



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### The party scene

**Citation for published version:**

Hofmann, SC & Martill, B 2021, 'The party scene: New directions for political party research in foreign policy analysis', *International affairs*, vol. 97, no. 2, pp. 305–322. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa165>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1093/ia/iiaa165](https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa165)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

International affairs

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced version of an article accepted for publication in *International Affairs* following peer review. The version of record Stephanie C Hofmann, Benjamin Martill, The party scene: new directions for political party research in foreign policy analysis, *International Affairs*, Volume 97, Issue 2, March 2021, Pages 305–322 is available online at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa165>

**General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



# The Party Scene: New Directions for Political Party Research in Foreign Policy Analysis

**Stephanie C. Hofmann**

Professor of International Relations and Political Science

The Graduate Institute, Geneva

stephanie.hofmann@graduateinstitute.ch

**Benjamin Martill**

Lecturer in Politics and International Relations

University of Edinburgh

benjamin.martill@ed.ac.uk

Accepted at *International Affairs*, 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020.

**Abstract.** Research on political parties and foreign policy has grown in recent years in response to disciplinary and real-world changes. But party research still bears the imprint of earlier scepticism about the role of parties, with most works aiming to show that parties *matter*, rather than *how*, *when* and *where* they matter. How can we advance research on parties and foreign policymaking? We argue that we first need to understand why political parties made initial inroads to FPA so gradually, before we can grasp what challenges confront the research programme. These two steps are necessary to show how closer engagement between International Relations, Comparative Politics and FPA scholarship can lead to a more self-reflexive research program. Drawing on recent work in Comparative Politics and International Relations, we suggest four avenues for future research: (1) ideological multidimensionality beyond left and right, (2) parties as organisations and the role of entrepreneurs, (3) parties as transnational foreign policy actors, and (4) the interaction between parties and the global order.

**Keywords.** Ideology, party organization, party leadership, party environment, Comparative Politics and International Relations nexus

## Introduction

Political parties formulate, propose and decide on policy proposals, on the national, transnational and international stage. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence that political parties matter in foreign policy-making, both across time and space. Some evidence points more towards party ideology, while other shows that party organization and leadership also matter. During the Cold War, the German Social Democrats built political relations with Central and Eastern European countries as well as the USSR (*Ostpolitik*) which were opposed by the Christian Democrats. The Republican Party under Trump conducts a much more unilateral foreign policy towards organizations such as NATO compared to previous Democratic administrations. The parties in Taiwan have been split on the issue of the island's independence from China with the Democratic Progressive Party historically favouring this goal, whereas the Kuomintang favour a continuation of the status quo.<sup>1</sup> In Latin America, different organizational projects such as UNASUR or PROSUR have emerged as the result of different political parties holding power.<sup>2</sup> And Islamist parties have transformed the electoral landscape of the Middle East in recent years, leading to a number of profound foreign policy shifts.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the case for political parties impacting upon foreign policymaking, it is only relatively recently that a substantial but disconnected body of scholarship on party politics has emerged in Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA).<sup>4</sup> How can we advance research on parties and foreign policymaking? We argue that we first need to understand why political parties made initial inroads to FPA so gradually, before we can grasp what challenges confront the research

---

<sup>1</sup> Eleanor Albert, 'China-Taiwan Relations', *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 22, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/background/china-taiwan-relations>.

<sup>2</sup> Joshua Goodman, 'South America bloc's woes leave architectural gem forlorn', *AP News*, January 8, 2019, <https://apnews.com/c1fb87dfaa024e61bd95fa081aad49a7>.

<sup>3</sup> Melani Cammett and Pauline Jones Luong, 'Is There an Islamist Political Advantage?', *Annual Review of Political Science* 17, 2014, pp. 187-206.

<sup>4</sup> Chris Adlen and Amnon Aran, *Foreign Policy Analysis: New Approaches*. Second Edition. (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 80; Tapio Raunio and Wolfgang Wagner, 'The Party Politics of Foreign and Security Policy', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, forthcoming.

programme. These two steps are necessary to show how closer engagement between International Relations (IR), Comparative Politics (CP) and FPA scholarship can lead to a more self-reflexive research program. Our aim is to advance the theoretical and conceptual insights which party research in FPA can produce and to thereby help refine theoretical scope conditions for party research at large.

Our argument proceeds in three steps. First, we argue that there are a number of reasons why FPA proved less conducive to the development of party research than might be expected. Party politics is complex and assumptions based on linear observations between ideology or party-type and foreign policy outcome were (and still are) few and far between. Moreover, the discipline itself evolved in an American context, with particular assumptions about the weakness of party organizations and ideology as a result. And, until the mid-1990s, a focus on Western democracies and the number of democratic regimes in the international system rendered analyses of party politics a selective affair.

We argue in the second step that changing disciplinary assumptions as well as real-world changes, have helped establish a substantial body of research on parties and foreign policymaking in recent years. This is to some extent the delayed by-product of disciplinary changes occurring in the 1990s – the ‘constructivist turn’, the systematisation of the liberal paradigm, and efforts at cross-disciplinary synthesis. The globalisation of FPA as a discipline also helped to break down some of the lingering assumptions about foreign policy which derived from the specific American context within which FPA had initially developed. And globalisation as well as regionalisation have increased interstate interdependence and blurred the lines between domestic and foreign policymaking. But party research *still* bears the imprint of the sceptical environment in which it developed and a tendency for research to focus on showing *that parties matter*.

In a third step of our argument, we propose a more self-reflexive turn towards studying *how*, *when* and *where* parties matter in foreign policymaking. We argue in favour of theory-driven scope conditions building on insights from FPA, CP and IR scholarship. This conversation provides the ground to develop a richer conceptual and theoretical vocabulary to draw from as well as think through different levels of analysis when analysing foreign policymaking. We suggest that a self-reflexive research program could begin with focusing on four avenues of research: ideological multidimensionality beyond the left-right model, the various organizational features of parties and the role of political entrepreneurs, the status of parties as transnational foreign policy actors, and the interaction between party politics and global systemic changes.

### **A Rough Start**

Drawing FPA's disciplinary boundaries and placing party politics within it can be challenging, especially over time.<sup>5</sup> Many scholars teach FPA as a subfield of IR<sup>6</sup> aiming to “develop the actor-specific theory required to engage in the ground of IR”<sup>7</sup>. FPA scholarship puts “human decision makers acting singly or in groups”<sup>8</sup> at the heart of its theoretical developments which provides for a better understanding of the processes in which foreign policy decision are made and the issues that these policies try to push.<sup>9</sup> However, FPA scholarship has also drawn on other disciplines to develop theories explaining national foreign policymaking. When focusing

---

<sup>5</sup> Steve Smith, ‘Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 16, 2, 1987, pp. 345–348; Valerie M. Hudson, ‘The History and Evolution of Foreign Policy Analysis’, in Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield, and Tim Dunne, 2nd eds, *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 419–440.

<sup>6</sup> Neither disciplinary boundaries are clearly defined.

<sup>7</sup> Valerie M. Hudson, ‘Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations’, *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1: 1, 2005, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Hudson, ‘Foreign Policy Analysis’, p. 1; see also Juliet Kaarbo, ‘A Foreign Policy Analysis Perspective on the Domestic Politics Turn in IR Theory’, *International Studies Review* 17, 2, 2015, pp. 189–216.

