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## Factionalism in Political Parties: An Analytical Framework for Comparative Studies

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### **Factionalism in Political Parties: An Analytical Framework for Comparative Studies**

Patrick Köllner and Matthias Basedau

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## **Factionalism in Political Parties: An Analytical Framework for Comparative Studies**

### **Abstract**

Factionalism can affect the stability and institutionalization of parties and party systems and it can impact on the efficiency and legitimacy of political parties and political systems as a whole. Nevertheless, factionalism has only received scant attention in the comparative literature on political parties. As this paper shows, there is no dearth of conceptual approaches and hypotheses which can readily be used to advance the systematic analysis of factionalism. We survey the relevant literature and offer a comprehensive analytical framework to stimulate comparatively oriented and nuanced studies of the causes, characteristics and consequences of intra-party groups.

Key words: political parties, factionalism, party organization, electoral systems, party finance

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## **Zusammenfassung**

### **Faktionalismus in politischen Parteien:**

#### **Ein analytischer Rahmen für vergleichende Studien**

Faktionalismus kann die Stabilität und Institutionalisierung von Parteien und Parteiensystemen beeinträchtigen und er kann sich auch auf deren Effizienz und Legitimität auswirken. Dennoch hat der Faktionalismus in der vergleichenden Forschung zu politischen Parteien nur begrenzte Aufmerksamkeit erfahren. Wie dieses Papier zeigt, gibt es indes keinen Mangel an konzeptuellen Ansätzen und Hypothesen, die für die Entwicklung einer systematischen Analyse innerparteilicher Gruppierungen genutzt werden können. Auf Basis einer Gesamtbetrachtung der bisherigen Forschung entwickeln wir in diesem Paper einen umfassenden analytischen Rahmen, der komparative orientierte und differenzierte Studien der Ursachen, Charakteristika und Auswirkungen des Faktionalismus in politischen Parteien ermöglicht.

## **Article Outline**

1. Introduction
2. Factions: Viewpoints, Structures and Functions
3. Structural Characteristics of Different Types of Factions
4. Functions of Intra-Party Factions
5. Consequences of Factionalism: Intra-Party Groups as Independent Variable
6. Explanations of Factionalism: Intra-Party Groups as Dependent Variable
7. Concluding Comments

### **1. Introduction**

Political parties are of central importance for the functioning of democratic systems (Lipset 2000). It is therefore not surprising that their structures and processes, as well as the factors which determine or influence them, have been analyzed time and again. The resulting stream of research has shown a great variety of possible organizational forms that political parties can take – and thus also a variety of ways in which parties perform society and state-oriented tasks. In organizational terms, parties can exhibit a hierarchical and bureaucratic form, they can exist as loose umbrella organizations for individual candidates or they can fall in between these extremes (Morgenstern 2001: 235). There is no universally valid organizational form of political parties, nor one that is forced upon them by sheer necessity. There is also no ideal or best organizational form since today's advantages of a given form can amount to disadvantages tomorrow (Panebianco 1988: 17; Wiesendahl 1998: 64; Sferza 2002: 168, 189). Like all organizations, parties exhibit alongside their formal organizational structure informal relational systems, operating procedures, and norms which are institutional-

ized to different degrees (Köllner 2006: chapter 2). At least in democracies and hybrid regimes in the non-Western world it cannot be assumed that formal structures and rules 'form the framework, binding for all concerned, in which intra-party processes take place' (Poguntke 2000: 84).

A central insight of the literature on party organization is that parties are *not* homogenous organizations which are sure of their goals and which follow some sort of unitary will. Rather, parties consist of coalitions of political actors who pursue their individual interests and goals. The coalition these actors enter are based on the exchange of political resources (Panebianco 1998: chapter 1). Just as politics in general can be seen as a process based on the conflictive and consensus-oriented relations among interdependent individuals, intra-party politics is characterized by conflict and consensus between interdependent groups within parties (Maor 1997: 147). The activities of intra-party groups, so-called factions, can not only influence changes in the identity, organization, and internal decision-making processes of parties (cf. Harmel and Tan 2003). Factions can also affect the stability of parties and party systems. They can influence how parties perform their societal and state-oriented tasks. Factions can thus impinge upon the legitimacy and efficiency of democratic political systems (see also below).

Against this background it is surprising that the study of the dynamics and underlying factors of intra-party factions has not played much of a role in the literature on party politics. In spite of a new wave of research about the organization of political parties within the past fifteen years or so, the topic of intra-party groups has received only scant attention in comparative work. Factionalism gets barely mentioned in relevant text books and survey articles (see e.g. Duverger 1959; Ware 1996; Katz 2002). Here the discussion centers on formal party structures, the distribution of power within parties, intra-party politics, and the resources which parties possess but factions are only noted in passing, if at all. Even Sartori (1976), who deals in his well-known book on parties and party systems in a more in-depth manner with the conceptualization and analytical penetration of intra-party groups, denies them in contrast to political parties any functionality. However, as we will argue in this article, intra-party groups can have important functions and consequences for the parties and political systems concerned. In extreme cases, factions can even be more relevant actors than the parties which host them.

