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## Party bureaucrats, independent professionals, or politicians? A study of party employees

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### ABSTRACT

The number of party employees is increasing, but to what extent and in what sense are party employees integrated into their parties? Based on the literature on party change, the article identifies three important dimensions – ties, tasks, and career plans – and constructs a typology of four ideal types of party employees – technical assistants, party bureaucrats, independent professionals, and unelected politicians. Data on Norwegian party employees suggest that they have strong party ties and are entrusted with a wide range of political tasks. However, career plans rarely include elected office. The results indicate that party employees have stronger party ties than envisaged in influential party models. Professionalisation does not render party grassroots irrelevant, but rather turns some grassroots activists into professionals – what can be called ‘unelected politicians’. In conclusion, the article discusses implications for contemporary understandings of political parties.

**KEYWORDS** Political parties; party employees; party organisation; party professionals; professionalisation; Norway

The professionalisation of political parties has attracted increasing attention in recent years (e.g. Farrell and Webb 2000; Gibson and Römmele 2009; Mair *et al.* 2004). The growing number of party employees is essential in this regard because professionalisation is often perceived as grassroots amateurs being replaced by professionals employed for their expertise (Mair *et al.* 2004). Party employees are nevertheless, according to Poguntke *et al.* (2016: 665), ‘one of the most under-researched fields in the study of political parties’.<sup>1</sup> This is a significant oversight, as their background and role in the party is of great importance for our understanding of today’s party organisations, the nature of party professionalisation, as well as the consequences for the role of

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political parties in democracy. Party employees may, on the one hand, constitute a group of independent professionals who are hired for their expertise in one particular area, for example communication, but with little interest in party politics as such. On the other hand, party employees may be heavily integrated into the party and take great interest in party politics. Thus, we must increase our knowledge of these in-house professionals, who have for too long been neglected in the literature on political parties (see Webb and Fisher 2003).

In this article we contribute to this field of research via a study of party employees in Norwegian political parties. We ask: to what extent and in what sense are party employees politically integrated into their parties? Based on the literature on party development and party professionalisation, in particular Panebianco's (1988) seminal work, we suggest that three dimensions are especially important for the nature of party employees: their *ties* to the party, the *tasks* they carry out as part of their party employment, and their *career plans*. Based on the two first-mentioned dimensions we construct a typology of four ideal types of party employees – technical assistants, party bureaucrats, independent professionals, and unelected politicians.

The article proceeds with a discussion of the concepts of party professionalisation and party professionals, and a presentation of our new typology. On the basis of this discussion, we formulate three research questions to guide our empirical analysis. We then discuss the Norwegian case and the – to our knowledge – unique survey of party employees, covering all parties represented in the Norwegian parliament in 2012. These survey data do not allow us to measure developments over time, but the number of party employees has increased sharply. The survey thus describes the composition of a group that carries an increasing amount of weight within parties. In the subsequent empirical analysis, we first offer a description of party ties and tasks among the party employees, and study to what extent task integration depends on close party ties. We then relate ties and task integration to future career wishes, and identify five main future career paths.

Our findings suggest that party employees, to a great extent, have strong ties to the party and are entrusted to carry out a wide range of essential tasks, but their future career plans rarely include elected office. This type of party professional differs from what we find in the literature on party models (Katz and Mair 1995; Panebianco 1988). In conclusion, we discuss the consequences of our findings for contemporary understandings of party politics, the professionalisation of parties, and the role of parties in democracy. The results indicate that party grassroots and the party organisation continue to be of relevance. Professionalisation is less about grassroots no longer being relevant, but rather about how some grassroots activists become professional paid advisers and campaigners.

## Party professionalisation and party professionals

Two essential tendencies have characterised most political parties in established parliamentary democracies during the last decades. Parties have gradually lost members and increasingly rely on state financial support (Katz and Mair 1995, 2009; van Biezen *et al.* 2012). Along with the decrease in party identification and the rise of individual forms of political actions, this has led several scholars to argue that the contribution of parties to democracy is in decline. The professionalisation of parties, in terms of increased full-time staff, is often understood as a consequence and part of this decline: a change towards more professionalised organisations in which grassroots activists are replaced by full-time employees. However, neither professionalisation nor professionals are widely discussed or defined (but see Panebianco 1988: ch. 12; Webb and Fisher 2003; Webb and Kolodny 2006), and the concepts have been criticised for obscuring more than they clarify (Negrine and Lilleker 2002). In political communication and marketing, professionalisation is conceptualised as a reaction to several factors, especially developments in the media (e.g. Farrell and Webb 2000; Negrine and Lilleker 2002). Professionalisation is often used to describe political parties' use of external experts, for example the political consultants that characterise the US system (see Bowler and Farrell 2000; Farrell *et al.* 2001; Karlsen 2010), as well as parties' increasing use of new (and sometimes old) techniques to communicate with the public, mostly in the context of election campaigns (e.g. Tenscher and Mykkänen 2014). Professionalisation is also perceived as an indicator of centralisation and party leadership empowerment (e.g. Poguntke and Webb 2005). Consequently, several studies refer to the number of party staff as an indicator of the level of professionalisation and organisational change in political parties (Farrell and Webb 2000; Katz and Mair 1995; Kölln, 2015; Tenscher and Mykkänen 2014). In this article, we delve deeper and focus on the actual role of party employees in political parties.