<sup>9</sup> Marijke Breuning, ‘Pedagogy and Foreign Policy Analysis’, *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of International Studies*, 2010, p. 1.

on the individual, scholars have imported psychological approaches to develop theories on roles or personality traits in the foreign policy realm.<sup>10</sup> Groups have been studied through social psychology (e.g. ‘groupthink’) or organizational theory.<sup>11</sup> Political parties are yet another group through which foreign policymaking can be studied.

In spite of the *prima facie* case for their importance for the conduct of foreign policy, scepticism towards the analytical value of political parties has run high. One prominent study noted, for instance, that politics still stops ‘at the water’s edge’.<sup>12</sup> Partly this was a consequence of the perceived consensus across political parties when it came to the ‘national interest’<sup>13</sup>, but scholars also lamented the lack of systematism in party positions on foreign policy, which are held to change frequently, seemingly vary from country to country within the same party type, fail to map neatly onto existing distinctions between ‘left and right’, and vary within parties as much as they do between them. Even those interested in studying parties acknowledged the challenges presented by bipartisanship, intra-party disagreements and low levels of parliamentary influence over foreign policy for linking parties clearly to external outcomes.<sup>14</sup>

Surprisingly few examples of FPA research were focused on party politics up until the 2000s. One contributing factor to this development are path dependent dynamics stemming from the disciplinary origins of FPA itself, which emerged in the context of the development of

---

<sup>10</sup> Christian Cantir and Juliet Kaarbo, ‘Contested Roles and Domestic Politics: Reflections on Role Theory in Foreign Policy Analysis and IR Theory’, *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8: 1, 2012, pp. 5-24.

<sup>11</sup> Irving Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascos*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982); Jack Levy, ‘Organizational Routines and the Causes of War’, *International Studies Quarterly* 30, 1986, pp. 193-222.

<sup>12</sup> Joanne Gowa, ‘Politics at the Water’s Edge: Parties, Voters, and the Use of Force Abroad’, *International Organization* 52: 2, 1998, pp. 307-324.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Chaudoin, Helen V. Milner and Dustin H. Tingley, ‘The Center Still Holds: Liberal Internationalism Survives’, *International Security* 35: 1, 2010, pp. 75-94; Raunio and Wagner, ‘The Party Politics of Foreign and Security Policy’.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Hill, ‘Public Opinion and British Foreign Policy Since 1945: Progress in Research?’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 10: 1, 1981, pp. 53-62, p. 60.

American social science.<sup>15</sup> Because political parties have been weaker organisations in the US than in other democracies and party-based regimes, and because their positions have switched so frequently,<sup>16</sup> theoretical developments in FPA have focused on dynamics felt more relevant, including interest-group politics, divided government, and the doctrines of individual leaders, keeping attention off parties in the most part.<sup>17</sup>

### **Getting the Party Started**

The wave of democratization that accompanied the end of the Cold War resulted in an uptick in the number of democratic regimes world-wide, increasing the number of states in the international system in which party politics and partisan competition are crucial to the policymaking process.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, processes of globalisation and regional integration have blurred the lines between the domestic and foreign policymaking fields by increasing the interdependence between countries, uploading competences to the regional level and shifting categories such as winners and losers.<sup>19</sup> As importantly, new theoretical paradigms in IR have

---

<sup>15</sup> Steve Smith, 'Theories of Foreign Policy: An Historical Overview', *Review of International Studies* 12: 1, 1986, pp. 13-29; Brian White, 'The European Challenge to Foreign Policy Analysis', *European Journal of International Relations* 5: 1, 1999, pp. 37-66.

<sup>16</sup> Verlan Lewis, 'The President and the Parties' Ideologies: Party Ideas about Foreign Policy Since 1900', *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 47:1, 2017, pp. 27-61.

<sup>17</sup> See Raunio and Wagner, 'The Party Politics of Foreign and Security Policy'. Something similar can be said of developments on the other side of the Atlantic, with the more historically-oriented British FPA also having had little to say about parties. The disciplinary development of FPA in countries with two-party majoritarian systems may have influenced the (lack of) focus on political parties, since the politics of foreign policy in these systems tended to occur within (not between) parties.

<sup>18</sup> Angelos Chrysogelos, *Party Systems and Foreign Policy Change in Liberal Democracies: Cleavages, Ideas, Competition* (London: Routledge, forthcoming). This is not to say that party politics do not also matter in different kinds of authoritarian regimes, see Jessica Weeks, 'Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve', *International Organization* 62:1, 2008, pp. 35-64.

<sup>19</sup> Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman, 'BREXIT, voice and loyalty: rethinking electoral politics in an age of interdependence', *Review of International Political Economy* 24: 2, 2017, pp. 232-247.

emerged that are more open to sub-disciplinary conversations between IR and CP<sup>20</sup>. And these developments have, slowly, come to influence FPA scholars' research agendas.

Research began showing that party politics can affect the conduct of foreign policy; in other words, that parties matter.<sup>21</sup> One of the key insights of research into political parties has been the identification of distinctive party positions on a host of foreign policy questions. Building on CP research, these scholars have argued that there are good reasons to regard party positions as systematic rather than incidental: Parties are 'alliances in conflicts over policies and value commitments within the larger body politic'<sup>22</sup> and these value commitments or party ideologies impose some 'limits from which parties only rarely break out, because of leadership commitments and core electoral attachments'<sup>23</sup>. Inter-party competition on the domestic level thus stands for different visions of how the domestic and international realms (or their intersection) should be organized. Scholars have shown that these programmatic distinctions among parties serve to organize political debate and preferences among parties.<sup>24</sup>

Based on the observation that parties differ in systematic ways on foreign policy issues, scholars pointed out that the so-called national interest is not necessarily constant over time.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> James Caporaso, 'Across the Great Divide: Integrating Comparative and International Politics', *International Studies Quarterly* 41: 4, 1997, pp. 563-591; Helen Milner, 'Rationalizing Politics: The Emerging Synthesis of International, American, and Comparative Politics', *International Organization* 52: 4, 1998, pp. 759-786.

<sup>21</sup> For example, Brian C. Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions: European Party Politics and Peace Enforcement in the Balkans* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Stephanie C. Hofmann, *European Security in NATO's Shadow: Party Ideologies and Institution Building* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013);

Wolfgang Wagner, Anna Herranz-Surrallés, Juliet Kaarbo and Falk Ostermann, 'Party politics at the water's edge: contestation of military operations in Europe', *European Political Science Review* 10: 4, 2018, pp. 537-563.

<sup>22</sup> Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan, 'Cleavage structures, party systems, and voter alignments: An introduction', in Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan, eds. *Party Systems and Voter Alignments* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1967), pp. 1-64.

<sup>23</sup> Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Andrea Volkens, Judith Bara, Ian Budge and Michael McDonald, *Mapping Policy Preferences II. Estimates for Parties, Electors, and Governments in Eastern Europe, European Union and OECD 1990-2003* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 108. See also James Adams, Michael Clark, Lawrence Ezrow and Garrett Glasgow, 'Understanding change and stability in party ideologies: Do parties respond to public opinion or to past election results?', *British Journal of Political Science* 34: 4, 2004, pp. 589-610.