Not all academic works have regarded intra-party groups as ephemeral, short-lived and thus unimportant and ignorable. Individual works on democratic representation through political parties (Graham 1993: chapter 8) and party-systems in long-existing democracies such as Great Britain (Maor 1997: chapter 5; Webb 2000: chapter 6), for example, have dealt with factions in the context of discussions of party cohesion or competition within parties.

Over the last ten years or so, there have also been an increasing number of rational-choice analyzes of the impact of electoral systems and other formal arrangements on the emergence and development of factionalism.<sup>1</sup> Before we will present in the following sections our own analytical framework, we first explain what exactly we mean by factionalism and factions in political parties.

## 2. Factions: Viewpoints, Structures and Functions

We will approach the phenomenon of factionalism first from an etymological and semantic point of view. A fairly neutral explanation is offered by *Webster's New Encyclopedic Dictionary* (1996: 359) which supplies two meanings for the word 'faction':

1. A group or combination acting together within and usually against the larger body (as in a state, political party, or church).
2. Dissension within a group (Latin *factio* 'act of making, faction', from *facere* 'to make, do').

In general terms there are two basic views with regard to factions and political parties. From the perspective of modernization theory factions are proto-parties or forms of party organization which are precursors to more developed 'modern' parties. Factions are perceived here as being characteristic of the early stages of the so-called modernization process in which individuals and groups have broken with traditional patterns of political behavior but the degree of political participation and institutionalization is still low (Chambers 1963; Huntington 1968: 412-415).<sup>2</sup>

The vast majority of studies portray factions as groups within parties. There are, however, nearly as many views of such intra-party groups as there are studies. Repeatedly there have been attempts to approach the topic in a more systematic manner. In particular, typologies of factions have been developed which focus on different kinds of factional structures and functions. Yet there is little agreement about the characteristics which determine factions in a constitutive manner. Studies have also arrived at quite diverging findings about the causes of factionalism and its consequences for political parties, party systems, and political systems (see below).

Before we will deal ourselves with the possible structures, consequences, and causes of factionalism in political parties, we must define factions from a political-science perspective. In

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Cox and Rosenbluth 1996, Cox et al. 2000, Morgenstern 2001.

<sup>2</sup> In the 18th century the terms faction and party were used synonymously. On the differentiation of these two terms thereafter see Müller-Rommel (1982: 10-11).



1931 Harold Lasswell provided one of the first such definitions in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*:

[T]he term faction is commonly used to designate any constituent group of a larger unit which works for the advancement of particular persons or policies. The faction arises in the struggle for power and represents a division on details of application and not on principles.<sup>3</sup>

In his well-known study of politics in the southern states of the US, Key used a much more restricted definition of factions. For him a faction denoted a group of people, both voters and politicians, which forms at a certain point of time in support of a given candidate running for office (Key [1949] 1984: 16). This limited instrumental focus on factions was however not taken up in the subsequent literature.<sup>4</sup> In a first explorative article on factionalism in political parties, Zariski used a much wider definition. For Zariski (1960: 33) a faction was synonymous with ‘any intra-party combination, clique, or grouping whose members share a sense of common identity and common purpose and are organized to act collectively – as a distinct bloc within the party – to achieve their goals’.

The various definitions of factions betray different approaches to the topic which render generalizing conceptualizations and systematic comparative analyses more difficult. Against this background, one further definition is of particular interest a) because it is broad enough to encompass various types of intra-party groups and b) because it does not assume the necessity of certain cultural dispositions as some other definitions do. It comes from Beller and Belloni (1978: 419) who define factions as ‘any relatively organized group that exists within the context of some other group and which (as a *political* faction) competes with rivals for power advantages within the larger group of which it is a part’ (emphasis in the original). From this perspective, as Maor (1997: 149) has put it succinctly, factionalism in political parties can be understood as a form of conflict organization which reflects the tendency of intra-party actors to act collectively to reach common goals.

In drawing together the definitions of Zariski, Beller and Belloni, we use the term ‘faction’ to designate every intra-party grouping which

- exists for a certain period of time,
- possesses a minimum of organization,
- exhibits a common group-consciousness,

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<sup>3</sup> Cited in Müller-Rommel (1982: 14).

<sup>4</sup> Key’s attempt to come to terms with the different characteristics of factions in the Deep South’s Democratic Party provided an important impulse for subsequent research. Key can thus be regarded as the *spiritus rector* of political-science research on factionalism (Graham 1993: 141-146; Grynaviski 2004).

- actively pursues political goals, be these policy-, personal-, or group-specific ones, within a party, and which thus
- can be discerned as a bloc within the party.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Structural Characteristics of Different Types of Factions

The above-mentioned definitions of factions do not yet tell us much about the structures and functions of intra-party groupings. Well-known attempts to differentiate between different types of intra-party groups have been presented by Rose (1964) and Hine (1982). Both see factions as an expression of deeply-rooted or institutionalized differentiation within parties. In comparison to tendencies, single-issue groups, or wings within parties, factions, to their minds, are characterized by a higher degree of organization, a shared identity, an a binding agreement on common goals. Furthermore, Hine argues that factions are disciplined groups with a solid organization who are conscious of their own existence and possess some stable personnel. According to Rose (1964: 37), tendencies are for one defined by a stable set of attitudes rather than a stable group of politicians. Thus a tendency does not equal any group of individuals within a party. Instead, for Rose, a tendency presents a changing coalition of people who share certain political attitudes and who band together from time to time under the label of a tendency.

