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## "Beyond Party Members. Changing Approaches to Partisan Mobilization", Susan E. Scarrow, Oxford 2015 : [recenzja]

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**Susan E. Scarrow, *Beyond Party Members. Changing Approaches to Partisan Mobilization*, Oxford 2015, pp. 240**

Party membership is a subject that attracts many students of political parties, because of changes that have occurred in this area. In this context it is worth mentioning the article: *Going, going... gone? The Decline of Party Membership in Contemporary Europe* by Ingrid van Biezen, Peter Mair and Thomas Poguntke (2012) or the Political Party Database Project led by Thomas Poguntke, Susan E. Scarrow and Paul W. Webb that among other organizational aspects of political parties has also covered party membership<sup>1</sup>. The author of the book under review is one of the contributors to this project. Susan E. Scarrow has dealt with party membership for a long time which has resulted in her previous book *Party and their Members. Organizing Victory in Britain and Germany* (1996) and the book chapter *Parties*

*without members? Party Organization in a Changing Electoral Environment* (2000) to name only a few. It is important, however, to admit that in the new book the author does not emulate the same content or research, but she makes further strides to bring us closer to a better understanding of a kind of paradox related to development of party membership. On the one hand, numerical membership strength is eroding, while on the other hand, individual party members have been gaining new political rights. Scarrow tries to solve the puzzle of party membership that has been becoming simultaneously less and more important. This is an essential study that provides an innovative comparative discussion of the development and importance of party membership. The author is not afraid of going off the beaten track, her reasoning and collected data are overthrowing some myths about party membership that have arisen in the subject literature. Originality, the clear structure of the book and the fact that it is written in a very accessible language makes reading it

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<sup>1</sup> The result of the latter are mainly an article by Thomas Poguntke, Susan E. Scarrow and Paul D. Webb *et al.* (2016) published in *Party Politics* and the book edited by Susan E. Scarrow, Paul D. Webb and Thomas Poguntke (forthcoming 2017).

really pleasant, which should be regarded as an additional plus of the study.

The book comprises two parts, in the first one the historical development of party membership is presented, whereas in the second the future perspectives for membership are outlined. Basing on the impressive data collection from 19 parliamentary democracies,<sup>2</sup> the author addresses the question of whether political parties were really mass membership organizations and only recently their membership has started to decline. She is wondering when there was the peak of the mass membership in political parties and in order to answer this question she examines membership evolution. A more complex story emerges from analyzing the subsequent periods of development (pre-1848, 1848-1914, 1918-1939, since 1950s). It seems that, contrary to popular belief, large party membership was not once the norm, only a few parliamentary democracies could have boasted mass membership on both left and right side of their political spectrum after World War II and since 1960s the membership has begun to decline. Building on these experiences the book bravely breaks stereotypes showing that the golden age of mass membership parties should be considered a myth rather than historical reality. These accounts are then used to consider the plausibility of a claim that currently we deal with a trend of dramatically declining membership. Although this trend is visible, at the same time, it is exaggerated. According to Scarrow "accounts of party change should

avoid comparing today's empirical realities with yesterday's ideal types".

In one of the chapters an effort is taken to explain enrollment changes occurring since 1960s. Analyzing some factors both on the demand and supply side that are usually assumed as causing membership decrease, the author questions other myths. For example, there is no explicit link between public subsidies for political parties and media-intensive campaigning on the one side and the enrollment drop on the other. The supply side arguments (such as new leisure competitors and changed participation preferences) seem to be more responsible for decreasing membership density (M/E – member/electorate ratio). However, as Scarrow aptly points out, there are meaningful differences across countries, therefore using the macro-level explanation is only a part of the picture that should be completed by the specific country-driven factors. This chapter is especially interesting for these who are researchers of political parties development themselves as it outlines most problems which should be faced during comparative analysis (e.g. poor data, inconsistent membership definitions) and advises how to deal with them.

Considering the future of party membership in the second part of the study, the author assesses costs and benefits that members provide for parties and then moves to burdens and profits on the side of party members. From parties' point of view, members are considered as party volunteers, financial supporters, most trustworthy and loyal electors as well as party ambassadors to the community where they live or work. In contrast to popular claims, members are supposed to play a role in each of these areas including financial support. Although members' fi-

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<sup>2</sup> The following countries are included: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom.

nancial contributions have been changing their importance, they are still meaningful for various reasons. However, the whole picture of members' involvement is really complex and there are significant differences between countries following their previous experiences. What is interesting is not only the members' commitments, but also the growing engagement of party supporters. This leads Scarrow to creating the multi-speed model of various party affiliation that is thought to replace the Duverger's bulls-eye model. It is worth to spend more time on it, as it can be considered the most appealing finding of the book.

To begin with the Duverger's model, it is composed of four concentric circles. The most involved in the party activity militants are in the center of the bulls-eye diagram, surrounded by the broader circle where party members are included and the wider ring composed of party supporters. The biggest circle comprises all these partisan affiliates as well as party electors. The more central is the position of an individual in the diagram, the stronger is his or her involvement in the party life. However, Scarrow proves that the picture of contemporary parties is much more complex as many parties introduce new forms of party affiliation that cannot be placed in concentric circles because they are neither exclusive nor hierarchical, sometimes they can even partly overlap. People who are going to affiliate to political party can choose whether they want to be full members or maybe trail or light members, cybermembers, sustainers, followers and friends (sympathizers, cooperators), or audience for party media. These forms of affiliation generate lower costs for party supporters than in case of traditional membership and they do not demand long-term com-

mitments, hence they are easily acceptable, especially for people who prove to be more resistant to traditional enrollment. Groupings that introduce these affiliation categories can be considered multi-speed parties and they differ from parties relying on merely traditional membership, because they enable supporters to connect to the party in multiple ways. What is more, supporters can choose the way and level of their involvement themselves. They can even change the level of engagement by being for example active sustainers during campaigns and then only passive Facebook or Twitter followers. Scarrow seems to believe that multi-speed parties can be perceived as a kind of remedy for declining membership and it must be admitted that the model is highly promising.

Wondering what parties can offer to attract new members, Scarrow proves that whereas social, psychological and material benefits are not so important as they were earlier, the role played by political advantages seems to grow as parties have started to offer their members meaningful opportunities for political participation. For instance, members are empowered to make decisions on party programs and priorities as well as to select party personnel (leader, candidates for public offices, etc.). Returning to multi-speed party model, it is important to consider if these new incentives should be used only to reward traditional party members or if they could be extended to all party supporters regardless of whether they are members or not. According to the author it depends on parties, especially on how they understand the role of traditional members.

To sum up, the book sheds a new light on changing relations between parties and their members in order to explain the paradox of the decreasing membership

numbers and at the same time the increasing incentives for party members in order to convince them to join and remain in a party. The author shows that party membership is not an obsolete institution and even if contemporary parties fit to a kind of multi-speed model, members are still regarded as “useful reservoirs of volunteers, opinion leaders, candidates and donors” and that is why parties are keen on increasing rights for party members. However, the growing importance of many alternative forms of party affiliation cannot be overlooked, hence the party researchers have to go beyond party members by investigating also other affiliation categories as described in the multi-speed model. All in all, this is an outstanding book that provides a comprehensive analysis of party membership both throughout history and nowadays, and therefore it should be required reading for students interested in party membership and wider political participation.

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