The democratic performance of party democracy is considered by many as being below par, resulting in lower levels of trust in parties, parliament, and government which negatively affects the system’s legitimacy. Legitimacy is considered to be essential for peaceful and effective governance in a democracy – it is the grease that makes democracy work. Legitimacy is often defined as the popular compliance with and acceptance of political authority and as a systemic outcome of variations in the democratic performance of political parties in parliament and government. Central to democratic performance is the degree of ‘responsiveness’ of parties towards electors, and of ‘responsible’ (accountable) performance of parties in parliament towards government. The central issue is therefore: to what extent parties, in or out government, enhance the democratic performance to maintain legitimacy (popular consent) by representing the ‘demos’ (electorate) in a responsive manner and by directing governmental actions in a responsible (accountable)?

Legitimate government also implies the ‘lawful’ exercise of public authority that can be impartially scrutinized (i.e. Rule of Law). Taken in this sense, legitimacy allows the transformation of coercion into compliance with the exercise of state powers in a peaceful but authoritative manner. Legitimate government is expected to steer the ship of state effectively (with lower transaction costs) and peacefully (with lower levels of protest) for the common good. Hence, responsive and responsible party behaviour is the benchmark of ‘good governance’, contributing to public welfare, popular acceptance and peaceful compliance with political authority. Yet, the concept of legitimacy is not only a contested concept but also a complex phenomenon, which is hard to define and measure. This symposium is not intended to solve all theoretical or empirical problems, but to take stock of comparatively driven research of the multifarious manifestations and dimensions of legitimacy.

Three themes will be discussed during the sessions:

One, the democratic performance of parties in elections by focussing on electoral change, emerging new parties and the quality of representation as ‘trustees’ of the ‘demos’. Responsiveness is here a key term, meaning that popular consent and support is developed on the basis that parties indeed are functioning as trustworthy and responsive channels of interest representation of their constituency.

Two, how adequate do parties operate as intermediaries between the electorate’s preferences (interests) and party government? This behaviour should not only be adequate in terms of ‘responsiveness’, but also in terms of making ‘responsible’ policy for the common good. This obviously implies a tension between what the electorate wants and what society needs. Hence, party government in whatever form and institutional context is confronted with policy dilemma’s that must be solved in one way or another.

Three, the relationship between parties – government – electorate is in large part influenced by the institutionalisation of these relations and by the degree of government efficacy regarding politically contested issue like European Integration, Unemployment and the Labour Market, Welfare State retrenchment, Crime and Law and Order, et. cetera. The extent to which parties in or out government handle these issues may well affect legitimacy in democracy.

We hope to contribute to a fertile and fruitful exchange of ideas and information to enhance future research on ‘Legitimacy’. We wish to thank the ‘sponsors’ for making the symposium possible: The Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen (KNAW), the Board of the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Department of Political Science and Public Administration of the VU University.
PROGRAMME

Wednesday 250913 (Faculty of Social Sciences VU, Metropolitan Building)

Political Performance and Changing Patterns of Legitimacy – Chair Anton Hemerijck
14.00-14.30: Registration of participants
14.30-14.45: Opening by Dean Hemerijck of the VU Faculty of Social Sciences
14.45-15.15: Hans Keman on the Theme of the Conference
16.15-16.45: Democratic Performance in the Netherlands (Jacques Thomassen)
17.15-18.15: Informal Reception

Thursday 260913 Auditorium VU (Main Building)

Trust in Politics, Electoral Change and New Parties – Chair Liesbet Hooghe
09.00-09.15: Opening
09.15-09.45: Democracy and subnational decentralization (Liesbet Hooghe & Gary Marks)
10.15-10.45: Electoral Change in Europe (Cees Van der Eijk)
11.30-12.00: How do Europeans view and evaluate democracy? (Hans-Peter Kriesi)
12.45-14.15: Lunch (provided)

Party Behaviour and Democratic Performance - Chair Gary Marks
14.30-15.00: Responsive and Responsible Party Behaviour (Paul Pennings)
15.30-16.00: Party Government and Public Policy: Why some incumbent parties radically deviate from the preferences of their social constituencies (Manfred Schmidt)
16.45-17.45: Organizing Democratic Choice (Ian Budge & Michael McDonald)

Friday 270912 Atrium VU (Medical Faculty)

Legitimacy and Quality of Democracy - Chair Henk Overbeek
09.00-09.15: Opening
09.30-10.00: Welfare Statism and Legitimacy (Kees Van Kersbergen)
11.00-11.30: Institutions and Policy Performance (Klaus Armingeon)
12.00-12.30: Consensus Democracy & the Quality of Democracy (Rudy Andeweg)
13.00: Closure and Departure

There is no official registration required but in order to have some idea of the potential number of participants, please send an email to j.j.woldendorp@vu.nl if you consider to participate.