Digital party

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Definition

A digital party is a political party whose organizational infrastructure and routine activities are predominantly based on digital affordances, such as online platforms. Digital parties rely on these tools to recruit and mobilize members, raise funds, deliberate and make decisions — over the selection of candidates, leadership or party programmes —, organize meetings or offline events and elaborate parties' ideology. Their defining feature lies not just in the use of digital tools but in their integration into the party's internal structure, communication, and mobilization strategies. While digital parties need not meet all these conditions, their everyday functioning largely depends on digital infrastructures.

Context

Political parties have been profoundly affected by the digitalization of contemporary societies. The adoption of digital tools by parties has evolved alongside technological innovations, to the point that maintaining an online presence has become essential for any political activity. Over the last thirty years, parties have been creating websites and mailing lists; they embraced social media and mobile applications; and, more recently, integrated advanced technologies such as chatbots and artificial intelligence.

However, it is crucial to distinguish the general process of party digitalization from the concept of *digital parties*. Whereas most parties use digital tools for campaigning or for a limited number of activities, digital parties exist *because* of their digital infrastructure, which allow them to perform key organizational functions. Given these boundaries, few parties can be classified as fully digital, and those that can are typically *digital natives*. Traditional parties that pre-date the digital era have incorporated online tools but have not (yet) evolved into true digital parties. Among the most electorally successful examples of digital parties are Alternativet in Denmark, the Czech Pirate Party (and other Pirate Parties across Europe), the Five Star Movement in Italy, and Podemos in Spain. Despite falling under the same broad definition, these parties differ in organizational structures, reflecting their distinct techno-political cultures—ranging from more bottom-up to more centralized models. Moreover, some, such as the Five Star Movement and Podemos, have retreated from

several digital affordances in recent years, raising ongoing debates about whether they can still be considered genuine digital parties.

Related Concepts

Gamification
Digitalization
Online primaries
Platform

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