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Appointing to Govern: Party Patronage in Europe

Petr Kopecký, Peter Mair, and Maria Spirova, eds., Party Patronage and Party Government in European Democracies (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012). xvi, 415 pp. \$110.00 (cloth), ISBN: 9780199599370.

Fabrizio Di Mascio, Partiti e stato in Italia: Le nomine pubbliche tra clientelismo e spoils system (Bologna, Italy: Il Mulino, 2012). 271 pp. €26.00, ISBN: 9788815237453.

Modern democracies are party democracies. Parties can be more (e.g., traditional European mass parties) or less (e.g., U.S. parties) structured. They can be tightly linked to society or to a specific societal segment, or they can reproduce the traits of the so-called cartel party model. Whatever the differences, parties are the actors that make representative democracies work.

From this viewpoint, party patronage is a quite neglected topic. Patronage is usually conceived as a form of compensation for a party's favors (mostly electoral support), and journalist-chronicled examples are rife across developed and developing party systems alike. Yet scholars of party government more frequently focus on the modes of selection of political rulers and on the behavior of party actors in the executive branch, directing less attention to party patronage as a vital aspect of governance.

A comprehensive and empirically updated book on party patronage that attempts to redress this oversight is, in principle, a warmly welcomed contribution. And this is what *Party Patronage and Party Government in European Democracies*, edited by Petr Kopecký, Peter Mair, and Maria Spirova, seeks to be. In its structure, it follows the classic pattern of many comparative edited volumes. The three editors provide the theoretical framework, lay out guidelines for the empirical research, and draw summary conclusions. In between, several country experts provide their contributions across 15 chapters, each dedicated to one country.

Linking the two books under review, the author of the Italian case has also written the second book reviewed here. Notwithstanding the shared origin with its "elder brother," *Partiti e stato in Italia* (Parties and State in Italy) is more than a mere spinoff; rather, it is a valuable effort to provide a better understanding of how political parties control institutions and the extent to which they do so through public appointments in a country considered a textbook example of patronage. This relation between the two works is enough to justify a common review. Let us take the two books in turn, beginning with that by Kopecký, Mair, and Spirova.

The scope of *Party Patronage* testifies to the large-scale effort behind it. The book's focus is not only on a specific part of the European Continent; the range of the countries goes from northern to southern, from western to eastern, from older to newer democracies.¹ The first chapter, by two of the editors (Kopecký and Mair), poses the framework for analysis. The authors distinguish between party patronage as an organizational resource and patronage as an electoral resource (clientelism and brokerage). What is at stake is the first kind of patronage. Patronage represents "a form of institutional control or of institutional exploitation that operates to the benefit of the party organization. . . . Patronage in this sense can best be considered as [one of the forms of] party-state linkage[s], rather than as a party-society linkage" (7–8). Simply, patronage is defined as "the power of political parties to appoint people to positions in state institutions" (8),² with its scope of influence being the range of positions that are distributed.

Three reasons extracted from the literature for expecting more party patronage in this sense are singled out. First, parties are now situated more in public offices and less in organizations of mass integration; they behave, according to the famous expression of Ingrid Van Biezen, as public utilities. In this view, patronage becomes a crucial resource for parties to anchor themselves to the political system. Second, the decline

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of ideologies forces parties to distinguish themselves on the basis of policy performances and managerial experience. And third, more complex government decision making produces the need for new organizational networks. In each chapter, the authors test these hypotheses by answering four key questions: What is the level of patronage? What motivations move parties? What role do parties have? And to what extent are patronage practices consensual or majoritarian?

The research design is described in the second chapter (Kopecký and Spirova). The notion of state is translated into a map of nine policy sectors that patronage can reach (local government being one of these). Each sector, in turn, is subdivided into three hierarchical levels: ministerial departments, nondepartmental agencies and commissions, and executing institutions. The (qualitative) inquiry is made by means of semi-structured interviews submitted to some experts (civil servants, academic scholars, politicians, journalists, and others) of the fields in each country.

The single-country chapters follow a common structure. They start with a brief introduction to the national party system and public sector organization (with an eye toward changes over time), followed by detailed empirical analysis and a set of country-specific conclusions.

The book's thoughtful conclusion is in the eighteenth chapter (again Kopecký and Mair). Diachronic intercountry differences are discovered with respect to the cohesiveness of party patronage: some countries, such as Italy, have displayed an unraveling of the party organizations as actors of patronage; others, such as Bulgaria and Spain, still exhibit an emphasis on the party more than on individuals. The overall finding involves a shift of party patronage, from an electoral resource to an organizational resource. Also richly explored by the authors are today's comparatively higher levels of patronage in the southern and post-communist democracies (where patronage can be useful for the party-building process), although Germany and Austria are significant exceptions to the trend. The latter actually ranks second in party-patronage levels, between Greece and Italy. The United Kingdom—an example of majoritarian patronage—and the Netherlands—where it is more consensual—are at the lowest levels. With regard to motivations for patronage, the analysis emphasizes control as the first reason, while reward becomes important mostly if associated with control. Political allegiance is not the first criterion employed to select appointees but rather the second, placed between professionalism (the most mentioned by the interviewed experts) and personal allegiance (described as relevant in many cases).