<sup>24</sup> Kenneth A. Schultz, 'The Politics of Risking Peace: Do Hawks or Doves Deliver the Olive Branch?', *International Organization*, 59: 1, 2005, pp. 1-38, p. 8; see also John H. Alderich, *Why Parties?: The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> Helen Milner, *Interests, Institutions, and Information: Domestic Politics and International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions*; Hofmann, *European Security*.



Distinct ideological positions lend themselves to divergent interpretations of the international domain. In its initial wave of party ideological research, the divergence between left and right is a thread that runs through much work on parties and foreign policy as a result. FPA scholarship on partisanship has shown divergence between ideological stances in a host of foreign policy issues, including military intervention,<sup>26</sup> support for multilateral cooperation and institutionalisation,<sup>27</sup> the choice of alliance politics and grand strategy,<sup>28</sup> the promotion of trade and protection of foreign investment,<sup>29</sup> and positions on foreign aid and humanitarianism.<sup>30</sup> FPA scholarship has also offered a number of suggestions on the mechanisms linking partisanship and foreign policy preferences, including underlying assumptions such as trust and egalitarianism,<sup>31</sup> constituencies of supporters and their interests,<sup>32</sup> social identity and ideological similarity,<sup>33</sup> and underlying positions on governmental interference in the economy.<sup>34</sup>

Focusing on dynamics within the government, scholars emphasized coalition-building dynamics and coalition politics.<sup>35</sup> Scholarship suggests coalition governments are less prone to conflict than single-party governments, since the coalition partner has an opportunity to veto

---

<sup>26</sup> Timothy Hildebrandt, Courtney Hillebrecht, Peter M. Holm and Jon Pevehouse, 'The Domestic Politics of Humanitarian Intervention: Public Opinion, Partisanship, and Ideology', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 9: 3, 2013, pp. 243-266; Laron K. Williams, 'Hawks, doves, and opportunistic opposition parties', *Journal of Peace Research* 51: 1, 2014, pp. 111-125; Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions*.

<sup>27</sup> Hofmann, *European Security*; Stephanie C. Hofmann, 'Party preferences and institutional transformation: revisiting France's relationship with NATO (and the common wisdom on Gaullism)', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40: 4, 2017, pp. 505-531.

<sup>28</sup> Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Kevin Narizny, *The Political Economy of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Alain Noël and Jean-Philippe Thérien, *Left and Right in Global Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>30</sup> Peter Gries, *The Politics of American Foreign Policy: How Ideology Divides Liberals and Conservatives over Foreign Affairs* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014); Jean-Philippe Thérien and Alain Noël, 'Political Parties and Foreign Aid', *American Political Science Review* 94: 1, 2000, pp. 151-162.

<sup>31</sup> Brian C. Rathbun, *Trust in International Cooperation: International Security Institutions, Domestic Politics and American Multilateralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Peter Trubowitz, *Defining the National Interest: Conflict and Change in American Foreign Policy* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> Haas, *Ideological Origins*.

<sup>34</sup> Narizny, *Political Economy*.

<sup>35</sup> Juliet Kaarbo, 'Power and Influence in Foreign Policy Decision Making: The Role of Junior Coalition Partners in German and Israeli Foreign Policy', *International Studies Quarterly* 40: 4, 1996, pp. 501-530.

conflict initiation.<sup>36</sup> Yet coalition governments may engage in more radical foreign policy behaviors, depending on the preferences of the senior and junior parties:<sup>37</sup> when coalitions suffer from internal disagreements, smaller players have greater opportunities to exploit internal divisions and promote their own foreign policy agendas.<sup>38</sup> Junior parties can push the cabinet in the direction of conflict, but they can also push in the direction of peace; the normative context thereby affects the balance of power within coalition governments, with norms of unanimity empowering junior partners more than norms of consensus.<sup>39</sup> Either way, these coalition dynamics can dilute some of the individually held ideological positions that parties hold.<sup>40</sup>

FPA research on parties has also examined the broader institutional environment within which parties operate, building on work on government-opposition dynamics. Scholars have shown that the more seats a government possesses, the more stable its position and the more able it is to pass legislation on foreign policy issues.<sup>41</sup> Governments with sizeable majorities are more likely to become involved in interstate disputes,<sup>42</sup> for instance, while minority governments are demonstrably more pacific.<sup>43</sup> Relations between the executive and the legislature also alter party positions and affect their realization – where the legislature exerts considerable sway over foreign policy decisions, the governing party's positions is more constrained, and the

---

<sup>36</sup> Joe Clare, 'Ideological Fractionalization and the International Conflict Behaviour of Parliamentary Democracies', *International Studies Quarterly* 54: 4, 2010, pp. 965-987.

<sup>37</sup> Juliet Kaarbo and Ryan K. Beasley, 'Taking It to the Extreme: The Effect of Coalition Cabinets on Foreign Policy', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 4: 1, 2008, pp. 67-81.

<sup>38</sup> Bertjan Verbeek and Andrej Zaslove, 'The impact of populist radical right parties on foreign policy: the northern league as a junior coalition partner in the Berlusconi governments', *European Political Science Review* 7: 4, 2015, pp. 525-546, p. 542.

<sup>39</sup> Kaarbo, 'Power and Influence'.

<sup>40</sup> Hofmann, *European Security*.

<sup>41</sup> Miriam F. Elman, 'Unpacking Democracy: Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Theories of Democratic Peace', *Security Studies*, 9: 4, 2000, pp. 91-126, p. 103; Joe D. Hagan, *Political Opposition and Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1990), p. 83.

<sup>42</sup> Glenn Palmer, Tamar London and Patrick Regan, 'What's Stopping You?: The Sources of Political Constraints on International Conflict Behavior in Parliamentary Democracies', *International Interactions* 30: 1, 2004, pp. 1-24, p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> Clare, 'Ideological Fractionalization', p. 968.

opposition's more evident.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, legislatures may gain greater powers over time, leading to a process of parliamentarisation of foreign policy,<sup>45</sup> often motivated by concerns about previous foreign policy mishaps.<sup>46</sup>

## **Taking Stock**

Recent research has shown that parties are integral actors in foreign policy processes, set out explanations of partisan politics, and contributed to bridging the disciplinary divides between FPA, IR, and CP. But research on political parties still bears the imprint of previous decades of scepticism towards political parties as foreign policy actors.

There is a notable absence of a self-aware research programme on party politics and foreign policy. Partly this is a product of the field's infancy. Party research spiked in the past few years, but prior to this, only a handful of works are identifiable. But partly also it is a product of the divided nature of the field and Political Science more broadly. FPA has only slowly turned to political parties while CP party politics scholars have only slowly turned to foreign policy issues. Much FPA research on parties emerges out of empirical cases of foreign policymaking, oftentimes when scholars have asked broader questions about distinct facets of foreign policy, rather than about parties per se. In consequence, accounts of political parties can be somewhat sporadically located across diverse literatures, rather than within a distinct field of study.

Moreover, the focus of existing research has been on showing *that* - and hence *why* - parties matter rather than how, when and where they matter, which would help delimit scope

---

<sup>44</sup> Wolfgang Wagner, Anna Herranz-Surrallés, Juliet Kaarbo and Falk Ostermann, 'The party politics of legislative-executive relations in security and defence policy', *West European Politics* 40: 1, 2017, pp. 20-41.