## Party employees: ties, tasks and career plans

Political parties are often discussed and classified by means of party models. While most of these discussions do not focus on the role of party employees (see e.g. Katz and Mair 1995: 18), Panebianco's (1988) models are useful for our purposes because party employees are essential in the construction of his ideal types. Panebianco (1988: 264) distinguishes between *mass bureaucratic* parties and *electoral-professional* parties. The former corresponds roughly to Duverger's (1959) mass party and the latter to Kirchheimer's (1966) catch-all party. However, by using the 'bureaucrat' and 'professional' categories in these labels, Panebianco signals that the composition of employees is an important definitional characteristic.

Moreover, Panebianco (1988: 220–35) thoroughly discusses the nature of party employees, and the distinction between *bureaucrats* and *professionals* is

of particular interest for us. Bureaucrats within parties exhibit some features of the Weberian ideal. They are placed within a hierarchy, their main tasks are administrative work, and they are usually expected to stay out of intra-party politics. They cannot easily find an equivalent job outside of the party, and their position vis-à-vis the party leadership is therefore weak. Staff professionals, on the other hand, are experts. They live under a different control system: even though professionals work within a party hierarchy, they also value the judgement of independent peers. A party-employed economist, for example, must be loyal to the party's economic policy but will also attempt to maintain his or her professional reputation among independent economists. This distinction is related to the party models: the growth of the electoral-professional party increases the weight of professionals in the organisation, at the expense of the bureaucrats, as the party's gravitational centre shifts from the members to the electorate (Panebianco 1988: 264).

Webb and Fisher (2003) build on Panebianco's distinction and investigate the professionalisation of employees in the British Labour Party, making use of the rich sociological literature on professionals: expertise, autonomy, mobility, self-regulation, and commitment.<sup>2</sup> They use both qualitative interviews with senior party officials and a survey sent to all employees working at Millbank, the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) at Westminster and the regional offices. They find that few Labour employees conform to the ideal professional type, and they rather use a more flexible definition and describe Labour employees as 'professionals in pursuit of political outcomes' (Webb and Fisher 2003: 19).

In our opinion, when it comes to party employees, the distinction between mass bureaucratic and electoral-professional parties – which dominates the literature (sometimes under other names) – is too crude. We argue that discussions of party employees suffer from not distinguishing between two aspects related to party employment: the tasks they carry out, and their ties to the party. In regard to tasks, the distinction between technical assistance and strategy assistance is essential (see Karlsen 2010). Strategy assistance refers to involvement in essentially *political* decisions, such as the development and implementation of policy and campaign strategy. Technical assistance includes *administrative* functions and services, such as website design or maintaining membership files. Employees' ties to the parties can be strong or weak. Lack of party membership before the time of employment indicates that ties are weak, whereas party positions and elected positions on behalf of the party indicate strong ties.

In the electoral-professional party model, increasingly professionalised staffs handle specialised tasks – including strategy assistance. The de-institutionalisation of the electoral-professional party, as well as the independence of professional staff, also implies weak ties. However, Fisher and Webb (2003) emphasise the importance of party ties as they treat employment in a political party as a type of political participation. They find that the vast majority of employees in the British Labour Party were very active members before they

**Table 1.** A typology of party employees.

		Tasks	
		Technical assistance	Policy/strategy assistance
Ties to the party	Strong	Party bureaucrat	Unelected party politician
	Weak	Technical assistant	Strategy professional

were employed by the party. Moreover, more than 50% had also attempted to run for local, national, or European office. Hence, the little evidence we have regarding party employees suggests that they are very integrated into the party in terms of ‘ties’ – they appear to be ‘party people’, contrary to the electoral-professional model. If the increasing group of party employees have strong ties to their party, party grassroots will not be replaced by detached professionals, as argued by Mair and colleagues (2004), but rather by politically engaged party activists. We therefore consider it essential to analyse party employment based on ties and tasks. In Table 1, we combine the two dimensions to obtain four ideal types of party employees.

Arguably, Panebianco’s party bureaucrats and staff professionals are found on the diagonal from upper left to lower right. In the upper left corner, we find the ‘party bureaucrat’ who has strong ties to the party but is intended to carry out administrative and technical services and has little influence on policy development or campaign strategy. We distinguish this category from the ‘technical assistant’ who carries out similar tasks but has weak party ties. In the electoral-professional model, experts have taken the place of the bureaucrats. This brings us to the lower right corner of Table 1. The ‘strategy professional’ has weak ties to the party but is entrusted with involvement in and influence on policy development and campaign strategy, due to their expertise. If strategy professionals dominate the party, the party leaders will be in charge of an organisation of detached professionals, who are merely there to do a job.

