



## REVIEW OF DIPLOMA THESIS

**Review type:** Opponent's Review

**Author of the diploma thesis:** Kim Roskam

**Title:** Political Parties in Contemporary Policy Process Frameworks: A Unitary Collective Actor or a Dynamic Organisation?

**Author of the review:** Mirna Jusić, M.A., Ph.D.

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*Evaluate the diploma thesis based on the following considerations (not necessarily in this order):*

1) *Factual benefits of work and its added value;*

The author explores how political parties are conceptualized by six contemporary theoretical frameworks of the policy process - Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), Institutional Analysis and Development Framework (IADF), Multiple Streams Framework (MSF), Narrative Policy Framework (NPF), Policy Feedback Theory (PFT), Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET). To that end, the author has conducted a comparative small-n study that works with two distinct conceptualizations of political parties (unitary collective actors vs. dynamic organizations or “three party faces”). The thesis findings show that only the MSF presents political parties as dynamic organizations; the NPF, PFT and the PET primarily depict political parties as unitary actors; while the ACF and the IADF contain limited information on the role of political parties in the policy process.

The author's main contribution lies in the in-depth exploration of the conceptualization of the role of the political party within policy process literature. She argues in her thesis that the rise in anti-establishment parties “may remind scholars and practitioners of the importance of political parties (and ideologies) in the policymaking process.” (p.7) This is especially relevant, as the author argues, considering the conceptualizations of political parties as ‘unitary collective actors’ stemming from scholarly work on the policy process of American scholars. In her work, the author emphasizes that a broader understanding of political parties that would consider party-related actors and elements could increase the understanding of their role in the policy process.

The contribution of the thesis lies also in the fact that the author looks at the differences between how parties are conceptualized in the policy vs. political science literature, where the focus on the dynamic nature of political parties is more widespread. Another contribution is in the comparison of the conceptualizations of political parties in policy process literature over time.

2) *Setting and answering research questions;*

In her thesis, the author seeks to answer the main research question of *how political parties are presented in contemporary policy process frameworks*. In answering her main research questions, she aims not only to describe various roles of political parties in policymaking, but also to understand if a more detailed conceptualization of parties would strengthen our understanding of their role in the policy process (p.8).



To answer her question, the thesis first provides a literature review on political parties, pinpointing the differences between American and European parties and the relevant literature on how this influences the understanding of the role of parties in policymaking. Furthermore, the thesis provides a literature review on party organization literature and explores more dynamic conceptualizations (e.g. ‘the three party faces’ by Katz and Mair, 1993). The author argues that this latter conceptualization provides an alternative to the depiction of parties as unitary collective actors, as it allows for a more dynamic depiction that can strengthen the understanding of their role in the policy process (p. 9). The thesis explores in detail the current political party conceptualizations within (and across) six contemporary policy process frameworks, relying on samples from the most recent editions of the *Theories of the Policy Process* volume. In the thesis, a distinction is made between ‘unitary’ and ‘organizational’ perspectives on political parties as the thesis explores on a comparative small-n study how each framework depicts parties.

The author has answered her main research question in a convincing way. However, how a more detailed conceptualization of political parties would strengthen our understanding of their role in the policy process (as mentioned in the Introduction as one of the aims of the thesis) could have been more explicitly tackled in the discussion part. This is to some extent addressed in the conceptual framework (and more indirectly in the findings and the discussion).

### 3) *Structure of work;*

The structure of the work is clear and contains all important elements of an academic text. The author starts with an introduction, which includes the main research question, and continues with the literature review, a conceptual framework, the methodology (including research design, sample selection and method of analysis), the findings, a discussion, and a conclusion.

### 4) *The factual accuracy and convincing of the argumentation;*

The argumentation flows well, and the author’s arguments are backed by evidence. In the literature review, the author convincingly decides to structure the ongoing academic debate on the differences in the roles of political parties in the policymaking process between the US and European contexts along the two heuristics of political parties as collective actors vs. dynamic organizations, a dichotomy that the author makes use of throughout the thesis.

The conceptual framework, which outlines Katz’ and Mair’s “three party faces”, a conceptualization of political parties as dynamic political actors, is well-suited for the thesis.