Implicit to this conceptualization of factions is a sense of longevity. Thus, even a group which puts forward clearly visible political positions or leaders should not be called a faction if it does not exist for a certain period of time. Intra-party groups that exist only for a limited span of time are unlikely to develop an 'organizational backbone' (Pridham 1995: 10). What in this perspective differentiates factions from other intra-party groups is their greater organizational strength and their durability, in other words their high degree of institutionalization.

While Rose and Hine thus differentiate factions from other intra-party groups, Beller and Belloni (1978) beg to differ. The two political scientists understand 'factions' as an overarching category of differently structured intra-party groups. They differentiate these groups on the basis of their particular organizational traits. Beller and Belloni distinguish between a) cliques and tendencies, b) personal, client-group factions, and c) institutionalized, organizational factions.

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<sup>5</sup> The informal character of intra-party groupings is as a rule, but not always a trait of factions. Groups mentioned in party statutes (e.g. youth associations) can act as factions if, but only if, they exhibit the other traits mentioned above (in particular the pursuance of distinct political aims).

What characterizes these three ideal-typical modal types is that *factional cliques and tendencies* have very little structure.<sup>6</sup> They are either almost totally unorganized or exhibit only a very ephemeral organizational set up for pursuing a single issue or for fighting an electoral campaign. Recruitment to such amorphous groups does usually not take place in a coordinated manner and leadership of the group exists, if at all, on an ad-hoc basis. Usually there are no hierarchical command structures. Individuals might play a prominent role in such groups but this role is usually based more on charisma than on clientelistic links. As a rule, such groups do not have offices or headquarters of their own, structured meetings, formalized procedures or symbols. There is also no real group identity or formal group membership to speak of. More often than not, such groups exist only for a short time, especially if the common interest of the group members is confined to one issue.

*Personalized factions* are based on clientelism which also serves as the central mechanism for mobilization. Such groups are characterized by what are usually asymmetrical exchanges of power resources. As a rule, hierarchies and chains of command in such groups are vertical. Horizontal links between group members might even be discouraged, although there can be subgroups. When such personalized groups have a name, it often refers to the group's leader who is vital to the identity of the group. In temporal terms, the existence of such groups is mostly limited by the political life of the respective leader.

In contrast to the groups just mentioned, *institutionalized factions* exhibit a developed organizational structure and a higher degree of bureaucratization. Recruitment regularly takes place on a non-personal and egalitarian basis. While the political ambitions of the groups' leader/s are important for the cohesion of these groups, their survival and continued existence is – as a rule – not dependent on individual leaders. This often gets also reflected in the groups' names or symbols. Also, membership in such groups is formalized and members share a common identity.<sup>7</sup>

It has to be emphasized that the factional types just sketched are models which in reality will not always be found in their pure form. There are numerous groupings in political parties which exhibit structural characteristics pertaining to different ideal types. Moreover, changes leading to a growing or diminishing complexity of intra-party groups can occur in the course of time. Personalized factions can thus undergo a process of institutionalization, but they can also evolve into loosely coupled cliques. In other words, the typology presented

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<sup>6</sup> The following is based on Beller and Belloni (1978: 422-430).

<sup>7</sup> It seems logical to deduce from the different organizational make-up of factions their respective autonomy from the party hosting them (see Panebianco 1988: 60, 168-169). Building on this thought, Morgenstern (2001) has developed a continuum whose outer ends consist of, on the one end, highly organized and independent factions and, on the other end, centralized parties without any factions.

above must be understood as a heuristic instrument to a) reduce the complexity of the object at hand and b) to assist in generating hypotheses.

Moreover it has to be pointed out that intra-party groups can exist at different levels. Thus, factions do not have to be confined to the central level of a party but can also exist at the local or regional level of the party's organization or within the parliamentary caucus of a party. In a related vein, also the diffusion of factionalism can vary. It can be restricted to elite groups within parties ('elite factionalism') or it can affect a party as a whole ('open factionalism'). A third pattern consists of 'factional alliances', i.e. factional competition which extends from a lower, maybe the local level of a party to increasingly higher echelons of the party's hierarchy (or vice versa).<sup>8</sup>

**Table 1: Descriptive characteristics and functions of factions within parties**

General descriptive characteristics*	Sub-characteristics	Possible findings (illustrations)
Factional Fragmentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of factions</li> <li>• Relative size/strength of factions</li> <li>• Vertical depth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bipolar or multipolar factionalism</li> <li>• (A-)symmetrical factionalism</li> <li>• Factionalism only at the central level</li> </ul>
Factional Institutionalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Degree of organization</li> <li>• Durability</li> <li>• Cohesion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tendencies (low)</li> <li>• Personalized factions (medium)</li> <li>• Institutionalized factions (high)</li> </ul>
Factional Polarization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict intensity</li> <li>• Ideological distance</li> <li>• Dynamics of inter-factional competition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low to high</li> <li>• Close to vast</li> <li>• Centripetal vs. centrifugal (Do conflicts increase or decrease? Are there any splits?)</li> </ul>
Main function of factions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevailing raison d'être, from 'factions of interest to factions of principles' (Sartori/Hume)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distributive: allocation of posts and resources among members and followers</li> <li>• Representative: representation of external interests/groups (e.g. unions, regions)</li> <li>• Articulative: representation and intermediation of ideologies, programs, and political issues (abstract, concrete: single issue)</li> </ul>

\* The characteristics refer to individual parties, not party systems or individual factions.

