

INTEREST AND ITS ROLE IN PARTISAN POLITICAL MILITANCY: A THEORETICAL STUDY OF THE DETERMINANTS OF PARTISAN WORK



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Abstract:

The study aims at uncovering the role of interests within political parties. These interests are related to political positions at different levels of the party hierarchy or gained by militants out of the party institution by means of elections. The latter interests fall under strong competition, which can cause political divisions in the absence of channels to satisfy the increasing demands for them, according to each militant's social resource structure and where collective incentives become insufficient, as the most active members have a tendency to obtain individual privileges aligning with their personal ambitions.

Key words: Interest; Political Militancy; Political Party; Positions; Incentives.

JEL classification: D03; D71; D72;

ملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن الدور الذي تؤديه المصالح داخل الأحزاب السياسية، سواء تعلق الأمر بالمناصب السياسية التي تقع في مختلف مستويات الهرم الحزبي، أو تلك التي يتحصل عليها المناضلون خارج المؤسسة الحزبية عن طريق الانتخابات، والتي تكون محل منافسات وتجاوزات شديدة قد تحدث تصدعات سياسية في حالة عدم إيجاد منافذ للطلبات المتزايدة عليها وفق بنية الموارد الاجتماعية لكل مناضل، وحيث تصبح التحفيزات الجماعية غير كافية في ظل نزوع المناضلين الأكثر نشاطا إلى الحصول على امتيازات فردية تتناسب مع طموحاتهم الشخصية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المصلحة؛ النضال السياسي؛ الحزب السياسي؛ المناصب.

تصنيف جال: D03; D71; D72;

Introduction:

Interest represents one of the key motivating factors for all various human activities: social, economic, and political. It is among the constituting determinants of every stance or behaviour, if not often the main one. The social actor is a rational being par excellence, aiming primarily to attain as much as possible benefits at the lowest possible cost. This manifests clearly in the party political field, where every militant aims to achieve a set of political, economic, and psychological resources as the assumed return for the efforts and sacrifices being made. These resources take different forms of rewards, whether within the party itself by way of career progression in political positions, or by benefiting from posts at numerous levels of the state hierarchy. Additionally, there are intangible benefits that achieve a sense of importance, self-fulfilment, and important social statuses on the one hand, and on the other hand, help bring about a kind of balance within the party.

In this regard, the study attempts to answer the following main question: What is the role played by interests and privileges within political parties?

Accordingly, the following sub-questions can be raised:

- Are material interests adequate to motivate militants to practise partisan work?
- Can political militants be satisfied with collective incentives without getting individual incentives?
- How do militants grasp the concept of leadership as the core of polarization within political parties?

The following plan is adopted to answer the previous questions:

First: Defining Concepts

Second: Positions as a Mechanism for Achieving Internal Party Balance.

Third: Between Individual and Collective Incentives.

Fourth: The Dominance of Oligarchy within Parties.

1- Defining Concepts:

1- 1- The Concept of Interest:

The concept of interest relates to anything beneficial to an individual or a group.

Interest can be individual or collective. It can raise complex sociological issues from which we can shed light on this concept from the viewpoint of individual interest, via contradictions between interests, or through ideologies associated with interest. Marxist theory sees that the determinants of individual behaviour are primarily economic, while methodological individualism highlights the importance of the social actor's rational nature and his freedom of choice. (Grawitz, 1981, p. 205)

Moreover, interest can be material or economic, as mentioned previously, or it can be moral or psychological. It can also be of individual interest, related to a single person, or related to the public interest, which benefits a group of people. (Grawitz, 1981, p. 236)

1- 2- The Concept of a Militant:

The concept of a militant differs according to the nature of parties, whether they are cadre parties or mass parties. For the latter, the militant is a distinct type of affiliate, characterised by intensive activity, forming, with colleagues, the nucleus of every grassroots party group. This indeed happens at the people's level, for example (Duverger, 1981, p. 151). We see that it forms a tiny circle of members who are distinctly characterised from the mass base through regular attendance at meetings in order to organize propaganda and contribute to the preparation of election campaigns. They are not regarded as party officials; but they implement the given instructions. In contrast, in cadre parties, only militants manage the party at the committee level. Sympathizers don't have roles or affiliation status within the party. On the other hand, in mass parties, all members, including sympathizers, participate in meetings, propaganda, and all activities undertaken by the party. (Cot & Mounier, 1985, p. 143)

