

CYBER PARTY

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Definition

A cyber party is a type of political organization where the ties between citizens and the political party are technologically mediated through the use of tools such as websites, mailing lists, e-mail, and intranets, with the consequence of introducing a more fluid and more direct dimension to the relationship (Margetts, 2001, 2006). As such, it can be considered a structurally weaker, looser form of political organization when compared to its historical antecedents in the development of party politics, but also one where individual relationships matter over collective appeals (Kirchheimer, 1966; Katz & Mair, 1995; Margetts, 2006). Additionally, the emergence of cyber parties has introduced a new arena of political competition, using online tools for capturing the interest of voters, and in this way contributing new structuring to existing party system dynamics (Norris, 2003; Small, 2007).

Context

The cyber party constitutes a fundamental conceptual step in the modelling of the new technological dimension of politics which began in the late 1990s, intervening within the ongoing transformation of existing cadre, mass, and catch-all parties (Kirchheimer, 1966; Katz & Mair, 1995; Margetts, 2001, 2006). Discursively, the cyber party has a double nature as both (1) an earlier conceptual formulation, predating newer, narrower conceptions such as the digital party and the networked party, and (2) a broader categorization capturing once innovative technological aspects that are now of broad application (Margetts, 2006; Gerbaudo, 2021). In other words, due to the global spread of digitalization, the disintermediation of the relationship between voters and parties fits the earlier formulation of the cyber party scholarship (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; Sandri et al., 2025).

Still, the “cyber party” label can be extremely useful in contemporary discussions, because of its potential applicability to all parties, not just to “digital leaders”, or to those that practice some form of platform politics for cultivating internal democracy (Margetts, 2006; Gerbaudo, 2021). While the empirical hurdle for fitting the digital party category is higher, many contemporary parties are arguably cyber parties because of their hybrid organizations (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; Sandri et al., 2025). This hybridity is derived from the simultaneous existence of a cyber component (*i.e.*, digitally mediated practices used for communication, participation, mobilization, campaigning, and internal coordination), and of a physical party on the ground with local offices, presence in the institutions, party rallies, and so on (Pedersen & Saglie, 2005; Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016).

Of course, is not meant to imply that all parties are today cyber parties. One can think of political organizations where the online component is minimal and has little bearing on the

daily life of the party (Pedersen & Saglie, 2005). To fit this category, there has to be proof of disintermediation of the relationship between the voters and the party (Margetts, 2001, 2006). The adoption of social media pages and websites alone does not make a cyber party, if their real impact is minimal and they are a functional equivalent to a campaign booklet – think of a website presenting the party’s manifesto – or a media outlet, as the digital equivalent of a partisan newspaper (Norris, 2003; Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016).

Finally, with every passing year there is a strong pressure on large parties to become cyber parties (Sandri et al., 2025). This is due to electoral competition, which pushes any party which wants to be relevant at the national level to have an online presence which disintermediates the relationship with the electorate (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; Small, 2007). While this means that this category has lost some of its initial discriminating power, it is nonetheless possible to use it as a scale, to differentiate between parties that are more or less “cyberized” (Sandri et al., 2025). Two good examples of established cyber parties that have not reached the digital party stage are constituted by British *Labour Party* and by the German *SPD (Social Democrats)*.

Related concepts

Digital party, political organizations, platform politics, digital intra-party democracy, cybercritic centralism.

Relevant literature

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