<sup>45</sup> Tapio Raunio and Wolfgang Wagner, 'Towards parliamentarisation of foreign and security policy?', *West European Politics* 40: 1, 2017, pp. 1-19.

<sup>46</sup> James Strong, 'Why parliament now decides on war: tracing the growth of the parliamentary prerogative through Syria, Libya and Iraq', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 17: 4, 2014, pp. 604-622.

conditions and formulate mid-range theories. Almost all research on parties is framed in response to realist or structuralist accounts which are sceptical about the role of parties in foreign policymaking, rather than as a contribution to a pre-existing body of party research. Not only does this lead to predictable narratives setting up the majority of new party research, but it also reproduces the realist/sceptical backdrop, setting party-based explanations up against either outdated or straw-man arguments. Moreover, it occludes the complex ways in which structural and partisan accounts of state-behaviour may be implicated in one another, and assumed that in order to demonstrate that parties matter it is necessary to show that structural facilitators do not.

Finally, while party research has explored many different avenues over the years, the majority of research has focused on those most-likely cases where we might expect partisanship to be more evident (and almost exclusive in democratic regimes). With a few notable exceptions there has been less research on cases where the effects of parties are more mixed, selective, or dependent on other factors. These cases are important not only for ascertaining the scope conditions for party-based explanations but also for understanding how such factors interact with other variables. We suggest one reason for this lacuna is the perceived need to show parties matter and the sense that greater complexity is somehow to the detriment of the causal and constitutive effects of parties.

We recommend shifting the focus from *whether* parties matter to *how, when* and *where* they matter. In other words, refining scope conditions will help advance the research programme. This requires of party researchers a greater confidence in the initial proposition - *that* parties matter - such that we can ask questions which delve into the various ways in which parties can (and cannot) influence or shape foreign policymaking. This may well highlight cases in which parties don't matter much, which is where disciplinary resilience is needed. Identifying scope conditions for political parties does not amount to a case against parties as foreign policy actors

more generally, and will only strengthen our understanding of the role parties play. In the next section we set out a research agenda through which party research on foreign policy can be expanded to take account of real-world changes and formulate a more self-reflexive research program.

### **Towards a More Self-Reflexive Research Programme**

A more self-assured status of research leaves open the question of what the next steps in party research on foreign policymaking might look like. We suggest four areas in which party scholarship might evolve in order to better understand the conditions affecting not only why but also how, where and when political parties matter. In some instances, these research avenues emerge as the logical extension of existing FPA works, in others they emerge from questions posed by scholars in CP or IR. Specifically, we claim greater attention to ideological multidimensionality beyond left and right, the organizational differences between parties and the role of entrepreneurs, parties as foreign policy actors, and the interaction between parties and global order.

These research avenues can help address the role of different levels of analysis (the individual, group, national, transnational and international level), explain away discrepant information which has previously been used to cast scepticism on the role of parties, help us explain changes in political parties and the politics of foreign policymaking as well as challenge us to think beyond democracies when examining the role of parties in foreign policymaking. Exploring these questions helps link FPA research to broader debates in CP and IR, allowing new insights in these fields to inform FPA research and bolstering the community of scholars working on the connection between foreign policymaking and political parties.

### *Ideological Multidimensionality*

Uncovering the different cleavages and value dimensions that can inform political parties and their preferences provide us with a better understanding of *how* parties matter as they illuminate the different issues that parties push for or want to abstain from. In addition, uncovering ideological dimensions helps us understand *when* parties matter as they draw our attention to which parties are most likely to cooperate with one another on the international level when certain issues come up or build coalitions on the domestic level after an election – no matter whether the party acts in democratic or authoritarian system. This is not to say that left and right – categories that originate from the French Revolution - are not relevant. But they might not best describe every political party there is. New value dimensions represent cleavages that are not well captured by the left-right metaphor, such as those over cultural identities and globalization.<sup>47</sup> Conflict between different ideological positions that do not map on a single cleavage characterizes quite well the politics of foreign policy. Moreover, new entrants to the political marketplace have championed issues which can defy classification according to the left-right schema, including regional interests and identities, environmentalism<sup>48</sup>, Euroscepticism<sup>49</sup>, and populism<sup>50</sup>, and these parties often have distinctive foreign policy preferences. But to a considerable extent FPA research continues to view partisanship in terms

---

<sup>47</sup> Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks and Carole J. Wilson, 'Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration?', *Comparative Political Studies* 35: 8, 2002, pp. 965-989; Hofmann, *European Security*; Michael Zürn and Pieter de Wilde, 'Debating globalization: cosmopolitanism and communitarianism as political ideologies', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 21: 3, 2016, pp. 280-301.

<sup>48</sup> Jae-Jae Spoon, Sara B. Hobolt and Catherine E. De Vries, 'Going Green: Explaining Issue Competition on the Environment', *European Journal of Political Research* 53: 2, 2014, pp. 363-380.

<sup>49</sup> Catherine E. De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Benjamin Martill and Adrian Rogstad, 'The end of consensus? Folk theory and the politics of foreign policy in the Brexit referendum', *Global Affairs* 5: 4-5, 2019, pp. 347-367.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas J. Scotto, David Sanders, and Jason Reifler, 'The Consequential Nationalist-Globalist Policy Divide in Contemporary Britain: Some Initial Analyses', *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 28: 1, 2018, pp. 38-58; Johannes Plagemann and Sandra Destradi, 'Populism and Foreign Policy: The Case of India', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 15: 2, 2019, pp. 283-301; Iñaki Sagarzazu and Cameron G. Thies, 'The Foreign Policy Rhetoric of Populism: Chávez, Oil, and Anti-imperialism', *Political Research Quarterly* 72: 1, 2019, pp. 205-214.

of left and right, in spite of evidence that political support for key dimensions of external relations would appear to follow a non-linear pattern.<sup>51</sup>

Insights from party policy research in CP can help FPA scholars incorporate ideological complexity into their analyses in a manner which is both systematic and better reflects the changing nature of partisan competition. The ‘foreign’ policy issue that CP scholars paid most attention to is European integration. Party politics and political behaviour scholars have developed a number of tools to model complexity, including multidimensional and non-linear models of ideology, the specification of new dimensions of partisan conflict<sup>52</sup>, the construction of datasets – such as the Comparative Manifesto Project or the UNC expert surveys – capable of conveying party positions on multiple dimensions<sup>53</sup> as well as theories regarding the circumstances under which different cleavages come to the fore.<sup>54</sup> Accounting for ideological multidimensionality more systematically, both via qualitative and quantitative methods, can help us understand the different foreign policy preferences that a diverse set of parties hold - both at one point in time and across time.<sup>55</sup> Paying attention to the different cleavages that can inform ideological positions can help explain under what circumstances we should expect foreign policy continuity<sup>56</sup> while acknowledging the non-linearity of ideology can help us account for observed similarities between both ‘extreme’ left and right in such foreign policy

---

<sup>51</sup> Noel and Therien *Left and Right*, p. 25; Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions*.