In the upper right corner of Table 1, however, we provide an alternative to both the mass bureaucratic and electoral-professional types. If party employees both have strong party ties and are included in developing party policy and campaign strategy, they may constitute a new breed of what we label the ‘unelected party politician’. We use the ‘politician’ concept because this is a person who is involved in influencing public policy and decision-making.<sup>3</sup>

The career paths of party employees are an essential aspect in earlier discussions of party change. Katz and Mair (2009: 761) regard the *specialisation* of the

party-political career path as an element of professionalisation. Party organisational careers are increasingly separated from other occupational tracks. For example, there will be less movement of staff between the central offices of social democratic parties and trade unions. This is seen as contributing to the development of cartel parties. In contrast, Panebianco (1988: 234) regards the role of a party professional as *unstable*. Whereas traditional party bureaucrats can only pursue their careers within the party organisation, staff professionals have two possible career paths.

The intrinsic instability of professional roles pushes experts, after a certain time, to abandon professional politics (though not necessarily the party) for more prestigious jobs outside of the organization or to try to attain leadership roles within the party. (Panebianco 1988: 234)

Accordingly, professionalisation (in this sense) leads to de-institutionalisation rather than centralisation. Hence, as described initially, we consider the career plans of party employees to be essential in understanding the role of party employees in political parties.

## Research questions

Based on the above discussion, we formulate three research questions to lead our empirical approach. The first two are directly linked to the dimensions that constitute the typology. First, *how strong are party employees' ties to the party?* Are they independent or do they resemble party activists? Second, *to what extent are party employees involved in developing policy and making strategic decisions, and are such tasks dependent on strong party ties?* Are the employees involved in the essential purposes of political parties, or do they merely carry out simple technical tasks? Panebianco describes a change from mass bureaucratic to electoral-professional parties. Our data do not allow us to chart development over time, but if Panebianco's hypothesis is correct, we would expect to find a large proportion of strategy professionals in contemporary parties, performing policy-related tasks without strong ties. However, we expect 'unelected politicians' to play a central role in parties. If this is the case, professionalisation entails a steep increase in the number of strong party identifiers and party activists working full-time in politics. In other words, we expect to find party employees who have strong ties to the parties, and are entrusted with tasks such as campaign strategy and policy development.

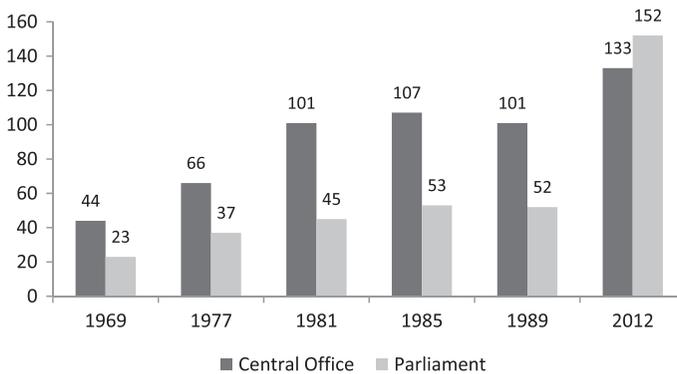
With regard to the career plans of party employees, the literature provides two alternative hypotheses. Whereas Katz and Mair (1995) linked professionalisation to a career *within* the party, Panebianco (1988) emphasised the various career opportunities *outside* of the party. Hence, our third research question concerns the career plans of the employees: *what type of future careers do party employees envisage, and are different career patterns related to party ties and task integration?* Do they envisage a future as party employees, and if not, do they seek a political or non-political career?

These general research questions refer to the whole universe of party employees. There is nevertheless reason to believe that the employees' party ties, what tasks they carry out, as well as their career plans might differ based on place of employment (central or regional party organisation and parliamentary group) as well as their main job assignment. Moreover, there may be differences between parties. On the one hand, as Panebianco (1988) pointed out, a party's formative phase leaves long-lasting marks. This may also include the recruitment of employees. On the other hand, professionalisation may have erased such differences. These questions are unexplored in the literature, as Webb and Fisher's (2003) study only covered a single party. Hence, we include differences based on these factors in the analysis. First, however, we discuss and describe the Norwegian case, as well as the data.

### The Norwegian case

The political system in Norway is characterised by a multiparty structure and a multidimensional cleavage structure. In organisational structure, the seven largest parties (which are included in our study) are quite similar. They have fundamentally maintained the formal structure of Duverger's (1959) mass party model, in which local branches are linked to the central organisation through regional units (Allern and Saglie 2012). Candidate selection is in the hands of regional branches (Valen *et al.* 2002). The party congress is responsible for electing leaders (Allern and Karlsen 2013) and adopting party programmes after a comprehensive hearing procedure that includes local and regional branches (Allern and Saglie 2012; Allern *et al.* 2013). These documents are fairly detailed, containing a large number of specific policy positions. In addition, the central office also establishes committees to develop policies in specific fields. However, much day-to-day policy-making is also left to the parliamentary party groups.