2- Positions as a Mechanism for Achieving Internal Party Balance:

Economic companies and administrations need to provide a career path to attract graduate cadres and imbue their activities with meaning to improve their development. Similarly, political parties need to offer incentives and privileges to keep the most committed members by providing a sense of security in addition to various material and symbolic benefits such as honours and a feeling of power. Furthermore, positions provide sufficient attraction and become a life goal for social actors; thereby they strive to achieve these objectives. In the same way to electoral positions in national or local councils, many positions in administrations and public institutions are reserved for the party's most potent members as the objective return for their activity within the party. Less influential members and militants at the bottom of the party hierarchy can also benefit from some state positions, thus achieving privileges in line with their position within the institution they belong to.

It is noteworthy that political parties themselves, as entities with both political and administrative dimensions, represent an important source for numerous and permanent positions at different levels of their own administrative hierarchy or their affiliated institutions. This is manifested in the functions offered by some of their affiliated bodies, such as newspapers, magazines, publishing houses, trade unions, cultural associations... etc., which help consolidate the ties between the militants and the party. This creates a situation in which the militant dedicates all his time for politics and lives for it.

The existence of hierarchy that determines the nature of privileges obtained by the most active members of the organization results in the deprivation or envy of less influential members. This causes imbalance in the organization, particularly if it cannot solve this constantly arising issue, which is revaluating the base's work. (Gaxie, 1977, p. 132)

If the organization has a system that allows for the movement of its cadres between positions and balances supply and demand, disturbances and unrest caused by resignations, oppositions, and defections will be avoided. This is because the political party is like a university or military institution as its stability relates to the balance

within its ranks' hierarchy. For example, rapid promotion can lead to defections and discontent within the party, and impede promotion for the following generations. In contrast, despite defections being weakening factors for political parties, they sometimes restore stability by reducing the demand caused by the departure of members whose desires and demands were not sufficiently met. Consequently, this leads them to act in a way that harms the smooth functioning of the political bodies of the party.

It must also be noted that no matter the number and type of internal positions and responsibilities within parties, they cannot encompass all militants, particularly in the presence of large-sized parties. Thus, their leaders must provide some non-collective privileges, which relate to the nature of grassroots militants, their career path and social resource structure. Some of them can be listed as follows:

- Through regularly held meetings, as well as by means of the press and affiliated schools, the militant gets a particular type of culture that exceeds what political frameworks can offer to a lower-level militant. Actually, it often grants him some educational privileges that equal the advanced educational level obtained by others outside the party.

- Political parties can compensate for the exclusionary mechanisms that marginalize disadvantaged classes from the schooling system, allowing forming a basis for the growth of self-made education. Then, it forms a significant cultural capital for the militants. It is also possible to interact with some political officials or those holding high official positions, which bestow a social aura on militants, making them feel proud and honoured in their presence and interaction with these political leaders.

- Contacts within the party help the militants attain important social capital, which often makes up the only source for those who have no other ways or channels of getting social capital out of the party. This network assists its members to acquire different privileges, such as private housing, or certain properties and services that are difficult to obtain under normal circumstances for other non-militant citizens in political parties.

- Some party newspapers and magazines offer some of its intellectuals the opportunity to publish and a significant space to reach the largest number of readers, something difficult to achieve outside the party framework. Additionally, assuming important roles by some of them as historians, economic specialists, or promoters of the party's ideology, gives them a scientific rank they would not have reached except through a long academic and scientific path. (Gaxie, 1977, p. 136)

- Most often, the party becomes a means for social integration for all its members. This is achieved by various activities and diverse feelings, such as: long discussions between militants inside and outside party institutions, friendships between militants, the pleasure which accompanies the distribution of leaflets and the pasting of pictures and candidate lists for different elections, the feeling of belonging to a specific group, solidarity spirit when achieving victories, and also the feeling that overwhelms many militants declaring that the party is their large family. Thus, it shares some social integration functions with the family, or replaces it in case of isolation resulting from old age or in cases of family disturbances. The opposite may also happen when the level of militancy decreases among some militants who transition from single to married status.

