PRuF INSTITUT FÜR DEUTSCHES UND INTERNATIONALES PARTEIENRECHT UND PARTEIENFORSCHUNG

HEINRICH HEINE UNIVERSITÄT DÜSSELDORF

Start partying early –
Why do Political Parties have Youth Organisations?

Sophie Karow, M.A.   Düsseldorf Party Research Institute

MOTIVATION & RESEARCH QUESTION

Most parties in Western democracies have a somehow related party youth organisation (PYO). Party sub-organisations and especially party youth organisations are widely ignored in party research, even though the organisation of parties and party membership are well-researched topics in political science. Furthermore, party research regularly names PYOs as a strategic factor within a party's organisation when facing party membership decline, and as a recruitment resource for (future) seat and office holders. However, none of these claims were ever thoroughly proven. My **DISSERTATION PROJECT** addresses this research gap and tackles the question:
Why do parties have party youth organisations and do they benefit from having one?
Before examining the benefits, it is essential to define what kind of relationship a parent party and their PYO maintain, what exactly the functions of party youth organisations are in theory and if they are able to fulfil the functions which are attributed to them.
In the second part of the project, the perspective shifts to the self-image of PYOs. PYOs can only be a strategic factor if they see it as their duty. Parties are vote-, office- or policy-seeking (Strøm 1990). Since PYOs don't run for elections and therefore don't compete with each other for either votes or office, the question needed to be solved here is: *What key aims do party youth organisations target for themselves?*
Closely linked to the question of key aims is: *What do PYOs actually do and are party youth organisations successful in what they are doing?*

State of the project: Developing the theoretical framework

METHODS & DATA APPROACH

Aim of the research project is to develop a general theory of PYOs across countries and beyond party families, which is why a comparative, mixed-methods approach is used.
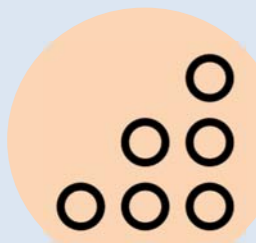
FIRST STEP: secondary analysis based on the Political Party Database (PPDB) data. This database includes a wide range of organisational details of 122 parties in 19 different countries with (semi-)parliamentary systems.

SECOND STEP: gathering additional data not included in the PPDB, e.g. about organisational details of the youth organisations.

THIRD STEP: case selection for a qualitative approach since it is not possible to answer all research questions otherwise.

FOURTH STEP: questioning/interviewing of key actors (to be identified) within the party organisation and within the party youth organisation.

QUANTITATIVE — QUALITATIVE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

● FUNCTIONS

① PYOs AS A LINKAGE (Lawson 1980, and others)

② PYOs AS PART OF 'THE THREE FACES OF PARTY ORGANISATION' (Katz/Mair 1993)

Party in Public Office — Party Central Office — Party on the Ground — Recruitment — PARTY — PYO

Mobilisation of young (party) members
Training ground
Inner Party Opposition
Party membership recruitment

The unique feature of PYOs, compared to other sub-organisations like women or farmers, is the young age of their members.
FUN FACT
In most British PYOs you are allowed to join at age 0, whereas in most German PYOs you join until the age of 35. Obviously youth is a very flexible concept for PYOs.

③ PYOs AS PEER GROUP

PYO as peer group → political education & socialisation

● GOALS

Parties — Vote-Seeking / Policy-Seeking / Office-Seeking — PYOs

● FOUNDATION

Where was the PYO founded? — inside of the parent party / outside of the parent party

REFERENCES

Katz, Richard S./Mair, Peter (1993): The Evolution of Party Organizations in Europe. The Three Faces of Party Organization. In: The American Review of Politics (14), 593–617.

Lawson, Kay (1980): Political Parties and Linkage. In: Lawson, Kay (ed.): Political parties and linkage. A comparative perspective. New Haven: Yale University Press, 3–24.
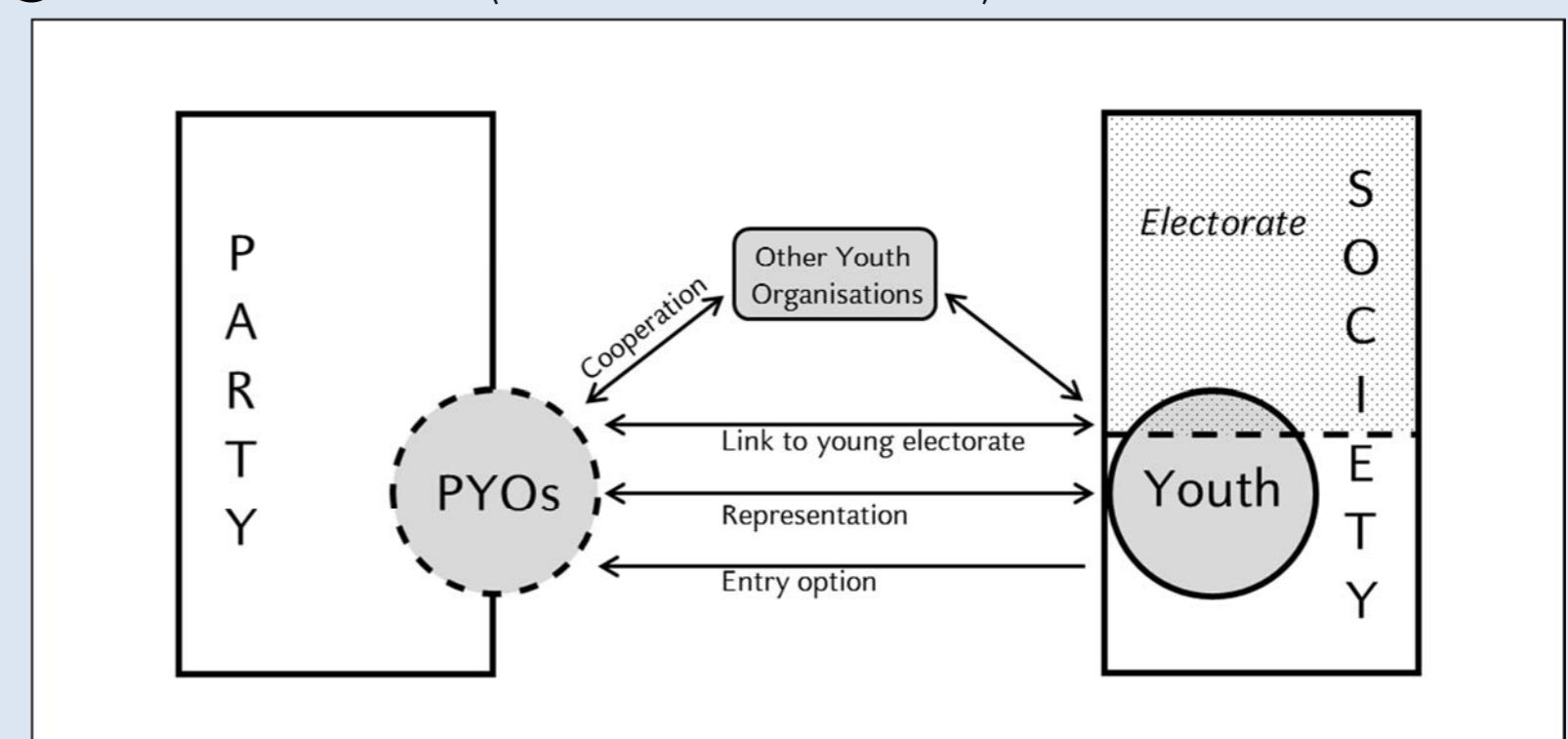
Poguntke, Thomas/Scarrow, Susan E./Webb, Paul D. (2015): Party Rules, Party Resources, and the Politics of Parliamentary Democracies: How Parties Organize in the 21st Century. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco.

Strøm, Kaare (1990): A Behavioral Theory of Competitive Political Parties. In: American Journal of Political Science 34 (2), 565-598.
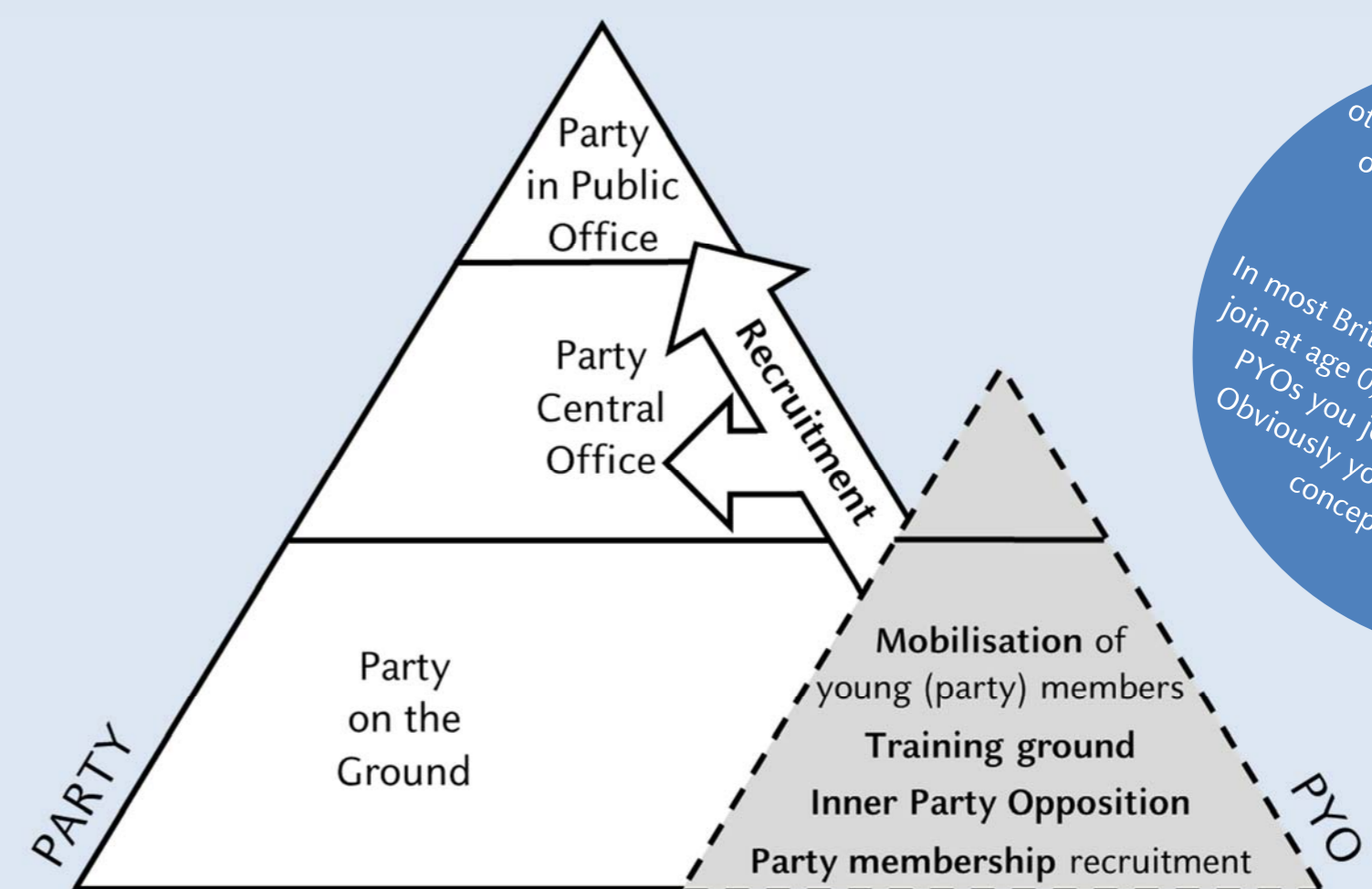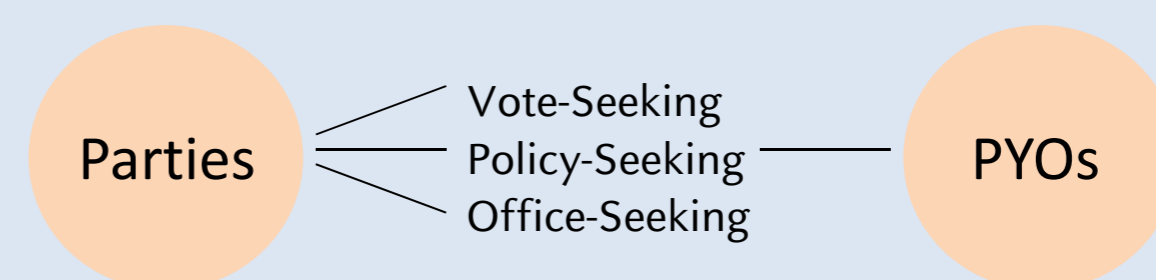
78%
out of the 122 parties (in 19 countries) included in the Political Party Database Project (PPDB) had a PYO which was formally implemented in the party's statute.
Compared to that, the next common sub-organisation (women's) was formally implemented in only 41% of all researched party statutes.

SOPHIE KAROW
is currently a research assistant for the Political Party Database Project (PPDB) based at the Düsseldorf Party Research Institute at the Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf, Germany.

She started her PhD project in 2015 and is supervised by Prof. Dr. Thomas Poguntke.

Research Interests: Party Organisation, Party Politics, Political Participation, Parliaments with a Focus on Timeframes