict, leading to party splits. He examines how the implementation of anti-defection law in Israel in 1991 affected legislators' incentives to exit the party that got them elected. His analysis distinguishes between individual and collective types of exit and suggests that anti-defection law had a distinct impact on these two forms of conflict. In addition, anti-defection law also seem to affect the timing of defection.

Bolleyer, von Nostitz, and Bormann further innovate, by analyzing how the party organization itself, through the implementation of intra-party tribunals, can manage different sorts of intra-party conflicts. The authors use a novel data set covering 1088 tribunal decisions in six German parties from 1967 until 2015 and highlight the role of political and strategic considerations on judge's propensity to accept or reject a case. Their findings suggest a positive

relationship between ideological unity and case acceptance by party tribunals.


### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### ORCID iD

Sergiu Gherghina  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6627-5598>

### References

- Andeweg RB and Thomassen J (2011) Pathways to party unity: sanctions, loyalty, homogeneity and division of labour in the Dutch parliament. *Party Politics* 17: 655–672.
- Bolleyer N (2012) New party organization in Western Europe: of party hierarchies, strataarchies and federations. *Party Politics* 18: 315–336.
- Bowler S, Farrell DM and Katz RS (eds) (1999) *Party Discipline and Parliamentary Government, Parliaments and Legislatures Series*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Carey JM (2007) Competing principals, political institutions, and party unity in legislative voting. *American Journal of Political Science* 51: 92–107.
- Carey JM (2009) *Legislative Voting and Accountability*, 1st ed. New-York: Cambridge University Press.
- Carty RK (2004) Parties as franchise systems: the strataarchical organizational imperative. *Party Politics* 10: 5–24.
- Ceron A (2015) Brave rebels stay home. Assessing the effect of intra-party ideological heterogeneity and party whip on roll-call votes. *Party Politics* 21: 246–258.
- Farrell DM, Mair P, Ó Muineacháin S, et al. (2015) Courting but not always serving: perverted Burkeanism and the puzzle of Irish Parliamentary Cohesion. In: Johnston R and Sharman C (eds), *Parties and Party Systems. Structure and Context*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, pp. 92–107.
- Gherghina S (2014) *Party Organization and Electoral Volatility in Central and Eastern Europe: Enhancing Voter Loyalty*. London: Routledge.
- Hazan RY (ed.) (2006) *Cohesion and Discipline in Legislatures: Political Parties, Party Leadership, Parliamentary Committees and Governance*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Kam CJ (2009) *Party Discipline and Parliamentary Politics*, 1st ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Katz RS and Mair P (eds) (1992) *Party Organizations. A Data Handbook on Party Organizations in Western Democracies, 1960–1990*. London: Sage.
- Katz RS and Mair P (1994) The evolutions of party organizations in Europe: three faces of party organization. *American Review of Politics* 14(Winter): 593–617.
- Panbianco A (1988) *Political Parties: Organization and Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pedersen HH (2010) How intra-party power relations affect the coalition behaviour of political parties. *Party Politics* 16: 737–754.
- Proksch SO and Slapin JB (2012) Institutional foundations of legislative speech. *American Journal of Political Science* 56: 520–537.
- Scarrow S (2015) *Beyond Party Members. Changing Approaches to Partisan Mobilization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sieberer U (2006) Party unity in parliamentary democracies: a comparative analysis. *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 12: 150–178.
- Stecker C (2015) How effects on party unity vary across votes. *Party Politics* 21: 791–802.
- van Haute E and Gauja A (2015) *Party Members and Activists*. Abingdon: Routledge.

### Author biographies

**Sergiu Gherghina** is a Lecturer in Comparative Politics at the Department of Politics, University of Glasgow. His research interests lie in party politics, legislative and voting behavior, democratization, and the use of direct democracy.

**Caroline Close** is a FNRS Postdoctoral Researcher at the Centre for the Study of Politics (Cevipol), Université libre de Bruxelles. Her main research interests are party organization, intraparty politics, party ideology, legislative studies, elections as well as (intra-party) democratic innovations.

**Petr Kopecký** is Professor of Political Science at Leiden University. His main research interest are political parties and party systems in contemporary democracies. His current research focuses on the relationship between political patronage and the processes of party building and party organizational transformation.