



Faces on the Ballot: The Personalization of Electoral Systems in Europe (Comparative Politics)

Alan Renwick, Jean-Benoit Pilet

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One of the key shifts in contemporary politics is the trend towards greater personalization. Collective actors such as political parties are losing relevance. Citizens are slowly dealigning from these actors, and individual politicians are therefore growing in importance in elections, in government, within parties, and in media reporting of politics. A crucial question concerns how this new pattern could be restructuring politics over the long run - notably, whether the personalization of politics is changing the institutional architecture of contemporary democracies.

The authors show that the trend towards personalization is indeed changing core democratic institutions. Studying the evolution of electoral systems in thirty-one European democracies since 1945, they demonstrate that, since the 1990s, there has been a shift towards more personalized electoral systems. Electoral systems in most European countries now allow voters to express preferences for candidates, not just for political parties. And the weight of these voters' preferences in the allocation of seats has been increased in numerous countries.

They examine the factors that appear to be driving this evolution, finding that the personalization of electoral systems is associated with the growing gap between citizens and politics. Politicians and legislators appear to perceive the personalization of electoral systems as a way to address the democratic malaise and to restore trust in politics by reducing the role of political parties in elections. The book also shows, however, that whether these reforms have had any success in achieving their aims is far less clear.

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