Some uniform trends characterise the development of party organisations in established democracies: party membership declines while financial resources and paid labour grows (van Biezen *et al.* 2012; Kölln 2015; Poguntke *et al.* 2016). The Norwegian case is typical of this general trend. Party membership has declined, while state subsidies to parties – and thereby party incomes – have increased significantly (Allern *et al.* 2016: 39–44). More importantly for our research question, there has been a steep increase in party staff during the last two decades. While the seven parties employed 153 people in 1989, that number had almost doubled to 285 by 2012. The staff increase in the parliamentary party groups has been especially strong (see also Rommetvedt 2011: 87). As shown in Figure 1, the number of people working for the parliamentary party groups increased from 52 to 152.<sup>4</sup> This confirms the thesis of the ascendancy of the party in public office (Katz and Mair 2002), but there has been an increase in central office staff as well. Even though this growth is much more modest, the party central offices are far from marginalised.



**Figure 1.** Number of party staff at the central office and in parliament in Norway, 1969–2012. Source: 1969–1989 Svåsand (1992: 750–52); 2012: the party employee survey population.

Whereas the central office and regional party staff are funded from the regular party budgets, the expenses of the parliamentary party groups (including salaries) are funded by grants from the parliament. However, the parliamentary group staff are recruited and employed by the party groups, not by individual MPs (Heidar 2014). The recruitment of all types of party staff is thus party-controlled, and they can all be recruited to their role for strategic reasons.

If we compare the number of staff in Norwegian parties to parties in other European democracies, the staff/member ratio in Norway is about average, according to the Political Party Database Project. The mean number of central office staff per 1000 party members in Norway is 1.0, whereas the mean for the 15 countries studied in this project is 1.3. The corresponding figures for legislative party staff per MP (in 12 countries) are 1.7 and 2.0, respectively (Poguntke *et al.* 2016: 666).

In addition to party headquarters and parliament, there are also a considerable number of party employees – 131 in 2012 – at the regional party branches in Norway. In other words, there are as many employees at the regional level as in the central office. In multi-level party organisations, such as the Norwegian ones, it is important to provide a link between the local branches and the national party organs. The staff at the regional party branches play an important role in this respect (Aarebrot and Saglie 2013; Allern and Saglie 2012). A party often has only one employee in a county, and he or she must therefore carry out both political and administrative tasks. Accordingly, there is most likely a greater division of labour among staff members at the national level than at the regional level.

## Data

Our data are comprised of a 2012 web survey of employees in Norwegian political parties.<sup>5</sup> The survey was sent to all employees in parties that were

represented in parliament at that time: the Socialist Left Party (SV), the Labour Party (Ap), the Centre Party (Sp), the Christian Democratic Party (KrF), the Liberal Party (V), the Conservative Party (H) and the Progress Party (FrP).<sup>6</sup> Employees in the central office, parliament, and the regional offices were all included.<sup>7</sup> In total, the population consisted of 411 employees: 133 working in the central offices, 152 in the parliament, and 131 in the regional offices. We obtained a satisfactory response rate of 64%, leaving us with 261 respondents: 90 (67%) in the central offices, 106 (70%) in the parliament, and 63 (48%) in the regional offices.

The survey contains several questions designed to measure the integration of employees into the parties, in regard to both ties and the tasks they are set to perform. Party ties are measured by party membership before and after employment in the party, elected position in the party, and elected office on behalf of the party. The indicators of our two selected tasks are questions about contribution to policy development and contribution to campaign strategy.

## Empirical analysis

To analyse the research questions discussed above, we first study party ties, as well as tasks carried out. We then proceed to explore the relationship between ties and tasks and ask whether close party ties are essential in being entrusted with central tasks. In the last section, we study the third element we use to come to grips with party employees: career plans. Are different career plans related to levels of party ties and differences in task integration?

### *Ties and tasks*

In this section we pursue the two first research questions formulated previously: how strong are party employees' ties to the party? To what extent are party employees involved in developing policy and strategic decisions, and are such tasks dependent on strong party ties? We measure the strength of party ties by means of three indicators: party membership, holding party office, and being elected to public office on behalf of the party. The indicators of party and public offices include *both* positions at the time of the survey and previous positions. With regard to membership, we asked about present membership and membership before they were hired. In Table 2, we also show ties based on main job assignment, and we distinguish between organisational advisers, political advisers, communication advisers, and administrative positions.<sup>8</sup> This variable is based on formal titles that the parties give their employees, and the point of introducing it is to determine whether ties and tasks are related to one's formal title specification and main area of expertise.

The results presented in Table 2 tell us that party employees are indeed party people. The vast majority, 78%, had been members before they started working

**Table 2.** Party ties (present and previous membership, party positions, and elected public office) by main job assignment (%).

