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The Challenges of Intra-Party Democracy

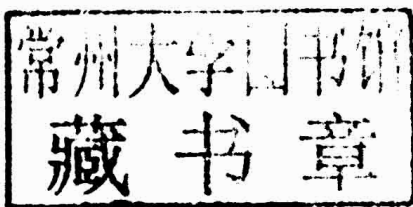
edited by

William P. Cross and Richard S. Katz

COMPARATIVE POLITICS

The Challenges of Intra-Party Democracy

EDITED BY WILLIAM P. CROSS
AND RICHARD S. KATZ



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THE CHALLENGES OF INTRA-PARTY DEMOCRACY

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This volume has its roots in a conversation between the editors at the ECPR general conference in Potsdam. The ECPR has provided many venues for both of us to present our work, and to meet with colleagues, and we appreciate these opportunities.

After agreeing on the need for a comprehensive examination of both the concept and practice of internal party democracy, among the first tasks we set for ourselves was the recruitment of a group of first-rate academics to carry out this examination. If at nothing else, we believe we achieved resounding success at this task. The contributors to this book all have made significant earlier contributions to the study of party politics and this volume benefits greatly from that body of work.

In addition to outstanding scholarship, each of the contributors also brought a professional and collegial approach to the project. This has truly been a team enterprise and the final product is better for it. The group of authors met twice in Ottawa for workshops during which the scope and contours of the study were agreed upon and preliminary drafts of chapters were reviewed and discussed. These gatherings often took on the feel of sophisticated graduate seminars with no shortage of discussion and constructive criticism of each other's work. We are grateful to Thomas Zittel and David Farrell who participated in these meetings and offered much useful advice.

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William P. Cross and Richard S. Katz

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Abbreviations

ALP	Australian Labor Party
CDU	Christian Democratic Union, Germany
CoE	Council of Europe
D66	Democrats 66, the Netherlands
FDP	Free Democratic Party, Germany
IPD	intra-party democracy
ISSP	International Social Survey Programme
NDP	New Democratic Party, Canada
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PS	Socialist Party, France
PvdA	Labour Party, the Netherlands
PVV	Freedom Party, the Netherlands
QWPA	quasi-women's policy agencies
SMP	single member plurality system
SPD	Social Democratic Party, Germany
UMP	Union for a Popular Movement, France
VLD	Flemish Liberals and Democrats, Belgium
VVD	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, the Netherlands

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The Challenges of Intra-Party Democracy

William P. Cross and Richard S. Katz

The centrality of political parties to modern democracy was already recognized when Schattschneider (1942: 1) argued ‘that the political parties created democracy and that modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties. . . . The parties are not therefore merely appendages of modern government; they are in the center of it and play a determinative and creative role in it’. Political scientists have continued to identify parties as key institutions for a healthy democracy, highlighting their roles in the recruitment of candidates, the providing of linkages between government and civil society, the organization of legislatures and the structuring of election campaigns. Beyond observations concerning the importance for democracy of the fact *that* parties do these things, there has also been widespread concern with the *ways in which* parties discharge these responsibilities. In particular, if state-level democracy cannot flourish save for parties, the questions inevitably arise of whether the parties themselves must be, should be, and are internally democratic with respect to their own decision-making practices and distributions of authority or influence.

If these are questions for academic political science, for many of those working to establish democracy in the third (or fourth) wave democracies, the answers are obvious: internal party democracy is either a necessity or a panacea. When the European Commission for Democracy through Law (the ‘Venice Commission’) issued its *Code of Good Practice in the Field of Political Parties*, it identified ‘to reinforce political parties’ internal democracy’ as ‘its explicit aim’.¹ Likewise, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has called on member states to ‘ensure that the legislative framework promotes the implementation by political parties of internal party democracy principles’.² After a workshop on the subject at the Third Assembly of the World Movement for Democracy, ‘There was a general consensus at the workshop that the strengthening of internal party democracy is a crucial prerequisite for democratic development in various

¹ <<http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2009/CDL-AD%282009%29021-e.pdf>>.