<sup>8</sup> For details see Beller and Belloni (1978: 437-439), Hine (1982: 39-41), and Müller-Rommel (1982: 46-47).

We suggest to catalogue the essential characteristics of intra-party factions in a similar manner as party systems (see table 1), i.e. in terms of fragmentation, institutionalization, and polarization. We thus term the number of factions, their relative size, and the vertical factional penetration of a party 'factional fragmentation'. The respective degree of institutionalization of factions is based not only their durability and cohesion but more importantly on their organizational structure, ranging from tendencies to highly organized factions (see above). The degree of polarization between faction in a party concerns both the ideological distance between the relevant factions and the intensity of ideological conflict. Connected to this are also the dynamics of factional conflict. A moderate conflict culture leads to centripetal competition, possibly in the institutionalized form of consociational parties (Bogaards 2003), while centrifugal factionalism can lead in extreme cases to a party's paralysis or disintegration.

Beyond the degree of fragmentation, institutionalization, and polarization we have to address another important characteristic of factions, viz. the central reason why factions exist: their *raison d'être*, their main functions.

#### **4. Functions of Intra-Party Factions**

With regard to the function of intra-party factions, many analysts have focused on the aspect of power struggles and the distribution of 'booty' (*spoils faction*, *power faction*). Factions can help to advance the intra-party and governmental careers of their members and leaders. While the attainment of positions and the allocation of posts can be termed the 'classical functions' of factions, there are also other (ideal-typical) functions. For example Sartori, taking his cue from David Hume, differentiates between interest- and principle-based functions ('factions from interest' and 'factions from principle', cf. Sartori 1976: 8-9, 76).

Thus not only material gain and the allocation of posts can be at the center of factional activities. Factions can also serve to articulate and mediate particular or sectional interests (e.g. those of a religious, ethnic, social or vocational group) and/or can be aimed at influencing the party's strategy or promoting certain values. The representation of specific interests, on the one hand, and the articulation of politico-ideological goals or normative issues, on the other hand, can thus be discerned as two further ideal-typical functions of factions. Beyond these basic functions, factions can also help to satisfy emotional and social needs of their members by means of reciprocal support and respect, intensive contacts, and by providing a sense of belonging. Finally, factions can be used for the exchange of information among

members and, more generally, can serve management and co-ordination purposes (especially within loosely coupled parties).

In summing up it can be noted that the functions of factions are closely related to the prevailing type of intra-party conflicts, i.e. whether they are about power and careers, policy issues and ideologies, or different sectional interests. Also, intra-party conflicts can follow cyclical patterns, e.g. when it comes to generational change within parties or 'eternal' questions such as the role of the state in the economy (cf. Hine 1982; Graham 1993: 154-157).

### 5. Consequences of Factionalism: Intra-Party Groups as Independent Variable

Generally, factionalism tend to be regarded as a phenomenon belonging to the 'pathologies of politics' (Friedrich 1972).<sup>9</sup> This certainly reflects the views of party leaders and officials for whom the existence of factions poses an open challenge to party management.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, factions can undermine the cohesion and the effectiveness of political parties. Clear-cut dissent within a party and ensuing repression can take parties to the verge of disintegration and beyond.<sup>11</sup>

Factionalism can also lead to intra-party decisions on personnel that are not based on merit and ability of the people involved but on their factional affiliation. Faction-based dissent can damage a party's ability to recruit new members, to fight effective campaigns, and to enter coalitions. Faction-based intra-party conflict can also lead to blurry and contradictory positions of a party and thus render voters' decisions more difficult. Factionalism can impede or block intra-party discussions and issue-oriented debates can be drawn into the vortex of inter-factional power struggles. In some cases, factionalism can even be (made) responsible for corruption within a political party or even within the political system at large. In sum, intra-party factions can damage or weaken the moral authority and integrity of individual parties or the whole party system. Factionalism can destabilize the party system and it can lead to growing cynicism on the part of voters.

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<sup>9</sup> Accordingly the term faction is often used not only in analytical but also in pejorative terms (Sartori 1976: 72-73; Beller and Belloni 1978: 445-446).

<sup>10</sup> There have been different ways to deal with intra-party factions which reflect, *inter alia*, their particular functions and their autonomy plus the political context in which they are embedded. Reactions have ranged from violent suppression as in the case of Stalin's Soviet Communist Party, silent acceptance as in the case of the former Italian Communist Party to formal acknowledgment in party statutes as in the cases of the Brazilian Labor Party (Samuels 2004: 13) or the Polish Democratic Union (Waller and Gillespie 1995: 1).