	All	CA	PA	OA	Adm
Member of the party at present	98	100	100	99	92
Member before employed by the party	78	71	85	86	56
Position in the local party organisation*	78	66	82	83	54
Position in the national or regional party organisation*	52	39	61	61	29
Elected office at the local level*	49	43	53	59	31
Elected office at the national or regional level*	28	16	32	40	10
Mayor*	1	0	0	3	0
Member of Parliament*	3	0	5	3	1
State secretary/political adviser in government*	6	7	13	3	2
Minister*	0	0	0	0	0
N	260	44	79	80	48

\*Includes both at present and former; CA: Mainly communication adviser; PA: Mainly political adviser; OA: Mainly organisational adviser; Adm: Mainly administrative position.

for the party, and almost all the remaining employees joined the party when they obtained their jobs. Accordingly, 98% of the employees were members of the party they work for. Also, although not all employees had been members *before* their party employment, a large majority of the non-members sympathised with the party to a great (65%) or some (26%) extent before they were employed by it. Hence, almost all employees had basic ties to the parties in the sense of longstanding membership and ideological sympathy.

Holding an elected position within the party is a more demanding type of attachment, but the majority of employees had also held such positions – at the time of the survey or previously. As would be expected, fewer had held a position at the national level. A substantial share of party employees had held elected office at the municipal or, to a lesser extent, at the regional level. Only a small minority of employees had held top positions as a state secretary, political adviser in government, or MP. None of the employees had been a minister.

As for the groups based on main job assignments, there is a clear pattern. The administrative staff had the weakest ties, followed by the communication advisers. Political and organisational advisers had the strongest ties. This is perhaps no surprise. The administrative staff is mainly comprised of clerical staff. Their political affiliation may be less crucial for their work, which has a less partisan nature. As for communication advisers, communication experience of some sort is probably deemed more (or equally) crucial than party political experience. For political and organisational advisers, party political knowledge seems to be vital.

Thus far, we can conclude that party employees have quite strong ties. Very few seem to be there just there to do a job without political attachment. In Table 3, we turn to the other dimension of our typology, task integration. To what extent are employees involved in arguably the two most essential aspects of political parties: policy development and campaign strategy?

**Table 3.** Party tasks (policy and strategy contributions) by main job assignment (%).

	All	CA	PA	OA	Adm
Contributed to the party programme <sup>a</sup>	70	64	85	78	35
Contributed with direct policy input <sup>b</sup>	31	23	57	25	8
Contributed to the campaign strategy <sup>c</sup>	66	84	62	81	27
Part of the main strategy group <sup>d</sup>	28	36	20	46	6
N	260	44	79	80	48

<sup>a</sup>Question 'Did you, as an employee, contribute to the development of the party programme? (yes/no).

<sup>b</sup>If yes: Please describe how you contributed to the party programme? Based on the answers to this open-ended question, we distinguished between direct input and indirect input through, for example, organising the process.

<sup>c</sup>Question: 'Did you contribute to the development of your party's campaign strategy in the 2009 or 2011 election? (yes/no).

<sup>d</sup>If yes: How did you contribute? Categories: 'I was part of the group that developed the main strategy; I was part of groups that developed parts of the campaign strategy; I gave feedback on the strategy through various fora.'

Starting with policy development, our survey confirms the political role of these staff members: 70% of our respondents stated that they – as party employees – had contributed to the development of the party programme. This contribution ranged from facilitating the organisational aspects of the party and giving advice to direct written input regarding policy documents. More than 30% of all employees contributed with direct policy input. In addition to any influence based on their job position, employees can also contribute to policy development through ordinary party channels, for example through a position in a local party branch.

In regard to campaign strategy, 66% stated that they, in one way or another, contributed to campaign strategy. This can range from commenting on the strategy through different fora and meetings to being part of the group that developed the main campaign strategy. In our material, 28% of respondents contributed by being part of the main campaign strategy group.

Again, the administrative staff are less involved with essential tasks. However, about one-third said that they contributed to the party programme and campaign strategy, but this is a much smaller share than in the other groups. Communication advisers are more involved with campaign strategy than policy development, while the opposite is true for political advisers. However, a majority in both these groups is involved with both aspects of party tasks.

Task integration may depend on close party ties. As mentioned previously, an employee may be recruited into a position that requires party political knowledge and/or party loyalty due to their ties to the party. In Table 4, we present the result of a multivariate regression model in which we investigate the effect of party ties on task integration. We also include main job assignment, place of employment (parliamentary group, central office, or regional office), and party affiliation in the model. This makes it possible to test whether the effect of ties is related to one main type of position in the party and whether it varies between parties.

**Table 4.** The effect of party ties on task integration (Multivariate regression analysis,  $N = 248$ ).

	Model			
	I	II	III	IV
Constant	1.497***	0.644***	0.942***	0.839
Party ties	0.173***	0.068	0.091	0.095
<i>Main assignment<sup>a</sup></i>				
Communication adviser		1.284***	1.269***	1.243***
Political adviser		1.387***	1.407***	1.415***
Organisational adviser		1.424***	1.359***	1.108***
<i>Party affiliation<sup>b</sup></i>				
Labour			-0.372	-0.355
Progress			-0.980***	-0.883***
Conservative			-0.324	-0.381
Centre			0.077	0.014
Socialist Left			-0.162	-0.167
Liberal			-0.342	-0.299
<i>Place of employment<sup>c</sup></i>				
Parliamentary group				0.069
Regional office				0.599***
$R^2$	0.05	0.22	0.26	0.28

\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \* $p < 0.10$ .

