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Abstract

This article examines conceptually the role of political parties in higher education policy. It discusses in how far political parties matter for changes in higher education policy, whether they offer different policy positions that might result in differing policy outputs and how one can conceptualize these differences. To do so, it develops a two-dimensional analytical framework consisting of one dimension that captures re-distributive conflicts and one dimension that captures conflicts over the control of the higher education system. To exemplify this, the article presents illustrative higher education systems and develops hypotheses about where different parties would ideally position themselves in relation to the framework. The article expands on these ideal positions by introducing different forms of path dependencies that might limit political parties and thus lead to a situation of constrained partisan preferences. Finally, it proposes a research agenda based on the analytical framework and the hypotheses generated from it. Overall, the article argues that political parties can be expected to favour different higher education systems and thus matter for changes in higher

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