

### Review 3

**Title:** *The Personalization of Politics: A Study of Parliamentary Democracies.*

By Karvonen, Lauri. 2010. Colchester: ECPR Press, 134 p.

**Reviewed by:** Felix Vermeulen, University of Antwerp.

In 'The Personalization of Politics' Lauri Karvonen asks himself whether we can say that politics became more candidate-centered. It is concluded that this common belief is not so certain after all.

Karvonen uses four different dimensions to investigate this hypothesis. First of all, he looks at the institutional aspect, whether parliamentary systems are influenced by presidentialization and whether prime ministers became more powerful and autonomous. In other words, how do the electoral systems influence candidate-centered campaigns.

The second dimension is the role candidates play. Have they become more visible than before and what is the importance of their personal qualities? Dimension number three is the role of the evaluations of the party leaders' character. Number four looks at the role of political personalization in the mass media, or how much references are made to leaders and their qualities.

The empirical data are all from previous studies and/or the analysis of existing databases. This means many different sorts of data. Some of them are from in-depth descriptions of country specialists and others are expert-surveys or content analysis of newspaper coverage. The conclusions of the different data are mixed. But when we talk about the media we can conclude that the evidence is there, although maybe not as strong as one might think. The dimension concerning institutions and personalization gave a much less clear conclusion. In some countries there is a greater candidate-centeredness, in others less so. In other words, there is no clear trend. Also the importance of individual candidates is less clear and, as it seems, the importance has only increased in countries where the possibility of choosing between candidates has existed for a longer period.

When Karvonen analyses the data on voters' attitudes toward leaders, he becomes even less sure of the hypothesis. All the evidence points to the conclusion that leaders did not become more important to voters when it comes to their decision. Instead, the leader is a function of the party factor. They are mostly associated with their parties, which are still the strongest determinant of the evaluation of any leader.

Karvonen thus concludes that there is no clear evidence toward personalization in parliamentary democracies, even if this is the case in some countries. But the author poses a new hypothesis, which states that the current changes are part of a process toward more personalization. The overall conclusion is still very critical to the importance of personalized politics. The shift from party-centered to candidate-centered style of

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campaign communication does not have to be regarded as clear evidence of candidate-centered politics. Politics is not only communication.

'The Personalization of Politics' tries to clarify the issue of contemporary politics characterization' by personalization. As said, there is no clear conclusion, which is a pity, but understandable, given the complexity if the subject.