<sup>a</sup>Administrative position is reference category.

<sup>b</sup>Christian Democratic Party is reference category.

<sup>c</sup>Central office is reference category.

To investigate the relationship between ties and tasks, we constructed indexes for each variable. The party ties index is a cumulative index of party membership (before employment) and the various possible party positions. Hence, the higher the score, the more positions held, and we consider this to be a general measure of party ties. The task integration variable is an additive index of two variables that each measure one of the two main tasks investigated: policy contribution and strategy contribution. They each have three values.<sup>9</sup> Hence, the task integration index ranges from 0 (no contribution regarding any of the two main areas) to 4 (major contributions regarding both areas).

Table 4 shows that party ties are related to task integration. Employees with strong ties to the party are significantly more likely to carry out important tasks for the party. However, the separate effect of party ties disappears after controlling for main job assignment type. In other words, people with strong party ties ultimately fill specific positions within the party. As expected from Table 3, the three types of advisers are much more likely to be involved in clearly political tasks than the administrative staff.

Staff at the regional offices contribute to the development of campaign strategy and policy to a greater extent than staff at the parliamentary group and central office, also after controlling for other variables. Employees in the regional organisation are involved to a greater extent than others, especially in developing campaign strategies. The regional secretaries serve as a key nexus between the levels of the party (Aarebrot and Saglie 2013). The regional branches are not only important in local election campaigns but also in parliamentary elections,

where the regions (counties) are the constituencies. Regional secretaries also play an important role in the development of the programme because they coordinate input from local branches.

With regard to party differences, there are few signs of distinct party cultures in Table 4. There is only one statistically significant effect: employees in the Progress Party are less likely than the reference category (employees in KrF) to carry out important tasks.

### **Career plans**

As Panebianco (1988) points out, we can distinguish between types of party employees by looking at their career patterns. Hence, now we pursue our third research question: what type of future careers do party employees envisage, and are different career patterns related to party ties and task integration? According to Table 5, most Norwegian party employees would like to continue their work in their respective parties. Yet this is not the only future prospect: more than half were also attracted to non-governmental organisation (NGOs) and the private sector. The typical political career of being elected MP or being part of the government as a minister was not, however, greatly sought after. A future position in government as a state secretary or a political adviser, on the other hand, was considered a prospect for half of the employees. The popularity of positions below the ministers – the state secretaries and political advisers – presumably reflects that this is a more likely career path: many government advisers are recruited from among party employees.

The fact that few would like to become MPs or cabinet ministers may support our thesis regarding ‘unelected politicians’: the party employees apparently prefer political positions in which they do not have to fight election campaigns on their own behalf. Of course, this may also express realism because most

**Table 5.** Future career plans (% and mean).

	Little extent		Great extent			Mean	N
	1	2	3	4	5		
The party	7	7	17	35	34	3.82	251
NGO	9	8	26	34	22	3.52	244
In the private sector	20	10	18	31	22	3.25	246
State secretary/political adviser	34	5	13	20	28	3.03	247
Adviser, consultant	35	12	20	24	10	2.62	245
Public sector	32	13	24	24	6	2.59	246
Central administration	39	17	17	19	9	2.41	233
PR firms	49	17	12	14	5	2.07	244
Local government administration	54	15	17	11	3	1.93	239
MP	64	11	12	6	5	1.90	239
Cabinet minister	65	11	12	6	5	1.74	237

Question: ‘Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is to a very little extent and 5 is to a great extent, to what extent you would like a future career in...’

politicians never get the opportunity to become cabinet members. The fact that the parliament and the central party offices are located in the capital may also hinder potential MP careers for some of the advisers because a presence in the constituency is important in candidate selection (Valen *et al.* 2002).

Do the career wishes of party employees constitute a small number of distinct career paths? To investigate the relational pattern of the individual careers in Table 5, we employ factor analysis. Factor analysis is a technique used to explore whether the relationship between variables constitutes a smaller number of underlying dimensions. Using a principal component strategy and an open solution, we retrieved a four-dimensional solution. Each dimension represents a career path. Table 6 presents the results.

The first dimension is a political career outside of the party organisation, the second is a career as a consultant or public relations (PR) adviser or filling another role in the private sector, the third dimension is a career in the public sector or an NGO, and the fourth is to remain in the party. Based on this analysis, in what follows, we construct and investigate five main future career types: top-level politician, political appointee (state secretary/political adviser), adviser/consultant, public sector, and party. We distinguish between top-level politician and appointee for two main reasons. First, while a substantial proportion of employees want a career as a political appointee, only a small minority regard being an MP or minister as relevant alternatives. Second, a career as a political appointee in government loads on two dimensions.