<sup>52</sup> Catherine E. De Vries and Gary Marks, ‘Dimensionality of Political Space’, *European Union Politics* 13: 2, 2012, pp. 185-342.

<sup>53</sup> Klingemann, Volkens, Bara, Budge and McDonald, *Mapping Policy Preferences II*; Gary Marks, Marco Steenbergen, Ryan Bakker, Liesbet Hooghe, Seth Jolly, Jonathan Polk, Jan Rovny and Milada Anna Vachudova, ‘Chapel Hill Expert Surveys’. Available at: <http://chesdata.eu>.

<sup>54</sup> Catherine E. De Vries, & Hector Solaz, ‘Sweeping It Under The Rug: How Government Parties Deal With Deteriorating Economic Conditions’, *Party Politics* 25: 1, 2019, pp. 63-75.

<sup>55</sup> Hofmann, *European Security*.

<sup>56</sup> Charles A. Kupchan and Peter Trubowitz, ‘Dead Center: The Demise of Liberal Internationalism in the United States’, *International Security* 32: 2, 2007, pp. 7-44; Benjamin Martill, ‘Center of Gravity: Domestic Institutions and the Victory of Liberal Strategy in Cold War Europe’, *Security Studies* 28: 1, 2019, pp. 116-158.

domains as military deployment<sup>57</sup>, grand strategy<sup>58</sup>, European integration,<sup>59</sup> and globalization<sup>60</sup>. Incorporating distinct models of partisanship can help us formulate scope conditions and increase our understanding of the complexities of partisanship in foreign policy and, as a result, help explain discrepant evidence - the failure of the left-right model - which has too often informed blanket rejections of the role of parties in foreign policymaking.

Acknowledging multidimensional ideological space also helps the incorporation of regional, niche, single-issue and populist parties into the roster of FPA actors.<sup>61</sup> More research is needed on the foreign policy positions of these actors: Recent studies have shown that populist parties have distinct foreign policy positions,<sup>62</sup> yet other works suggest transformative change is limited to the personalization of foreign policy.<sup>63</sup> Focusing on how ideological positions interact with political leaders and entrepreneurs who might use existing parties and create new parties as platforms of their political ambitions, given us a better idea of why these parties have distinct foreign policy profiles and why and how they change over time needs further investigation.

And FPA scholars can draw on insights from CP to shed light on when parties seek programmatic goals and when they seek instrumental desiderata such as political office. Within

---

<sup>57</sup> Wolfgang Wagner, *The Democratic Politics of Military Interventions: Political Parties, Contestation, and Decisions to Use Force Abroad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>58</sup> Martill, 'Center of Gravity'.

<sup>59</sup> Hofmann 'European Security'; Daphne Halikiopoulou, Kyriaki Nanou and Sofia Vasilopoulou, 'The paradox of nationalism: The common denominator of radical right and radical left euroscepticism', *European Journal of Political Research* 51: 4, 2012, pp. 504-539.

<sup>60</sup> Zürn and de Wilde, 'Debating globalization'.

<sup>61</sup> De Vries and Hobolt, *Political Entrepreneurs*.

<sup>62</sup> Angelos Chrysosgelos, 'Populism in Foreign Policy', in Cameron Thies, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Foreign Policy Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 427-440; Pablo de Orellana and Nicholas Michelsen, 'Reactionary Internationalism: the philosophy of the New Right', *Review of International Studies* 45: 5, 2019, pp. 748-767; Plagemann and Destradi, 'The Case of India'; Scotto, Sanders, and Reifler, 'Nationalist-Globalist Policy Divide'.

<sup>63</sup> Sandra Destradi and Johannes Plagemann, 'Populism and International Relations: (Un)predictability, personalisation, and the reinforcement of existing trends in world politics', *Review of International Studies* 45: 5, 2019, pp. 711-730; Özgür Özdamar and Erdem Ceydilek, 'European populist radical right leaders' foreign policy beliefs: An operational code analysis', *European Journal of International Relations*, forthcoming; Verbeek and Zaslove, 'The impact of populist radical right parties'.



FPA at present the tendency is to specify a priori whether parties are motivated by policies or office. Rationalist works tend to utilize office-seeking as a basic assumption<sup>64</sup> whilst those informed by constructivism, those focusing on ideology, or those assuming connected coalitions have found policy seeking a more useful assumption.<sup>65</sup> While a small number of FPA works have discussed the implications of this choice for the perspectives that result,<sup>66</sup> the discipline has not engaged substantively with the conditions under which parties are more likely to seek policies or elected office. Yet CP research treats these conditions as variables, since parties, party leaders and the political elite seek both in varying degrees and at different times, motivated by a host of factors influencing their motivations<sup>67</sup>. Understanding the conditions under which parties are more likely to promote one goal over the other in their preference ordering promises a more versatile theory of party motivation in foreign policy and can help link together insights from rationalist and constructivist schools of thought.

### ***Party Organisation and Political Entrepreneurs***

A closer look at party organization and political entrepreneurs also contributes to a better understanding not only *why* but also *how* and *when* parties matter. Parties differ in a number of respects: size, membership, governance structure, territorial reach, international memberships,

---

<sup>64</sup> Helen V. Milner and B. Peter Rosendorff, 'Democratic Politics and International Trade Negotiations: Elections and Divided Government As Constraints on Trade Liberalization', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41: 1, 1997, pp. 117-146; Kenneth A. Schultz, 'Domestic Opposition and Signaling in International Crises', *American Political Science Review* 92: 4, 1998, pp. 829-844; Douglas M. Stinnett, 'International Uncertainty, Foreign Policy Flexibility, and Surplus Majority Coalitions in Israel', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51: 3, 2007, 470-495.

<sup>65</sup> Binner Ozkececi-Taner, 'The Impact of Institutionalized Ideas in Coalition Foreign Policy Making: Turkey as an Example, 1991-2002', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1: 3, 2005, pp. 249-278, p. 257.

<sup>66</sup> Kai Oppermann, Klaus Brummer and Niels van Willigen, 'Coalition Governance and Foreign Policy Decision-Making', *European Political Science* 16: 4, 2017, 489-501; Raunio and Wagner, 'Towards parliamentarisation?', p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> Georg Wenzelburger and Reimut Zohlnhöfer, 'Bringing agency back into the study of partisan politics: A note on recent developments in the literature on party politics', *Party Politics*, online first; Sara Binzer Hobolt and Robert Klemmensen, 'Government responsiveness and political competition in comparative perspective', *Comparative Political Studies* 41: 3, 2008, pp. 309-337; Michael J. Laver and Kenneth Benoit, *Party Policy in Modern Democracies* (London: Routledge, 2006); Kaare Strøm, 'A Behavioral Theory of Competitive Political Parties', *American Journal of Political Science* 34, 1990, pp. 565-598.

branding and identity, life span, and leadership. Party organization is not a constant as political actors adjust to changing societal conditions, technologies and issues. In recent decades many parties have changed from mass-based organisations with ideologically-defined rationales to more nimble organisations which compete for one another's support base and for rents from the state.<sup>68</sup> Some parties have become more centralized and/or more personalized, and have sought new ways to reach out to potential voters. While FPA scholarship is sensitive to the differences between individual parties, few studies have sought to demonstrate systematically *how* divergent aspects of party organisation connect with foreign policy outcomes, at least outside of studies of party factionalism<sup>69</sup> and the degree of centralization of the party apparatus.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile, the role of individual leaders and legislators to influence foreign policy decision-making is now well established,<sup>71</sup> but there remains considerable scope to link these insights to political parties, since party-based factors often determine the scope of personalization and individualization of party agendas. Focusing on these issues helps understand when and how parties matter rather than individual leaders - and vice versa.

