Refereed article

Political Parties in Europe and South Asia and Unwritten Rules: Patterns, Differences, and Similarities of Party Structures

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Summary
This article traces indicators for the “unwritten rules” that shape the functioning of political parties. Unwritten rules are taken to be ideas and patterns of meaning that are not formalized, but that nevertheless still influence and inform the political choices and actions of both individual and collective actors. For these unwritten rules to be able to exert influence, they need to be appreciated and shared by a considerable number of actors. Unwritten rules can, furthermore, have effects in most formal political settings on both the input and output level of the political process.

The first two working hypotheses presented in this article are that: a) unwritten rules shape party structures and b) that these unwritten rules can show similarities to each other even if the political system indicators are simultaneously very different. To test these hypotheses, the article undertakes an exploratory discussion of party structures in two Asian — India and Pakistan — and two European countries — France and Germany. The next hypothesis presented in the article is that: c) despite these apparent differences, similarities can be found with regard to four core factors shaping both the party system and the parties themselves: (1) the role of key persons and/or political families; (2) the stability of the parties; (3) the role of ideological currents; and, (4) the role of women, as well as patterns of gender representation and participation in the parties. In a final hypothesis, it is then proposed that: d) any similarities with regard to these dimensions can be explained by the comparable unwritten rules that are at work in them.

Introduction
In this article we want to trace indicators for the “unwritten rules” that shape the functioning of political parties. Our understanding of unwritten rules is based on the discussions of the research context presented in the editorial of this issue, and also in the featured article by Ursula Birsl and Samuel Salzborn. As such, we take unwritten rules to be ideas and patterns of meaning that are not formalized but that nevertheless still influence and shape the political choices and actions of both individual and