What can explain the different career paths identified above? To investigate this further, we computed additive indexes from the items that define the various career path dimensions most clearly: top-level politician (MP and

**Table 6.** Main career paths (Principal component analysis, N = 209).

	1	2	3	4
Cabinet minister	0.903	0.146	-0.011	-0.052
MP	0.881	0.097	0.088	0.026
State secretary/political adviser	0.656	0.430	0.173	0.123
Adviser, consultant	0.078	0.859	0.120	0.045
PR firms	0.144	0.848	0.035	0.049
In the private sector	0.283	0.677	0.067	-0.230
Public sector	0.122	0.053	0.806	-0.221
Local government administration	0.037	-0.053	0.769	-0.094
Central administration	0.145	0.120	0.759	0.114
NGO	-0.054	0.117	0.464	0.132
The party	0.049	-0.045	-0.007	0.967
Eigenvalue	3.34	1.82	1.29	1.07

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.  
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation.  
Rotation converged in five iterations.

**Table 7.** Explaining future career wishes (Multivariate regression analysis, N = 225–228).

	Career as				
	Top-level politician	Political appointee	PR consultant	Public sector	Party employee
Constant	0.925***	1.016***	1.846***	1.913***	4.150***
Party ties	0.127***	0.123**	-0.078	-0.053	0.090*
Policy integration	0.053	0.446***	0.115	0.103	0.173
Strategy integration	0.056	-0.074	0.015	-0.207**	-0.156
<i>Main assignment<sup>a</sup></i>					
Communication adviser	0.379	1.740***	1.152***	0.518**	-0.379
Political adviser	0.786***	1.973***	0.698***	1.052***	-0.630**
Organisational adviser	0.375	0.971***	0.606**	0.801***	-0.503*
<i>Party affiliation<sup>b</sup></i>					
Labour	-0.238	-0.150	-0.428	-0.243	-0.033
Progress	0.416	0.380	0.437	-0.118	-0.421
Conservative	0.113	0.314	0.337	-0.239	-0.164
Centre	-0.205	-0.354	0.127	-0.016	-0.722**
Socialist Left	-0.352	-0.475	-0.700**	0.551*	-0.357
Liberal	0.394	0.272	0.452	0.003	-0.016
R <sup>2</sup>	0.16	0.37	0.17	0.14	0.03

\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \* $p < 0.10$ .

<sup>a</sup>Administrative assignment is the reference category.

<sup>b</sup>Christian Democratic Party is the reference category.

minister), political appointee (state secretary/political adviser in government), PR consultant (adviser/consultant, PR firm), public sector (public sector, local government administration, and central administration) and the party (party item). In order to compare the effects of the variables in the multivariate analysis, all career indexes range from 1 to 5: the additive index is divided by the number of items included in the index.

In Table 7, we present the results of the multivariate regression analyses, with the five career paths being used as dependent variables. As independent variables, we include party ties, task integration, main assignment, and party affiliation. We split the task integration index into two separate variables – policy tasks and strategy tasks – because these could be differently related to career paths.

Party ties have an independent effect on wanting a political career – both as a top-level politician and a political appointee – even when we control for the main type of position and party affiliation. With regard to tasks, policy integration has a significant independent effect on wanting a future career as a political appointee. However, most effects on the part of policy and strategy integration are weak.

In contrast, the effects of main assignment are generally strong. Compared with the reference category – administrative positions – all three types of advisers envisaged a broad range of career options. Indeed, working as a political, communication, or organisational adviser has a significant effect on all future career paths, except for top-level politician and continuing in the party. Interestingly, it is primarily political advisers who wanted careers as top-level

politicians. When communication advisers and organisational advisers wanted a political career, they typically wanted to be political appointees. Regarding alternative careers outside of politics, it was – not surprisingly – the communication advisers who expressed the strongest desire to work as PR consultants. The political and organisational advisers seemed to prefer public sector careers.

Our analyses are able to explain the last of our five career wishes only to a lesser extent: the wish to continue in the party. The explained variance is very low. However, we see that the organisational and political advisers were significantly less likely to want to stay in the party as compared with those in administrative positions.

Party affiliation has almost no significant effects. Socialist Left employees were less interested in careers as consultants in the private sector than employees in other parties, while the opposite is true for careers in the public sector. This may be a result of their ideological convictions, but the most striking result is nevertheless the lack of party differences. Even though the career plans of party employees vary *within* parties, the variation between parties is much more modest. They appear to share a common job market, with no segments being clearly reserved for the left or the right.

## Discussion and conclusion

The findings of this article indicate that party employees play a different role in political parties than envisaged in influential models from the party literature (Katz and Mair 1995; Panebianco 1988). Here, a mass bureaucratic party, populated by traditional party bureaucrats, is expected to yield to an electoral-professional party populated by independent professionals (Panebianco 1988). Instead, we find that a new type of employed professional seems to be emerging within political parties. The empirical evidence suggests that party employees in Norway have strong ties to the parties in the sense that all are members and most were members before they were employed. A majority have also had positions in the party and held political office on behalf of their party. Party employees were also involved in tasks at the strategy level. Specifically, they were highly involved in two fundamental tasks of party organisation: developing policy and campaigning. In sum, a large number of employees resemble what we in our typology refer to as ‘unelected party politicians’.