3- Between Individual and Collective Incentives:

If commitment to a specific issue is a factor in political mobilization, it cannot be the sole and primary factor in this process for several reasons. Many political militants do not completely perceive the ideology and intellectual background of the parties they act in, especially those in the lower organizational positions (Gaxie, 1977, p. 126). In addition, the nature and requirements of collective work, as regarded by Mancur Olson, is another reason. Although he did not study political parties in his works, this does not prevent from applying his theory to partisan work, considering it of excellent collective nature.

Political parties provide benefits and privileges to their militants or clients from different social and professional groups by way of

elections. In spite of the fact that all militants are interested in obtaining these privileges, not all of them participate in collective work due to their unwillingness to shoulder the necessary costs. Hence, they pass on their duties to other individuals to focus on their other personal interests. In return, it would be irrational for a small number of individuals to devote all their efforts and time to defend their cause, often bearing high costs, while the results benefit everyone. Therefore, this group needs to work hard to obtain individual privileges, given that collective benefits become secondary and do not motivate them to make sacrifices. Olson says: "If members of a large group want to increase personal resources, they will not work to achieve collective goals unless they are forced to do so by coercive power or by the presence of independent incentives".(Olson, 1965, p. 130)

The independent incentives Olson speaks of are what form the decisive factor for political party leaders in practising political work, with all its obligations, constraints, battles, and political contests. Therefore, parties become a strategic means for holding positions within state structures, as viewed by Max Weber: "The existence of political party leaders as political entrepreneurs primarily interested in political life and have a desire to participate in governance results in that political organizations are strategic means for assuming positions within state structures".(Weber, 1971, p. 412)

Through the theoretical model established by Bettcher, the functioning of currents and factions within political parties can be understood. His model is founded on two key dimensions: the first is related to motivational conditions, and the second is linked to the degree of organization in terms of stability and efficiency.(Close, 2011, p. 06)

Regarding incentives, Bettcher distinguishes between two types: collective incentives and selective incentives. Currents and factions within political parties utilize these in order to recruit militants and maintain the stability of the organization. The types of incentives and their distribution constitute the form and structure of these factions. The faction or current related to interests functions as a united group to attain privileges and resources for its members, considering that the fate of these members mainly relates to the ability of the leader or president to remain in power. The second faction, related to principles, strives to accomplish collective goals as political or ideological programmes. The

decisive factor in political commitment for it is linked to their members' personal convictions.

4- The Dominance of Oligarchy within Parties:

Leadership in organizations, including political parties, represents an absolute requirement without regard to the activity performed by these organizations. It is the guiding activity that shifts the organization from inertia to action. Some regard it as a characteristic of the individual as a leader, while others define it as the ability to lead a group in a manner that ensures the goals and objectives of the group. (Rashwan, 2010, p. 03)

Regarding the importance of leadership for society, IbnKhalidun states: "There must be a deterrent to prevent some from harming others, due to their animalistic nature of enmity and injustice... So that deterrent will be one of them who has dominance, authority, and overwhelming power over them, so that no one can transgress against another. This is the meaning of sovereignty". (Rashwan, 2010, p. 36)

Leadership is a goal that every militant in political parties aspires to achieve, from the local level up to the national level, with the party leader representing the highest position one can reach. Those who seek leadership may use various methods to achieve it, including forming alliances and blocs, or staging coups and corrections. Old leaders often contend with new leaders over remaining at the head of the political party and who has the power and influence to control available resources.

Roberto Michels says in this context: "To confront new leaders who are a minority, old leaders resort to a set of somewhat honest tricks, which, even if they don't achieve victory, delay defeat. These include accusing their opponents of incompetence, corruption, charlatanism, and troublemaking, and they are all available means to everyone. Those leaders also justify their behaviour toward the younger generation with high-level pretexts, such as maintaining the unity of the party, its doctrine, its tactics, and what results from the invasion of the party by

the younger generation without having the necessary competence and experience".(Michels, 1914, p. 119)

According to Michels, leaders utilize different and simultaneously smart means to maintain the leadership of their parties, by accusing their opponents of many negative traits, such as incompetence and lack of experience. Nevertheless, what Michels did not mention is that the opposite often happens: opponents may accuse their leaders of abandoning the founding principles of the party, or forming alliances with the ruling power, and other claims that may or may not have some truth to them. However, the issue of leadership remains very important for political leaders, whether in opposition or in power.