<sup>11</sup> See for example the case of the Spanish UCD (Gunther and Hopkin 2002).

On the other hand (or in other cases), factions can serve as a transmission belt for bargaining processes, conflict resolution and consensus building within parties. The formation and further development of factions can also have participation-widening and mobilizing effects for party members and supporters – especially, but not only, when it comes to internal elections. The existence of different power groups within a party can contribute to linking different social groups to the party and thus to strengthening the inclusionary character of the party. Moreover, it is even thinkable that factions stabilize a party's leadership. This can be the case when a) factions serve as 'early warning systems' on latent conflicts and when b) the institutionalization of factions makes intra-party opposition more calculable.

In general terms, factions can also promote the unity of a party by means of articulating and channeling different (group) interests within the party. It is important in this respect, of course, that the basic aims of the party are not put into question. Especially within dominant parties, factionalism can help to engender necessary competition between ideas and persons.<sup>12</sup> The existence of differently oriented factions inside a party can also work in a moderating manner if radical and extremist positions are already countered within a party. Factions in political parties that act in an integrative manner can help to stabilize the party system *per se*.

Against the background of such possible negative and positive consequences or effects, factionalism in political parties can be an ambivalent phenomenon. Positive and negative consequence might be interrelated and can at least occur at the same time. To give just one example: factionalism can lead to a broader representation of social groups in a party (and thus possibly to better election results), but can also diminish the ability of the very same party to govern effectively.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, factionalism in a party can develop from an advantage into a disadvantage (and vice versa). As Sferza (2002: 171) has argued in this context: "[f]actionalism [...] is a double-edged format: while it can be extremely conducive to renewal, it can also be dysfunctional and a source of sclerosis".

With regard to the relationship between factions and the formal structures of a political party, it is not possible to assume *a priori* a complementary or a clear-cut conflictive relationship. In general terms, we can speak of a complementary relationship when informal institutions such as factions support the formal structures or are at least in accordance with their spirit. For example, factional structures and processes can be used to circumvent the rigidities of the party's formal structures. The use of informal structures can in such cases help to

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<sup>12</sup> See on this Zariski (1978: 27-28), Müller-Rommel (1982: 22-24) and the more recent literature on factions in dominant parties (e.g. Bettcher 2005 on the Italian DC and the Japanese LDP, Bogaards 2003 on the South African ANC).

<sup>13</sup> On the consequences of factionalism in parties see e.g. Raschke (1977: 226-235), Beller and Belloni (1978: 439-442), Müller-Rommel (1982: 37-39), Sferza (2002: *passim*), and Reiter (2004: 252).

reduce transaction costs. Intra-party factions can also support the formal party structure by making the access of various groups to the party easier, thus securing or increasing a party's representational ability and responsiveness. Factions can even promote the legitimacy of the formal party framework if they help to integrate 'traditional', shared values into the formal framework, thus helping to secure support for formal, somewhat abstract party organization.

**Table 2: Possible consequences of factionalism**

Possible consequences	Relevant characteristics	Hypotheses (examples)
Functionality of the party	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizational structure</li> <li>Social and ideological basis</li> <li>Function within the political/party system: governing or opposition party</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate institutionalized factionalism eases intra-party conflicts and increases cohesion</li> <li>Centrifugal or polarized factionalism paralyzes individual parties with regard to core functions (legitimacy and efficiency)</li> </ul>
Functionality of the party system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fragmentation</li> <li>Polarization</li> <li>Institutionalization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Centrifugal factionalism increases both fragmentation and polarization, but weakens institutionalization of the party system and thus core functions of parties (legitimacy and efficiency weakened)</li> </ul>
Functionality of the overall political system or regime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Balance of power in parliament</li> <li>General institutional framework: presidential and federal elements</li> <li>Position of the party affected by factionalism within the parliamentary and governmental system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Centrifugal factionalism promotes unstable majorities</li> <li>Centrifugal factionalism in opposition parties increases power of the government</li> <li>Polarized factionalism lowers respect for parties</li> </ul>

The possible consequences of factionalism are not restricted to individual parties (cf. table 2). As mentioned above, factionalism can induce the fragmentation of parties and whole party systems, thus diminishing the ability of parties to act and govern. In the final analysis, the efficiency and legitimacy of political system can get severely damaged and even the survivability of young democracies is at stake. Generally speaking, a conflictive relationship exists between formal and informal structures of a political setting when informal structures 'colonize' and undermine the formal framework. This is the case when informal structures contradict the spirit of formal elements or when the formal framework is used only as a 'host' for parasitic activities and processes of an informal nature. A conflictive relationship does,



however, not exist when the informal structures are clearly subordinated to their formal counterparts.<sup>14</sup>

Whether factionalism acts as a positive or negative factor in party politics depends on the particular functions of the relevant factions, the context they are embedded in, plus the decisions and strategic options of the party's leadership (cf. Pridham 1995: 23). While the literature has tended to highlight negative consequences of factionalism, questions regarding the specific effects of factionalism and its relationship with formal elements in the parties concerned have to be answered in an unbiased manner on a case-by-case basis.