Recent research in CP identifies a number of variables both within and across parties which have *prima facie* implications for their position on foreign policy issues. These include the degree to which the party controls resources and the corresponding scope for personalization

---

<sup>68</sup> Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair, *Democracy and the Cartelization of Political Parties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>69</sup> Clare, 'Ideological Fractionalization'; Benjamin Martill, 'Over the threshold: the politics of foreign policy in majoritarian parliamentary systems – the case of Britain', *International Politics*, 55: 5, 2018, pp. 631-654, p. 637; Stephanie C. Hofmann, 'Beyond Culture and Power: The Role of Party Ideologies in German Foreign and Security Policy', *German Politics*, online first; Rathbun, *Partisan Interventions*, p. 81; Kenneth N. Waltz, *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics: The American and British Experience* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967).

<sup>70</sup> Destradi and Plagemann, 'Populism and International Relations'.

<sup>71</sup> Ralph G. Carter and James M. Scott, *Choosing to Lead: Understanding Congressional Foreign Policy Entrepreneurs* (London: Duke University Press, 2009); Margaret G. Hermann and Charles F. Hermann, 'Who Makes Foreign Policy Decisions and How: An Empirical Inquiry', *International Studies Quarterly* 33: 4, 1989, pp. 361-387.

of messages,<sup>72</sup> how they respond to changes in the voter base,<sup>73</sup> how they allocate portfolios within the party,<sup>74</sup> the nature of the tasks individual legislators undertake,<sup>75</sup> the strength of party discipline,<sup>76</sup> and where their funding comes from.<sup>77</sup> Recent research has also sought to move away from the party as the main unit of analysis in order to bring individual leaders and legislators, and their agency, back into the picture.<sup>78</sup> This has occasioned a turn towards informal politics alongside formal institutional structures to understand how parties function and how they adopt specific strategies and policy platforms.<sup>79</sup>

FPA scholars can benefit from a deeper engagement with the organizational dynamics of parties. Internal party characteristics vary considerably and incorporating these variables into FPA party research opens a number of helpful avenues of inquiry. For instance, the organizational type into which a given party fits may have important implications for foreign policy stability. Existing research on cartel parties, for instance, suggests these organizations are better able to insulate elites from public scrutiny than other parties, resulting in greater foreign policy continuity, but also declining legitimacy.<sup>80</sup> Research also suggests that

---

<sup>72</sup> Troels Bøggild and Helene Helboe Pedersen, 'Campaigning on behalf of the party? Party constraints on candidate campaign personalisation', *European Journal of Political Research* 57: 4, 2018, pp. 883-899.

<sup>73</sup> Tarik Abou-Chard and Lukas F. Stoetzer, 'How Parties React to Voter Transitions', *American Political Science Review* 114: 3, 2020, pp. 940-945.

<sup>74</sup> Laurenz P. Ennser-Jedenastik, 'Portfolio Allocation within Parties: The Role of Regional Party Branches', *Journal of Legislative Studies* 19: 3, 2013, pp. 309-327.

<sup>75</sup> Nicolas Bouteca, Jef Smulders, Bart Maddens, Carl Devos and Bram Wauters, "'A Fair Day's Wage for a Fair Day's Work'? Exploring the connection between the parliamentary work of MPs and their electoral support', *Journal of Legislative Studies* 25: 1, 2019, pp. 44-65.

<sup>76</sup> George Tsebelis, 'Decision Making in Political Systems: Veto Players in Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, Multicameralism and Multipartyism', *British Journal of Political Science* 25: 3, 1995, pp. 289-325.

<sup>77</sup> Jonathan Mendilow and Eric Phélippeau, eds. *Handbook of Political Party Funding* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2018).

<sup>78</sup> De Vries and Hobolt, *Political Entrepreneurs*.

<sup>79</sup> Scott Radnitz, 'Informal Politics and the State', *Comparative Politics* 43: 3, 2011, pp. 351-371; Christine Reh, Adrienne Héritier, Eduardo Bressanelli and Christel Koop, 'The Informal Politics of Legislation: Explaining Secluded Decision Making in the European Union', *Comparative Political Studies* 46: 9, 2013, pp. 1112-1142.

<sup>80</sup> Angelos Chrysosgelos, 'State transformation and populism: From the internationalized to the neo-sovereign state?', *Politics* 40: 1, 2020, pp. 22-37.

organizational differences determine how parties respond to external pressures for change,<sup>81</sup> with obvious implications for party positions on the shifting contours of international order.

FPA party research could also benefit from asking whose interests are represented by the party, and how these are aggregated.<sup>82</sup> The foreign policy preferences of party members, party supporters and voters, and the party's own legislators can differ significantly. In the UK, for example, the Labour party membership is more radical than the party's MPs and its broader support base, while the Conservative membership is notably more Eurosceptic than the party's legislators.<sup>83</sup> In such instances, selection mechanisms which empower the membership (e.g. membership ballot) would be expected to influence foreign policy positions in different ways than those which empower the citizenry (e.g. open primaries) or existing legislators (e.g. party ballot).

Moreover, alongside these formal distinctions, party research would also benefit from adopting a focus on the role of leaders and entrepreneurs within parties, since research in CP shows the role of such individuals can affect key decisions, including the programmatic and ideological direction the party takes, its level of cohesion and unity, and whether to seek close relations with other parties. As the recent literature on party entrepreneurs has shown, ideological position and party organization can variably be influenced by powerful actors in parties – may these be heads of parties or MPs.<sup>84</sup> Individuals can thus exert significant influence over foreign

---

<sup>81</sup> Gijss Schumacher, Catherine E. de Vries and Barbera Vis, 'Why Do Parties Change Position? Party Organization and Environmental Incentives', *Journal of Politics* 75:2, 2013, pp. 464-477.

<sup>82</sup> Gijss Schumacher and Nathalie Giger, 'Who Leads the Party? On Membership Size, Selectorates and Party Oligarchy', *Political Studies* 65:1, 2017, pp. 162-181.

<sup>83</sup> Peter Dorey and Andrew Denham, 'The Longest Suicide Vote in History': The Labour Party Leadership Election of 2015', *British Politics* 11: 3, 2016, pp. 259-282; Cary Fontana and Craig Parsons, 'One Woman's Prejudice': Did Margaret Thatcher Cause Britain's Anti-Europeanism?', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 53: 1, 2015, pp. 89-105, p. 100.

<sup>84</sup> De Vries and Hobolt, *Political Entrepreneurs*.

policy priorities as well as over a host of other factors impinging on a party's foreign policy programme.