There are few differences *between* the parties, but a certain division of labour *within* them: the political and organisational advisers best fit the image of party employees as ‘unelected party politicians’. Those responsible for administrative tasks have somewhat weaker ties to their parties and are less ambitious with regard to their career plans. Nevertheless, the administrative staff also have strong ties to their parties and are to some extent – less than other employees – involved in policy-making and campaign strategy development. This group thus resembles traditional ‘party bureaucrats’ more closely. The communication

advisers, on the other hand, have weaker party ties than the organisational and political advisers. Accordingly, they resemble the ‘independent professional’ type more closely than the other party employees do. Nevertheless, in sum our results indicate that two of the types from our typology dominate in Norwegian parties: party bureaucrats and unelected politicians.

According to Panebianco (1988: ch. 12), party professionals have access to a wider range of career options than traditional party bureaucrats. Our analyses support this proposition. Employees in administrative positions more often envisage staying in the party as compared with professional groups – the three categories of advisers – even though the administrators have weaker party ties. The advisers foresee a broad range of career possibilities, including political office, as well as being lobbyists or bureaucrats or working in NGOs. In other words, the data do not support Katz and Mair’s (2009: 761) proposition that professionalisation entails specialisation within a party-political career path.

Our results speak directly to the nature of party professionalisation. Mair *et al.* (2004) perceive professionalisation as grassroots amateurs being replaced by professionals, who are employed for their expertise. However, we show that party activists rather constitute the recruiting ground for party professionals: party professionals are highly committed to the party, and they also have extensive experience of being active in the party. These results indicate that professionalisation is less about grassroots no longer being relevant, but rather about how some grassroots activists become professional paid advisers and campaigners. Hence, in ‘professionalised parties’, our results indicate that party grassroots and the party organisation continue to be of relevance and serve to socialise not only future politicians but also future party professionals into the party.

The new political positions in the party organisation, parliament, and government offer politically interested and active people opportunities to have political careers – to influence campaign strategy, political decisions, policy development, and policy implementation without necessarily running for political office. In this article we refer to them as ‘unelected party politicians’. However, as we see it, the jury is still out on whether the increasing presence of party employees is worrying in democratic terms. On the one hand, a new group with political influence has emerged seemingly outside of the parliamentary chain of control. However, they operate under and are accountable to someone who is *accountable* to the electorate, the party organisation, or both. In this sense the term ‘unelected’ is less problematic in democratic terms than might be perceived. Moreover, our results modify Panebianco’s (1988: 232) prediction of de-institutionalisation. The strong party attachment of the professionals may be a source of stability and prevent party employees from pursuing their own interests in conflict with party leadership, MPs, or rank-and-file members. Their attachment to the grassroots organisation, as indicated by their local political offices, may also prevent employees from becoming uncritical yea-sayers for

the leadership. The increase in party employees has been a conscious choice not only to strengthen parliamentary groups versus the executive branch but also to strengthen parties in relation to the media, think tanks, etc. Still, employees are obviously an influential group inside political parties today, and future theorising on parties and their role and function in democracies must take them into account. Further research will be needed to investigate whether their political attitudes deviate from those of other layers within their parties.

Norwegian parties are not the only ones with increasing numbers of professionals within their organisations (Kölln 2015; Poguntke *et al.* 2016). The extent to which ‘unelected politicians’ – strongly integrated employees who carry out political tasks – are also found in other West European political parties should be an essential topic for future research. Due to similar organisational and communicative needs, we expect to find a similar pattern in many parties in West European countries. This is supported by Fisher and Webb’s studies of employees in the British Labour Party (Fisher and Webb 2003; Webb and Fisher 2003). However, contextual factors like institutional setting, party organisational aspects, and political culture (general and party-specific) may influence the composition of party employees. Knowledge about such differences will give us a better understanding of changing political parties and the forces that shape these changes.

## Notes

1. Notable exceptions include Fisher and Webb (2003) and Webb and Fisher (2003).
2. See also Webb and Kolodny (2006).
3. Although we label this group ‘unelected’, they may hold or have held elected office at the local level.
4. Rommetvedt (2011: 87), using other sources, reports an even higher increase in the staff of the parliamentary party groups.
5. The survey was conducted in the field from 11 January to 12 March.
6. The Green Party first entered the Norwegian parliament in 2013, after the survey was carried out. It is therefore not included in our study.
7. State secretaries and political advisers to cabinet members were not included. The ministers’ advisers are not permanently employed and must leave office when their minister resigns.
8. We distinguished between these main types of assignments using the following question: what description would you say fits your formal job description? (1) Information/communication, (2) political advisement, (3) organisational work, (4) finances/accounts, (5) ICT, (6) administrative support, or (7) personnel management. Groups 4–7 were coded as administrative.
9. Policy: contributed with direct policy input (2), other types of contribution (1), or no contribution (0). Strategy: part of the group that developed the main campaign strategy (2), other types of contributions (feedback, etc.) (1), or no contribution (0).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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