One key point is that Italy, already “a paradigmatic case” (229) of (clientelistic) patronage across its First

Republic (until the early 1990s), is still a very peculiar case in terms of reducing parties to the role of simple coordinators of a highly personalized patronage.

These peculiarities enhance the worth of a volume dedicated solely to Italy. The main findings of Di Mascio's book are, naturally enough, the same as those found in his chapter of *Party Patronage and Party Government in European Democracies*. Added value arises from the in-depth analysis of the case. In spite of the focus on the Italian political system, the work seeks to place it, in a comparative way, inside the broader European context on the basis of the aforementioned collective project. This adds breadth to the book.

Partiti e Stato in Italia initially moves from a discussion of conceptual issues and changes in party organizations in a comparative perspective, with the specific analysis of Italy beginning in the second chapter. After posing the theoretical premises of his research, Di Mascio turns at length to the party system and the administrative system. With regard to the former, the author examines the Italian case during the “bipolar period” that began in 1994. More specifically, the new dynamics of party competition, the trend toward the personalization of politics, and the relationships between parties and executives are illustrated.

The latter, the structure of the administrative system, is a theme less investigated—but, according to Di Mascio, not less important than the party system. The idea is that both create constraints and opportunities for the use of patronage. In other words, together they shape the room for maneuver of political actors. The consideration of the second variable is even more important for the analysis of Italian patronage because of the several relevant reforms (or at least interventions) that have affected Italy in the last 20 years.

The fourth and fifth chapters cover empirical research and a discussion of the data. Just to cite the main country-specific findings, Di Mascio tells us that in Italy, expertise and personal relations are the leading criteria when it comes to appointing public offices. At most, a minor role is played by the party membership. As for the parties as collective actors, they are not—I underline once again—“actors of the process of patronage ... which is a prerogative of the élite constituting the party in government” (144). Moreover, we learn that patronage appointments are mainly made, in line with the general pattern, to control motivations. However, this is true in particular with regard to the central level, whereas at the local level, patronage is more often an instrument for political compensation.

A concluding sixth chapter is dedicated to the comparison between Italy and the other democracies included in the aforementioned cross-national project.

To conclude, the two books are valuable pieces that bring fresh air into the study of party government and politics–public sector relationships. It goes without saying that Di Mascio’s book will reach a limited audience owing to the language in which is written (Italian), which is less accessible even to many Europeanist scholars. However, this fits with its aims, that is, to present an accurate study of party patronage in Italy from 1994 onward to specialists of Italian politics and public administration. Given the audience, the language is not such a major shortcoming. Of course, the book is best read in light of the broader project from which it ensues.

As for the volume edited by Kopecký, Mair, and Spirova, it is an essential reference for those interested in the study of party patronage. The research is accurately packaged, the chapters are clearly written, and the conclusions are intriguing and will inspire a raft of related research. One might say that a truly comparative book, with less reliance on single-country chapters, could be even more appreciated. This could be a step for future research. Furthermore, the volume sets the bases for other comparisons. It could be very interesting to have a study of party patronage outside Europe, that is, in the United States, in order to observe possible differences and similarities.

Summing up, both *Party Patronage and Party Government in European Democracies* and *Partiti e Stato in Italia* are good works that the scholarly/

review literature has largely missed. Each enriches our knowledge of a basic face of party government. They also better define the field of investigation, from a theoretical standpoint, by clarifying the concept of patronage. And, finally, they propose sturdy empirical studies and enter the “black box” of the link between parties and state in many contemporary diverse democracies.

For all of these reasons, these two works—and the former in particular—may be considered as essential references for scholars who will decide to study – theoretically or empirically—party patronage in Europe (and beyond). Each book is also a stimulating read for not only specialists of the topic but for all those simply interested in it. Those who are able to read Italian will find in the latter volume a further detailed source of knowledge on a very illustrative case.

Notes

1. The countries are Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom.
2. With regard to this, one could stress a certain conceptual ambiguity in the definition. As soon becomes clear reading the book, patronage is in practice mostly considered as the *action* of appointing, not as a potential power. This is confirmed by the fact the authors often speak about the possibilities that parties have to exercise patronage. A more detailed discussion of the point is beyond the scope of this review article.