### *Parties as Foreign Policy Actors*

The transnational level also matters in foreign policymaking. Political parties engage with one another across borders, making them diplomatic actors in their own rights. This is, of course, nothing new, since transnational cooperation on ideological lines can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the inception of the First International, followed much later with the establishment of the Liberal International in 1947. But recent years have witnessed a marked increase in the cross-border activities of political parties. The establishment of transnational parliamentary forums and assemblies in the EU, the AU or ASEAN, for example, changes political contestation at the national level, pushing parties to take positions on supranational and intergovernmental issues.<sup>85</sup> In Europe, the increasing powers of the EU's European Parliament gained over the course of the 1990s resulted in a supranational legislative organization with considerable powers and more or less cohesive ideological groupings.<sup>86</sup> However, voting still happens based on national lists. Efforts to establish transnational party organisations has stepped up in recent years, with the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 one of the more recent examples.<sup>87</sup> Collaborative linkages between parties that have existed for many years have been stepped up.<sup>88</sup> Even right-wing populist parties have sought to establish informal

---

<sup>85</sup> Thomas Winzen, Christilla Roederer-Rynning and Frank Schimmelfennig, 'Parliamentary co-evolution: national parliamentary reactions to the empowerment of the European Parliament', *Journal of European Public Policy* 22: 1, 2015, pp. 75-93.

<sup>86</sup> Simon Hix, Abdel Noury and Gérard Roland, 'Dimensions of Politics in the European Parliament', *American Journal of Political Science* 50: 2, 2006, pp. 494-520; Zoe Lefkofridi, 'Competition in the European Arena: How the Rules of the Game Help Nationalists Gain', *Politics and Governance* 8: 1, 2020, pp. 41-49.

<sup>87</sup> Benjamin De Cleen, Benjamin Moffitt, Panos Panayotu and Yanis Stavrakakis, 'The Potentials and Difficulties of Transnational Populism: The Case of the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25)', *Political Studies* 68: 1, 2020, pp. 146-166.

<sup>88</sup> Angelos Chryssogelos, 'Patterns of Transnational Partisan Contestation of European Foreign Policy', *European Foreign Affairs Review* 20: 2, 2015, pp. 227-246; Daan Fonck, 'Parliamentary Diplomacy and Legislative-

groupings through which they can coordinate their activities.<sup>89</sup> And there are instances of parties getting involved more directly in the diplomatic game. German political foundations, for instance, which are linked to German parties, have offices across the globe which function as quasi-diplomatic forums for the parties.<sup>90</sup>

While FPA's theoretical toolbox is well-equipped to understand transnational diplomacy, it has not focused on parties as diplomatic actors. Early work on signaling captured some of the effects of the engagement between political parties and external actors,<sup>91</sup> but this was neither the main focus of the research, nor did it spur continued discussion on parties as diplomatic actors. Work in CP, however, does examine the transnational activities of political parties, with key examples focusing on the politics of supranational legislative institutions,<sup>92</sup> cross-border processes of diffusion and learning,<sup>93</sup> so-called 'open' models of democratic transition,<sup>94</sup> and other forms of cross-border engagement between parties.<sup>95</sup> The recent focus of many FPA scholars on populism has heightened awareness of the disciplinary divide between FPA/IR and CP, with scholars noting that most of the research on populist parties' transnational activities

---

Executive Relations in EU Foreign Policy: Studying the European Parliament's Mediation of the Macedonian Political Crisis (2015–17)', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 56:6, 2018, pp. 1305-1322; Afke Groen, 'Loose Coordination or Ideological Contestation? Transnational Party Activities of German Political Parties on the EU military operation EUNAVFOR Med'. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, forthcoming; Tapio Raunio and Wolfgang Wagner, 'Party Politics or (Supra-) National Interest? External Relations Votes in the European Parliament', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, forthcoming.

<sup>89</sup> Stijn Van Kessel, Nicola Chelotti, Juan Roch and Patricia Rodi, 'Eager to leave? Populist radical right parties' responses to the UK's Brexit vote', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 22: 1, 2020, pp. 65-84.

<sup>90</sup> Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, 'Foreign political aid: the German political foundations and their US counterparts', *International Affairs* 67: 1, 1991, pp. 33-63.

<sup>91</sup> Schultz, 'Domestic Opposition and Signaling'.

<sup>92</sup> John FitzGibbon, Benjamin Leruth and Nicholas Startin, *Euroscepticism as a Transnational and Pan-European Phenomenon* (London: Routledge, 2010); Hix, Noury and Roland, 'Dimensions of Politics in the European Parliament'.

<sup>93</sup> Mark R. Beissinger, 'Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions', *Perspectives on Politics* 5: 2, 2007, pp. 259-276.

<sup>94</sup> Hakan Yilmaz, 'External-Internal Linkages in Democratization: Developing an Open Model of Democratic Change', *Democratization* 9: 2, 2002, pp. 67-84.

<sup>95</sup> Margarita Gómez-Reino, *Nationalisms in the European Arena: Trajectories of Transnational Party Coordination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

has taken place within the latter discipline, to the detriment of being able to understand the current politics of foreign policy.<sup>96</sup>

Incorporating an understanding of the transnational activities of parties can aid our understanding of how parties matter in the formulation of foreign policy by illuminating a number of new avenues for research. For instance, the prevalence of transnational party contacts raises the question of how aligned these activities are with the foreign policy priorities of the government in power, and whether or not these ties complement or undercut the government's activities. It is often said that Cameron's withdrawal of the British Conservative party from the EPP grouping made the prime minister's renegotiation efforts all the more difficult, since these transnational ties could not be relied upon as a source of information and influence.<sup>97</sup> The presence of such linkages also raises the question of how - and to what extent - opposition parties are able to conduct parallel diplomatic activities when not in power, and whether these kinds of activities are stepped up when the party in question cannot utilize the diplomatic resources of the state.

Moreover, transnational collaboration provides an alternative explanation for inter-state policy congruence than do the shared domestic or international (institutional) attributes of states. There is, for example, considerable evidence that parties in Europe, including populist parties, coordinate on foreign policy issues<sup>98</sup>. Moreover, the presence of multiple and overlapping legislative forums also raises questions of coordination, and whether the same party's foreign policy positions match in the different legislative forums within which they are present (regional, national, supra-national).<sup>99</sup> These questions can help FPA scholars understand how

---

<sup>96</sup> Destradi and Plagemann, 'Populism and International Relations'.

<sup>97</sup> Francis B. Jacobs, *The EU after Brexit: Institutional and Policy Implications* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018), p. 70.

<sup>98</sup> Raunio and Wagner, 'Party Politics or (Supra-) National Interest?'

<sup>99</sup> Kris Deschouwer, 'Coalition Formation and Congruence in a Multi-layered Setting: Belgium, 1995-2008', *Regional & Federal Studies* 19: 1, 2009, pp. 13-35.

transnational processes sit alongside more traditional forms of diplomacy and foreign policymaking, as well as contributing to a narrowing of the divide between CP and FPA when it comes to the external activities of political parties.