## 6. Explanations of Factionalism: Intra-Party Groups as Dependent Variable

Studies on factionalism in political parties have discussed a number of different factors which are said to promote or aid the establishment and development of factions. Numerous variables both inside and outside the parties and the party system have been pointed to. However, there is so far no consensus on which factors should be regarded as decisive. Already Key concluded that in most cases he had analyzed, a combination of factors influenced the development and traits of the factions concerned. We will divide these factors into three categories:

- a) general socio-economic and political dynamics and structures,
- b) formal state institutions such as electoral systems and the structure of the state,
- c) the characteristics of the party system and parties, including the historical conditions of party formation.

### General Social and Political Dynamics and Structures

The *socio-cultural environment* in which organizations exist affects them through various channels and thus it also affects the specifics of factionalism within parties. In societies which are marked by strong clientelistic links or by pronounced cleavages, we are more likely to witness factionalist tendencies within parties. On the other hand, there seems to be hardly a link between the socio-economic background of politicians and their membership in factions.<sup>15</sup> It seems however possible that a low level of development and a related heightened importance of access to resources worsens distributive fights within parties and

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<sup>14</sup> On the relationship between formal and informal institutions see more generally Helmke and Levitsky (2004), Köllner (2005: chapter 2).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Zariski (1960: 46-50; 1978: 29-31), Sartori (1976: 104), Beller and Belloni (1978: 430-432), and Hine (1982: 46-47).

thus fosters factionalist tendencies. Even though this hypothesis has so far not really been tested, it seems plausible in countries such as India or Malawi.<sup>16</sup> The link between the social environment and factionalism seems to be of particular relevance where a pronounced personalized political culture exists.

On an altogether different level, we would expect specific conflictive political issues to affect the formation of factions. Here we differentiate between power-related and ideological conflicts: Struggles about succession at the helm of party mark a high time of personalized faction formation. Parties which are based on certain fundamental convictions, ideologies or worldviews (*Weltanschauungsparteien*) often react to new political ideas by factional positioning of groups within the relevant parties. For example, the advent of neo-liberalism fostered divisions within the two big British parties (Detterbeck 2006).

### **Formal Institutions**

With regard to the formal institutional framework, the state's structure, the governmental system, stipulations in the constitution and laws governing parties, and the (national) electoral system have often been discussed as factors determining, or at least influencing, factionalism in political parties.

*Formal characteristics of the state structure and the governmental system* create diverging incentive structures for the establishment of factions: Where federal or decentralized state structures are connected with a significant amount of resource distribution, as in India or Germany, they can promote the formation and persistence of regionally rooted factions. Direct elections of state presidents endowed with strong executive competences carry a particular personalistic element into political conflicts. Such elections can heighten intra-party differences when supporters rally around auspicious candidates in the nomination phase.

*Legal regulations governing parties and the parliament* exert multitudinous effects. Regulations which prohibit parliamentarians from party switching ('floor crossing', 'cambio de camisas') while keeping their seat, are often intended to prevent party splits. Under such circumstances, intra-party dissent can find an outlet in faction formation. State subsidies for parties, on the other hand, have a contra-factional effect if the party leadership controls these funds (see also below). Finally, restrictions on the establishment of parties can affect the proclivity for faction formation. Because parties based on ethnicity, region or religion based are prohibited in many sub-Saharan African countries, relevant groups have to organize in different kind of parties. This is possibly one reason why ethnic congress parties and not mono-ethnic parties are the rule in sub-Saharan Africa (Erdmann 2002). In a related vein, the prohibition

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<sup>16</sup> See the relevant country studies in Köllner et al. (2006).

of extremist parties may lead to the establishment of relevant party wings within large catch-all parties.

The *national electoral system* determines how seats and thus posts get allocated. It is therefore also relevant to intra-party conflicts. It has been argued that proportional electoral systems provide an institutional framework amenable to faction formation and development. In the case of closed candidate lists, intra-party groups can become active ahead of elections in order to secure auspicious slots for their candidates. On the other hand, factions can also arise where majoritarian electoral systems are in place. It can be argued that majoritarian systems or high vote thresholds foster the concentration of political forces and thus also factionalism. Also the single non-transferable vote system is said to provide incentives for factionalism.<sup>17</sup> A special case is presented by the Uruguayan electoral system. The formation and persistence of factions got an extra boost here because intra-party groups can present their own lists (so-called *sublemas*) under the country's electoral system (cf. Morgenstern 2001).

