

BOOK REVIEW

Tigri di carta. Debolezza dei partiti e instabilità sistemica in Italia (1994–2018)

by Eugenio Pizzimenti. Pisa: Pisa University Press. 2020. 267p. €19.00 (paperback). ISBN 978-88-3339-361-3.

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The book seeks to give a comprehensive overview of the organizational approach to the study of political parties by examining changes in Italian politics during the past 30 years. The author's goal in this work is to synthesize his extensive study of political organizations and the evolution of the Italian party system. The book's goal is to combine organizational theory with the literature and empirical research relating to political party organizational change.

For researchers, the organizational viewpoint is a crucial theoretical approach for understanding how political parties work. The importance of adopting a consistent and comprehensive perspective from an organizational standpoint was recently shown in the Political Party Database Project (see Scarrow, Poguntke, and Webb 2017), to which the author contributed. Primarily, the author aims to develop a formal organizational theory of political parties that blends neo-institutionalism with a multidimensional approach to empirical study.

Tigri di Carta is an in-depth presentation and discussion of that comparative organizational approach to the study of the political parties applied to the never-ending transformations of Italy's collective political actors, offering an innovative and original contribution to the ways in which scholars can understand and empirically adopt the organizational perspective.

Pizzimenti initially clarifies the role of political parties, leaving little room for (mis-)interpretation: parties are defined as 'formalised physical and social structures, created as an attempt to achieve specific goals, through the collaboration and space-temporal coordination of participants, using appropriate technical instruments and exchanging resources with the environment in which they operate' (p. 28).

The book is structured in two parts: the first three chapters explain the theoretical approach taken, while the second part (the final two chapters) applies the previously described concepts and indicators to an examination of Italian political parties from 1994 onward.

The theoretical discussion of organizational theory, in particular, provides a picture of the classical framework (by Weber, Ostrogorsky, Michels and Duverger, and Panebianco). The first chapter discusses neo-institutionalism and its evolution. The author emphasizes the need to take into account the connection with the environment and move beyond the traditional hypotheses of organizational convergence. The second chapter focuses on organizations, addressing processes of development, consolidation, and organizational change as well as resources (both material and strategic) (pp. 51–59). The third chapter discusses the application of organizational theory to the study of political parties, as well as the author's true original contribution: the multidimensional approach to the study of political party organizations. The innovation lies in the accurate and detailed assumptions and propositions that contribute to formalizing the theory presented above and promoting the actual application of the notions explained.

The empirical part of the book focuses on the Italian situation and the perennial struggle between the organizational insecurity of political actors and the systemic insecurity of the political environment with which political parties must contend. The turbulence in the party system was particularly intense following the demise of traditional political organizations in the early 1990s: electoral reforms, various reconsiderations of the public political financing system, and a shift in the administrative distribution of power at the local level all significantly altered the exogenous factors surrounding political parties. As a result, the inadequate consolidation of Italian political parties might be seen as a systemic feature.

The description of the Italian case study is based entirely on the indicators presented in the first section of the work. The tables and data provide an understanding of the differences and changes that have occurred within the Italian party system and among its main actors, with an original perspective made possible by the theoretical framework implemented and specific, brand-new indicators directly relating to organizational structures, strategies, and resources. The empirical chapters stress the lack of political party consolidation in Italy over the previous two decades.

The primary goal of this book is to be a comprehensive companion to the study of political parties from an organizational standpoint. The author aims to provide us with a thorough understanding of the current literature on the organizational framework while also providing original insight for use in an empirical study. The genuine value of this book derives from both its rich theoretical ground discussed and an explanation of the Italian case given in such a way that it can easily be applied to study other political systems.

Overall, the book is essential for students and academics working on political parties, as well as those who want to comprehend organizational change from a unique and fresh perspective.