### ***Parties and Global Order***

This discussion so far has left out macro-structural factors on the domestic (e.g. regime type) and international (e.g. global order) level. These macro-structural factors can mediate the role of political parties and party politics but can also be impacted by parties (especially by political parties in hegemonic or great power countries). We focus here on global order due to space constraints. Changes in the global order such as the distribution of power impact some states and governments more than others.<sup>100</sup> The era of American unipolarity is arguably receding and it remains to be seen what kind of order will replace it. What is already visible is a plurality of worldviews. And these worldviews are pursued not only by democracies but also by political parties outside of democratic systems. This raises questions about the purchase of democratic norms and the scope of party research.<sup>101</sup> And it results in a host of new strategic choices for national and transnational actors, including parties. Systemic conditions have been examined in some party research – notably within neoclassical realism.<sup>102</sup> The emphasis has usually been on the effect of the Cold War's end, but changes in systemic conditions and their implications for party politics have not been theorized much beyond this. Partly this is because initial

---

<sup>100</sup> Christian Reus-Smit, 'Cultural Diversity and International Order', *International Organization* 71: 4, 2017, pp. 851-885; Amitav Acharya, 'After liberal hegemony: the advent of a multiplex world order', *Ethics and International Affairs*, 2017; Stacie E. Goddard, 'Embedded revisionism: networks, institutions, and challenges to world order', *International Organization* 72, 2018, pp. 763-797.

<sup>101</sup> Weeks, 'Autocratic Audience Costs'; Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Stephanie C. Hofmann, 'Of the Contemporary Global Order, Crisis, and Change', *Journal of European Public Policy* 27:7, 2020, pp. 1077-1089.

<sup>102</sup> Michiel Foulon and Gustav Meibauer, 'Realist avenues to global International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, online first; Brian C. Rathbun, 'A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism', *Security Studies* 17:2, 2008, pp. 294-321.



research on political parties in FPA, needing to establish its relevance first, took aim at the structural theories which might now help us understand the interaction between parties and the changing international order.

Our claim is that work on political parties needs to take seriously the external environment and changes in the distribution of different kinds of powers<sup>103</sup> in order to establish *when* and *where* political parties matter (most). Here, innovative impulses do not only come from CP but also the broader IR scholarship. Interdependence means that areas traditionally associated with domestic policy – e.g. health, economic redistribution, environmental protection – are now also aspects of foreign policy. The result is an expansion of the scope of foreign policy and foreign ministries as well as the introduction of new political conflicts into foreign policy, including those over domestic redistribution and economic openness. In addition to the changing meaning of what constitutes foreign policy, the uploading of competences to the international level mentioned in the previous section also results in parties which had hitherto held a more restrictive view of foreign policy – including radical right parties – becoming less isolationist as a result of their interest in managing domestic concerns about migration and economic intervention.<sup>104</sup> Political parties do not only react to these changes, instead, they also contribute to them.<sup>105</sup> And parties can formulate policies that in turn influence the structure and ideational composition of the international system, which, in the long run, can come back to influence party positions subsequently. For instance, the liberal internationalism of many Western governments during the 1990s resulted in the creation of a more densely interdependent and institutionalized world which arguably bound their successors to neo-liberal policies and

---

<sup>103</sup> Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, 'Power in International Politics', *International Organization* 59: 1, 2005, pp. 39-75.

<sup>104</sup> Verbeek and Zaslove, 'The impact of populist radical right parties'.

<sup>105</sup> Farrell and Newman, 'BREXIT, voice and loyalty'; Claudio M. Radaelli, 'Policy transfer in the European Union: institutional isomorphism as a source of legitimacy', *Governance* 13:1, 2000, pp. 25-43; John G. Ruggie, 'International regimes, transactions, and change: embedded liberalism in the postwar economic order', *International Organization* 36: 2, 1982, pp. 379-415.

spurred the emergence of new parties and movements offering alternatives which oppose this order and ordering vision.

Changes in the global order also raise a number of other pertinent research questions. One is whether the end of the Cold War was really as transformative for the politics of foreign policy as is widely believed, or whether changing concepts and theories made parties more 'visible'. Recent work on Cold War politics has suggested partisanship was important at key moments, even during the most contentious moments of the 'early Cold War' when strategic constraints were at their zenith.<sup>106</sup> And relatedly, the return of powerful, illiberal challengers to the West invites discussion of the partisan bases of party positions in and on Russia and China.<sup>107</sup> Whether partisan divisions will arise in relation to these countries, and whether they will fall along left-right or other lines, are important questions. So are questions pertaining to what kind of party politics and foreign policymaking are pursued in illiberal countries where political parties are an important vehicle for policymaking – moving FPA away from Western democracies.

The scope for partisan contestation is another important factor which interacts with systemic changes. Changing poles and polarity of the international system might change respective potential partners (and adversaries). This can contribute to the emergence of partisan contestation on the choice of allies and the most appropriate grand strategy - as was the case during the 1930s.<sup>108</sup> On the other hand, it may be that the intensity of strategic threat occasioned by the return of geopolitics reduces levels of partisanship along similar lines to the postwar

---

<sup>106</sup> Fordham, 'Cold War Consensus'; John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Ronald R. Krebs, 'How Dominant Narratives Rise and Fall: Military Conflict, Politics, and the Cold War Consensus', *International Organization* 69: 4, 2015, pp. 809-845; Martill, 'Center of Gravity'.

<sup>107</sup> Weeks, 'Autocratic Audience Costs'; Michael Onderco, 'Partisan views of Russia: Analyzing European party electoral manifestos since 1991', *Contemporary Security Policy* 40: 4, 2019, pp. 526-547.

<sup>108</sup> Haas, *Ideological Origins*.

foreign and security policies consensus observed in some countries during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>109</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Research on political parties has been a long-time coming in FPA, owing to a number of disciplinary barriers as well as problems grappling with the complexities of party positions on foreign policy issues. Recent years have seen a flurry of research on the topic. While these works address a broad range of foreign policy questions and have improved our understanding of political parties in foreign policymaking, the explanations focus on narrow categories of party ideology and the institutional role of parties. And party research in FPA still bears the imprint of early skepticism: It lacks a self-aware research programme, continues to focus on disproving realist claims that parties don't matter, and eschews less-likely cases for parties and partisanship. It is time for the party politics in foreign policymaking to assume a more self-assured position.

Thanks to existing research, we know that parties matter in foreign policymaking. What we need to develop further is how, when, and where they matter most. To clearly define theoretical scope conditions, we suggest to focus more on the gaps in the existing body of party research, expanding the empirical cases to countries beyond Western democracies, looking into historical cases, and jettisoning the reliance on realism and other structural accounts of foreign policymaking as foils. We do not mean by this that realism cannot be helpful in explaining party positions or that it does not matter in explain foreign policy outcomes, but rather that 'tests' of partisan versus realist approaches risk encouraging a false dichotomy between

---

<sup>109</sup> Benjamin O. Fordham, *Building the Cold War Consensus: The Political Economy of US National Security Policy, 1949-51* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998); Raunio and Wagner, 'The Party Politics of Foreign and Security Policy'.

partisan and systemic approaches. A more fruitful avenue of research is trying to determine when, how and where these different approaches matter.

We tried to take a first stab at these tasks with this paper. As the distinction between domestic and international politics arguably becomes more blurred empirically and analytically, it is likely that parties will matter more. We suggested four aspects in particular which would benefit from greater attention from party scholars working on foreign policymaking. We have tried to show that party politics is more variegated in its effects than we might wish to accept. This does not undermine the effects of parties, but rather opens a host of new research questions. Rather than disproving party-based approaches, party politics in foreign policymaking is evidence of a progressive research programme in which new questions are emerging.