### Party System and Parties

The general characteristics of a *party system* can also affect the formation of factions. Both a high degree of polarization between parties and a low number of competing parties in a given party system have been said to increase the available room for intra-party conflict about ideological issues. The second claim has however been questioned a number of times. It also runs counter to cases of two-party systems in which the severe competition for votes in fact forces moderation upon parties. Moreover, in multi-party systems the issue of coalitions and election pacts can also trigger intra-party conflicts and related factional activities. Does at least the hypothesis about the link between a high degree of polarization in a party system and ideology-based factionalism yield more explanatory power? Unfortunately, in a number of case studies the hypothesis did not jell with empirical reality, signaling that the explanatory power of this variable is (at best) not universal.<sup>18</sup>

It has also been argued that the strength of parties influences factionalism. As a number of case studies have shown, factionalism flourishes extremely well in dominant parties. Such parties are a) in charge of executive power for a long time (= potential for issue-based conflicts among factions), b) control the distribution of power resources (potential for patron-

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<sup>17</sup> On the consequences of various electoral systems on factionalism see Key (1984: chapter 19), Zariski (1960: 37-41, 1978: 24-26), Sartori (1976: 93, 98-100), Raschke (1977: 147-150, 178-180), Beller and Belloni (1978: 432-434, 437), Hine (1982: 42-46), Müller-Rommel (1982: 24-25), and Grofman (1999).

<sup>18</sup> For overviews see Zariski (1960: 41-43), Sartori (1976: 102), Raschke (1977: 173-178), and Müller-Rommel (1982: 20-22).

age-based factionalism), and c) usually represent a broad range of socio-economic groups (potential for factional representation of specific interests). It has been argued in this context that factions in dominant parties are more unlikely to break away from these parties than others (as factions would lose their access to power resources). Much-cited historical examples in this context include the former Italian DC, the Japanese LDP, and the Indian Congress Party. It also seems that dominant founding parties in new democracies are often affected by a heavy dose of factionalism.<sup>19</sup>

On a different level, it can be suggested that highly institutionalized party systems tend to host political parties that have equally institutionalized internal structures. As signaled by the case of the Japanese LDP with its rather durable and complex factions, however, such institutionalized party structures may not always be of a formal kind. Finally, it can be submitted that the need for cohesion is higher in the case of governing parties which have to contain intra-party conflict in order to be able to govern effectively.

Not only in the case of governing parties, strong centripetal tendencies can better be avoided when the *channels of party finance* are controlled by the party leadership. The centralization of party finance tends to work against the formation or reduces at least their ability to survive. Conversely, the decentralization of party finance renders the establishment and further development of factions easier. This should hold in particular true of personalized and spoils-based factions.<sup>20</sup>

Also, the *organizational structure of parties* is said to have numerous potential effects. It has been postulated that simply-structured elite parties exhibit a higher degree of factionalism than, for example, mass parties with a vast network of local branches. It has also been argued that centralized parties are more likely to have factions at the central party level (Zariski 1960: 43-45; Beller and Belloni 1978: 436-437; Müller-Rommel 1982: 16-20). Empirical studies have however repeatedly put the universal character of such causalities into question (see e.g. Zariski 1978: 23-24). Undisturbed by this, Carty (2004: 15-16) has recently advanced a new organization-based explanation of factionalism. He argues that factions in political parties can be related to the loose coupling of these parties, in other words their stratarchy. According to Carty, factions function in such organizational contexts as instruments to coordinate relatively autonomous intra-party units. Caution is however required with regard to claims about the connections between factional and overall party structures. First, there is always a danger of tautological or functionalist explanations. And secondly it

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<sup>19</sup> On this point see Zariski (1978: 27-28), Müller-Rommel (1982: 22-24), and Pridham (1995: 10-11).

<sup>20</sup> For a relevant discussion of the Italian and Japanese cases see Sartori (1976: 93-95). The connections between the channels of party finance and the internal organization of political parties have not yet been well analysed. For an interesting exception see Mulé (1998).

is often unclear whether factionalism results from a particular way of organizing a party or whether the causality runs the other way. In sum it can be suggested that organizational structures of parties offer the weakest starting point for general explanations.

The amount of support a party can claim is not the only relevant thing when it comes to the *social linkages* of parties. Attention has to be paid to the composition and characteristics of support groups, i.e. their social and ideological basis, their durability and heterogeneity. For example where ethnicity plays a role in society, multi-ethnic congress parties should be more prone to factionalism than mono-ethnic parties. Based more on empirical observation than theory is the hypothesis that left-wing and especially extreme leftist tend – maybe as a reflection of some kind of ‘vanity of the least difference’ – towards centrifugal factionalism.

Similar to national electoral systems, *(s)election procedures within parties* also influence factionalism in political parties. In particular primaries are said to foster intra-party factions. In studies on factionalism in the Republican and Democratic parties of the US, the results of primaries have been used to measure factional strengths (cf. Carty 2004). Also, the option of minority votes increases the power of intra-party groups, as for example in the case of the German Greens where decisions affecting the course of the party have to be supported by two thirds of delegates at party congresses. Authoritarian leadership sometimes also leaves renegades no other choice than to band together. On the other hand, in some cases factionalism has been suppressed by means of strict control by the party leadership.

So far we have concentrated on presenting possible factors affecting the emergence and development of factionalism in a systematic if somewhat static manner. However, we also have to be mindful of the *historical conditions, critical junctures, and dynamics of party formation and development*. In this respect, the literature on party organization has highlighted the conditions of a party’s genesis (*inter alia* the form of territorial diffusion, the existence of charismatic leaders and external sponsors – e.g. labor unions – and existing collective identities in the case of party mergers) as important factors which can influence the formation and character of factions (see especially Panebianco 1988: chapter 4). Finally, research has shown that within a specific historical context the above mentioned explanatory factors for factionalism can act in conjunction with other factors. Thus contingencies have to be taken into account.