With respect to the findings and the discussion, one point (also mentioned below in the methodology part) that could be improved upon are the keywords that distinguish between unitary and organizational perspectives, as some of the keywords that are attributed to the latter perspective could also be relevant in case of the former. Moreover, while the analysis of references in the bibliographies of the chapters studied is valuable, arguing that fewer or more references made to European vs. America scholars (e.g. p. 69) may be indicative of the perspective that the chapter takes on the conceptualization of political parties is not convincing, as these aspects may not always be linked.

### 5) *Sophistication and application of theoretical approaches;*

The author’s entire thesis is essentially focused on the conceptualization of political parties in theoretical literature, more specifically the policy process literature. As such, she does not apply theoretical approaches directly, but rather analyzes them, which is a valid approach given the focus of the thesis. She does so in a convincing and comprehensive way, after outlining a detailed conceptual



and methodological framework. The discussion of the theoretical frameworks and their conceptualization of political parties in the Findings and Discussion parts is superb.

Three dimensions of power (Katz and Mair, 1993), which contribute to the understanding of internal party dynamics as continuous processes of accommodation and mutual adjustment are beneficial for a more complete understanding of political parties. Nevertheless, it would have been interesting to mention (in the conceptual framework) whether the literature supporting the unitary perspective completely ignores internal party dynamics. It appears that this would be a somewhat simplistic understanding of how parties (in the US context) operate.

6) *Methodological approach and application of particular methods and approaches;*

The methodological approach of the thesis is clear. The author explains her focus on the depiction of political parties in contemporary policy process frameworks to be able to understand the role of parties through a variety of theoretical lenses and gauge whether this understanding corresponds to conceptualization of political parties as dynamic organizational actors or unitary actors.

To do so, the author has chosen to conduct a small-n study on six contemporary policy process frameworks. She primarily relies on qualitative analysis of a small number of cases, although some quantitative elements are incorporated to strengthen the comparison between frameworks. The approach seems justified considering the focus of the thesis, despite the limitations of small-n studies (which are emphasized on p. 26).

The thesis also looks at the development of frameworks over time, looking at conceptualizations of political parties in volumes published in 2018 and 2023. This appears justified, as the author wanted to see whether the increased interest in these theoretical approaches could have resulted in a more comprehensive understanding of the role of political parties (p. 28).

The author also describes in detail the sample selection (six frameworks). However, the rationale that the first six frameworks in the *Theories of the Policy Process* volume were assumed to be sorted based on their overall relevance and thus, the author chose the first six frameworks (rather than a total of eight frameworks), could be more convincing and explained in more depth.

To study the six frameworks, the author has opted to analyze key paragraphs that explicitly or implicitly discuss the role of political parties in the policymaking process. (p. 30). How the paragraphs were selected (and with which key terms) is described in detail and shown in Table III (p.32). Nevertheless, the argument that the terms “political party” and “political parties” are good enough proxies to represent the conceptualization of political parties as a unitary collective actor could be strengthened, also given the more extensive conceptualization of organizational perspective (Table II). The mention of these terms does not automatically appear to imply a unitary perspective, and the unitary perspective may also include terms like “party ideology” or “elected” and “appointed officials” (as these may, as the author argues in the discussion, “be portrayed as being receptive to wider party influences and reveal little about future intra-party dynamics,” p. 68).

Overall, the methodological section is extensive, clear, and well-written.

7) *Use of literature and data;*

The author relies on an extensive number of relevant scientific sources. The literature review is comprehensive and well-written. The emphasis of the scope of the literature review (and its limitations, e.g. in relation to the geographical locations studied) is appreciated.



Turnitin shows a 24% similarity score. However, the text shows similarity of all sources to the extent of less than 1%. After carefully reviewing the Turnitin report for the thesis, it is clear that the similarity score can be attributed to the use of quotes and a great number of concepts, as a substantial part of the thesis is devoted to exploring theoretical frameworks.

8) *Stylistic and text editing (quote, text layout, etc.).*

Very well-written academic text with no stylistic or text editing issues. A few minor points: Page breaks before each chapter would make the layout cleaner; some paragraphs are too long and merit breaks for easier reading (e.g. p. 12; p. 20).

9) *Question for defense (not obligatory)*

- 1) What changes pertaining to the conceptualization of political parties would you recommend to one or more policy process frameworks that you have explored in your thesis? How could such changes contribute to a better understanding of the role of political parties in the policymaking processes?
- 2) How can an improved understanding of the role of political parties in policymaking processes support the work of policy communities in the European context?

**For the above reasons, I recommend the diploma thesis for the defense.**

**My grading is "A".**

Date: 11/1/2024

Signature: