

Industrial Relations, Political Parties, and Political Systems

Call for Papers for Special Issue

ILR Review

Guest Editors

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Political parties and political systems have long been features of industrial relations scholarship on the state, albeit implicit ones. From as far back as Dunlop's (1958) *Industrial Relations Systems* to more contemporary theories influential in the industrial relations field, such as Hall and Soskice's (2001) *Varieties of Capitalism*, the state has been recognized as playing a central role in mediating relations between capital and labor. However, these and other theories have tended to overlook the inherently political role of the state, treating it more as a neutral mediator or arbitrator of conflicts between groups, rather than as a proactive entity with its own interests in affecting industrial relations. Put simply, while industrial relations scholarship recognizes that state power and activity are contested (Hyman 2008), there tends to be less recognition that state activities in regulating work and industrial relations are inherently party political and embedded in political systems.

Part of the explanation of the implicit treatment of political parties and political systems in industrial relations scholarship is their importance is generally regarded as obvious. In many countries, center-left and left-wing parties have strong historical connections with trade unions and worker organizations and are more likely to pursue legislation supportive of workers. Conversely, following the broad political consensus that emerged after WWII, center-right and right-wing parties are viewed as more pro-employer in their orientation owing to their ideological sympathy for and affiliations with business interests (Frege and Kelly 2003; Streeck and Hassel 2003).

While these traditional associations are often taken for granted within industrial relations scholarship, the comparative political systems literature has tended to adopt a more nuanced view. There is recognition of weaker support for worker protective mechanisms and lower levels of political acceptance and legitimacy of trade unions and collective bargaining and greater support for business interests in liberal market economies compared with coordinated market economies (Bulfone and Afonso 2020; Hamann and Kelly 2007; Wright and McLaughlin 2021). The breakdown in affinities between organized labor and center-left parties and the rise of "third way politics" in liberal market economies, and the trend toward "secularization" has contributed to this (Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick 2010; Western 1997). The "common neoliberal trajectory" in industrial relations policies across a variety of market economies and the rise of authoritarian regimes and single-party states have led to further scrutiny of traditional assumptions about the dynamics of industrial relations, political parties, and political systems (Bishara 2023; Ford and Gillan 2016; Howell 2021).

Recent developments necessitate further consideration of these dynamics. These include the decline of traditional two-party systems, the rise of non-traditional parties, and the courting of working-class voters and, in some cases, unions by primarily extreme-right populist parties in Europe, North America, and Latin America (Budd and Lamare 2021; Mosimann, Rennwald, and Zimmerman 2019; Rathgeb 2018). These developments have been fueled in part by the salience of identity politics and rising worker insecurity on one hand and how these have affected parties' electoral coalitions on the other (Benedetto, Hix, and Mastrorocco 2020; Doellgast, Bidwell, and Colvin 2021). At the same time, unions and employers have been engaged in non-material issues relating to gender and race inequality, migration, and climate change, which has led them to engage with a wider range of political parties (Flanagan and Goods 2022; Lee and Tapia 2021; Riordan and Kowalski 2021). Another example is cooperation between center-right governments and trade unions to develop worker-protective responses to the COVID pandemic including in liberal market economies, which traditional industrial relations scholarly assumptions cannot easily account for (Brandl 2023).

There remain significant gaps and tensions in industrial relations scholarship on political parties and political systems, which thus have grown even wider due to these and other recent developments. These tensions are increasingly salient to the field as both political party/system and industrial relations orthodoxies are being heavily contested by those who were largely marginalized from these structures for much of the late-20th and early-21st centuries. Industrial relations scholarship is at something of a crossroads between its interpretation of the postwar political consensus of old and the emerging party/system structures redefining the relationship between workers and the state. However, there is the potential to learn from and further develop insights generated in other fields relevant to the study of politics and labor, including comparative political economy and political sociology.

We invite papers that examine the broad relationships between industrial relations, political parties, and political systems. Such topics might include paper proposals on:

- How political systems shape and are shaped by industrial relations
- The relationships between extremist/populist political parties, unions/union members, and/or employers/employer associations
- The rise of non-traditional political parties and their connections to the workplace
- Examinations of non-union voice effects on political party support
- The extent to which structural shocks (i.e., the COVID pandemic, climate transitions, new technologies, or electoral system changes) affect the relationships between parties/systems and industrial relations actors
- Theoretical advancement of these relationships, including the potential to extend new and emerging perspectives, e.g., power resources approaches, theories of legitimacy, gender and race perspectives
- Comparative studies including in regions that have received relatively less attention, e.g., Latin America, Southeast Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, Africa
- The role of organized labor in democratization processes and how these shape political systems

Interested contributors should first submit an extended abstract (max. 1,000 words) via email to chiara.benassi13@unibo.it **no later than October 15, 2024**. The abstract should clearly outline the research question or purpose of the proposed paper, as well as how the paper contributes to our understanding of the relationships between political parties/systems and industrial relations. The abstract should also include a brief description of the empirical

analysis used and/or an illustration of the theoretical/conceptual model to be developed. Questions or any other communication about the purpose and process of the special issue should be directed to any of the guest editors via email. However, we will not provide editorial assistance for the extended abstracts.

Guest editors will then choose a subset of abstracts and invite full papers from authors. An in-person paper development workshop will be organized in conjunction with the 2025 SASE Annual Meeting (July 9–12, 2025, in Montreal, Canada) to provide further editorial guidance and an opportunity to gain feedback on ideas/work in progress. Those invited to participate will be asked to submit a draft paper prior to the workshop. Participation in the workshop will not be a guarantee of acceptance of the paper for the special issue of the *ILR Review*. While participation in the workshop is not a requirement for consideration of a paper for the special issue, potential contributors are strongly encouraged to participate.

The deadline for submission of full papers will be September 30, 2025. Details for the online submission process will be provided when papers are invited. All invited papers submitted by this date will undergo double-blind review by two reviewers. Note that there is no guarantee that invited papers will be accepted for publication. Based on the blind reviews and extent to which the papers meet the aims and scope of the special issue, a subset of invited papers will be selected for the special issue.

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