We must also note that the vast majority of research in factionalism has focused on established democracies. It should not be overlooked, however, that in new democracies the instability of the party system and the political system as a whole can promote factionalism. Since parties are not yet settled, factional affiliations and alliances can be of greater importance to politicians than party loyalties (Magone 1995: 92, 99). Such loyalties can evolve on the basis of shared experiences and identities. But this development should and cannot be taken for granted, especially if parties continue to be controlled by individual leaders.

**Table 3: Possible causes of factionalism in political parties**

Possible causes and context variables	Relevant characteristics	Hypotheses (examples)
<i>a) General social and political structures and dynamics</i>		
Socio-cultural structures and dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cleavage structure</li> <li>• Prevalence of clientelism</li> <li>• Socio-economic level and dynamics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heavily segmented, clientelistic and personalized cultures tend to factionalism</li> <li>• Low level of development increases the importance of power struggles and thus promotes factionalism</li> </ul>
General political structures and dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political culture (elites and population)</li> <li>• Specific controversial political issues and crucial decisions (power, ideology)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successions and leadership (s)elections promote the formation of factions</li> <li>• New politically relevant ideas (e.g. neo-liberalism) promote the formation of factions</li> </ul>
<i>b) Formal institutions</i>		
State structure and governmental system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal vs. decentralized vs. unitary</li> <li>• Presidential vs. semi-presidential vs. parliamentary systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal structures combined with significant resource distribution aids factionalism</li> <li>• Presidential system promotes distributive factionalism</li> </ul>
Regulations in constitutions and party laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Floor crossing'</li> <li>• Public party funding</li> <li>• Register restrictions for parties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prohibition of floor crossing stimulates factionalism</li> <li>• Party subsidies controlled by the party leadership weakens factionalism</li> <li>• Prohibition of ethnic or extremist parties aids factionalism</li> </ul>
National electoral system (parliament)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principle of representation (proportional vs. majoritarian)</li> <li>• List forms, voting system</li> <li>• District magnitude</li> <li>• Thresholds of representation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closed lists promote factionalism</li> <li>• Preferential voting in small districts (with few MPs) and SNTV foster factionalism</li> </ul>
<i>c) Party system and party</i>		
Party system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fragmentation</li> <li>• Polarization</li> <li>• Institutionalization</li> <li>• Position of party in party system (opposition vs. government)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dominant parties tend to factionalism (possible functional equivalent of intra-party competition)</li> </ul>
Organizational structures of party	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Size/strength of party</li> <li>• Leadership structure</li> <li>• Channels of party finance (both informal and formal)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elite parties tend more strongly to factionalism than mass or catch-all parties</li> <li>• Centralized party finance constrains factions</li> </ul>

Possible causes and context variables	Relevant characteristics	Hypotheses (examples)
Social linkages of parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social and ideological basis (type, durability, and heterogeneity of support groups)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Factions are particularly likely where heterogeneous social and ideological supporters exist</li> <li>Left-wing and parties of the extreme left tend heavily to factionalism</li> </ul>
Intra-party decision-making and (s)election processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Degree of effective intra-party democracy</li> <li>Intra-party electoral system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Authoritarian leadership style stimulates centrifugal factionalism</li> <li>Primaries foster factionalism</li> </ul>
Specific historical conditions of party genesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conditions of party genesis (e.g. party merger)</li> <li>Young democracies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instability of party system in transitional periods aids factionalism</li> </ul>

Sometimes consequences of factionalism can also turn into causes. For example regarding the Uruguayan case, Morgenstern (2001: 239) has argued that in 1910 the already heavily factionalized parties introduced a national electoral system in order to maintain a two-party system. According to Morgenstern, this particular electoral system led to the further institutionalization and disciplining of the factions. The ambiguity of factional phenomena with regard to their status as dependent or independent variables has important implications for the research design. The politics of intra-party groups are a dynamic and complex affair. Scholars have to be aware of the fact that the particular period under investigation can determine whether phenomena will be causes or consequences. In many cases it will be useful to differentiate between several periods of factionalism (e.g. Detterbeck 2006).

## 7. Concluding Comments

Factionalism can play a substantial role in terms of determining or at least influencing how political parties perform their society and state-oriented tasks which are vital for the functioning of democratic systems. Factionalism can affect the stability and institutionalization of parties and party systems. In the final analysis, factionalism can impact on the efficiency and legitimacy of political parties and political systems as a whole. This is not to say that factionalism is of crucial importance to how all parties and political systems operate. But as a substantial number of case studies indicate, factionalism can – for better or worse – make a difference. We thus deplore the fact that the study of factionalism has so far only received scant attention in the comparative literature on political parties. As this article shows, there is no dearth of conceptual approaches and hypotheses which can readily be used to advance the

systematic analysis of factionalism in political parties. The comparative study of intra-party groups require systematic descriptions of their characteristics as well as careful and comprehensive conceptualization of their possible consequences and causes. We hope that the analytic framework developed in this article will help to stimulate a more comparatively oriented and nuanced study of factionalism.



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