



Call for Incentive Research Collaboration 2024

Project COCOPE

The End of Party Government? Assessing the Conditions and
Consequences of Personal Parties' Rise to Power

AURORA



Co-funded by
the European Union



PROJECT IDENTIFICATION

Project title:

The End of Party Government? Assessing the Conditions and Consequences of Personal Parties' Rise to Power.

Project acronym: COCOPE

COORDINATOR

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OBJECTIVE

This project enquires why personal parties emerge, proliferate and grow, and how they affect the current state and future of representative democracy. More specifically, it looks into the conditions and consequences of personal parties' success at a time when party government as we knew it is in decline in many parts of the democratic world. It raises, and seeks to answer, two main research questions: what explains the success of personal parties? And what are their effects on democratic representation?

ILLUSTRATION OF THE PROJECT

Personal parties are characterized by highly personalized leaderships that are little more than devices to support, and help satisfy, the personal ambitions of political entrepreneurs. These parties have become a large fraction among new parties in Europe and beyond and call into question the normative foundations of representative democracy and party government. We hypothesize that the combination of societal individualization, dissatisfaction with democratic institutions and unstable patterns of party competition provide the best condition for the (emergence and) success of personal parties.

As for the effects, we put forward four major assumptions. First, the establishment of personal parties de-institutionalizes party systems. Second, it leads to the rise of new political elites, marked by significantly lower levels of political professionalism. Third, personal parties increase electoral volatility and make patterns of government formation less predictable. Fourth, there are distinct consequences on public policies to be investigated.

Our analysis has major implications for the understanding of one of the most profound changes that liberal democracies – and citizens all over Europe – are experiencing: the shift of power from groups to individual leaders, who turn into key representative linkages between the citizens and the state, at the expense of intermediate collective actors.

SOCIAL IMPACTS AND TARGETED SDG

In a first step, a new comprehensive dataset on the ‘Conditions and Consequences of Personal Parties’ Success’ (COCOPE) will be created. Specifically, the dataset will include information about personal parties, focusing on countries where – all else equal – the institutional setting should disincentivize party personalism. In a second step, the project will provide four case studies about the consequences of successful personal parties in four different European democracies. In a third step, the project will create a ‘public space’ with citizens and policymakers to co-create scenarios on the pressing question ‘How can we address the logics and consequences of personal parties’ to strengthen liberal democracy in Europe?’. Overall, our project will systematize a burgeoning but deeply fragmented field of research, introducing an integrated theoretical framework designed to account for the conditions and consequences of personal parties as well as a unique dataset, which will serve as key reference for future debate in this field.

AURORA ADDED VALUE

The project is set to play a key role in strengthening the Aurora Network and building a robust - community with long-term beneficial consequences. We believe that the Aurora Network is a most important opportunity to put expertise together and create a long-lasting team of scholars working on party change in contemporary democracies.

The setting of a robust basis to develop a broader research proposal to be submitted within the EU-funded Horizon scheme (2021-2027) is also expected.