Michels noticed through his study of socialist parties the existence of a kind of stability at the leadership level of these parties, and thus non-occurrence of significant changes, which indicates an oligarchic tendency characterizing these parties. To prove this, Michels presented some indicators, such as the remaining of Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel at the head of the German Workers' Party for over thirty years. Additionally, he found that the active delegates in the conferences held in 1893 for three parties: the German Social Democratic Party, the French Workers' Party, and the Italian Socialist Party were those who would form the core leadership in the conferences to be held in 1910. In details, he found that among 200 delegates who attended the Cologne Conference in Germany in 1893, 60 delegates would be present at the other conference in 1910, and 102 delegates out of 311 delegates would attend the Reggio Emilia conference in Italy in 1910, after participating in the former conference in 1893. Moreover, Michels mentioned in his book 'Political Parties' that the average tenure of ministers in their posts during the German Empire was about four years and four months. Definitely, these numbers are inadequate from the viewpoint of political science and political sociology, but they denote a kind of stability in the management of socialist parties, and thus the existence of what is called oligarchy. The latter is a state characterized by the absence of rotation in the key positions within the political party. Hence, the following question must be raised: What are the reasons that lead us to this situation?(Schonfeld, 1980, p. 848)

Roberto Michels introduces three reasons, which explain this phenomenon: the structural requirements of the party, the psychology of members, and the mindset of leaders.

The structural requirements of the party refer to the need of any political party for competent leaders with experience and practice in the political field, which enable them to reach power within society. Therefore, the need for specialized and highly qualified individuals is in line with the nature of democratic organizations, which their work is founded on the principle of labour division, and requires specialized individuals in the partisan political field.

Concerning the psychology of individuals, party members always adhere to the prevailing traditions and avoid areas of doubt and uncertainty. That is, based on their experience, they think that the party leaders know them very well and appreciate their competencies. Therefore, they neither risk promoting leaders with unknown abilities in the field, nor do they replace others who have proven their political worth and thus gained legitimacy and status that made them historical symbols of the party institution. The consequent stability characterizing the party's leadership stems from the militants' feeling of gratitude for the significant services these leaders have offered and the burdens they have borne since the inception of the party, which makes abandoning them look like ingratitude. (Michels, 1914, p. 124)

Regarding the mindset of leaders, it relates to their belief that the work they are responsible for at the head of the party is very costly in terms of volume, time, and sacrifices. Hence, they demand a kind of guarantee to continue their tenure in the same position. Michels says in this context: "Appointment to a position for a short period of time is a democratic act, but it is inapplicable for technical and psychological reasons".

Conclusion:

According to the aforementioned, it becomes evident that interests are important in party life. They are the main driving force that endows partisan work with appeal and significance, in addition to considering the importance of ideology and the overall ideas and perceptions of militants. This importance manifests on three interconnected levels:

The first level represents the nature of different privileges and benefits and their effect on balancing the increasing demands for positions against offers that often do not cover all militants. Thus, leaders must expand the organizational hierarchy by creating new positions, such as political and economic advisors... etc.

The second level relates to leadership positions themselves, which represent a strategic stake within the party hierarchy. The second-tier awaits its turn to assume leadership, with all the various accompanying psychological and symbolic advantages, like a sense of status, favour, and appreciation, or those related to material and financial aspects. However, this ambition is often in clash with the party leadership's clinging to its positions, in order to protect the party's unity or fearing the new generation's inability to preserve its achievements. This culminates in the creation of opposing currents that may, in some cases, lead to schisms and divisions, causing the emergence of new entities that accommodate the unmet demands.

The third level refers to the nature of incentives obtained by the militants within the party. The greater the efforts and sacrifices made by a particular group, the more collective incentives that cover everyone become less valuable to them. Therefore, special incentives must be provided that are

commensurate with the nature of the effort, interest, and commitment invested.

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