² <<http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc10/EDOC12107.htm>>.

countries'.³ International IDEA has a project on internal party democracy that aims 'to provoke party reform by identifying the challenges facing political parties for them to become more democratic, transparent and effective'.⁴ According to the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, 'internal democracy' is one of the "institutional guarantees" that... political parties would have to fulfill if they were to effectively meet what is expected of them in a democracy'.⁵ Similarly, USAID support for political parties 'emphasizes the need for internal party democracy'.⁶

For many practicing politicians confronting what they see as crises of participation in the longer established democracies, the answers are the same: the way to counter the nearly universal decline of party membership (van Biezen et al. 2012), is for the parties to become more internally democratic. The result has been a wide variety of reforms in party structures and practices—in some cases adopted by internal decisions of individual parties and in others imposed by law (although, of course, in democratic systems the laws are made in elected legislatures, which is to say by representatives of the parties themselves)—to provide for more direct member involvement in the choice of candidates for public office, the selection of the leader(s) of the party, and the formulation or ratification of statements defining the party's policies. Parties often present themselves as being democratically organized both to differentiate themselves from their competitors and as a signal that they are open to participation from all citizens. Rare is the party that admits to being 'undemocratic' in its organization.

While parties and the democracy promotion community may espouse general agreement that internal party democracy (IPD) is a good thing, any survey of parties' internal structures makes it clear that there is no single, agreed upon definition of what it means to be internally democratic. Parties claiming to practice IPD organize and operate in dramatically different ways. Like democracy itself, the definition of IPD is essentially contestable. Is it primarily about participation, inclusiveness, centralization, accountability, or something else altogether? Should the emphasis be on outcomes or on process? For example, if inclusiveness is a key consideration, in terms of candidate selection is the concern about the inclusiveness of the selectorate (those who choose the candidates), or is it about the diversity of the group of candidates ultimately selected? And, who is either group meant to be inclusive of—party members, party supporters in the electorate, the electorate generally?

³ <<http://www.wmd.org/assemblies/third-assembly/workshops/political-parties-and-finance/how-strengthen-internal-party-demo>>.

⁴ <http://www.idea.int/parties/internal_democracy07.cfm>.

⁵ <http://www.nimd.org/documents/1/internal_party_democracy-_state_of_affairs_and_the_road_ahead.pdf>; report written by Augustine Magolowondo.

⁶ <<http://serbia-montenegro.usaid.gov/code/navigate.php?ld=23>>.

There is no obviously correct answer to these questions. First, even when there is agreement about democratic values, the values themselves may be in conflict. For example, there is a significant body of evidence suggesting that processes that strengthen the value of participation can have an adverse impact on the value of inclusion (at least with regard to the inclusiveness of candidate lists—Hazan and Rahat 2010). Second, IPD as an internal value may impede the achievement of the party's external goals. Aside from the frequently cited possibility that giving more power to the party's activists may result in candidates or policy positions that are less able to attract support in the broader electorate (May 1973), thereby increasing the likelihood of government policies that are less to the liking of those activists,⁷ there are the examples of left-libertarian or ecological parties in Europe whose insistence on direct member decision making (aside from giving disproportionate power to those members with the stamina to endure interminable meetings) made it impossible to take binding decisions (because they could always be reversed at the next meeting, with a different set of members present) (Kitschelt 1989), or whose abhorrence of hierarchy and insistence on rotation in office denied them both stable and experienced representation. In other words, if democracy, whether intra-party or systemic, is an end in itself, there is no consensus on exactly what that means or how it would be either institutionalized or measured. And if, on the other hand, 'Democracy is a political *method*, that is to say, a certain type of institutional arrangement for arriving at . . . decisions and hence incapable of being an end in itself, irrespective of what decisions it will produce under given historical conditions' (Schumpeter 1962 [1942]: 242), then there may be limits to how much IPD is actually a good thing.

Even parties that generally agree that internally democratic structures are desirable are faced with a series of decisions when operationalizing this principle. In some cases, they are constrained by state imposed party laws that regulate parts of their internal activity. These laws generally are predicated on the ideas that, on the one hand, parties are private associations of citizens who should be free to organize their activities as they choose, but that, on the other hand, they are also powerful actors in politics and potentially subject to capture or perversion by their nominal leaders. Hence, when internal party processes are legally prescribed, it is generally to assure, at a minimum, that the 'members' (somehow defined) are represented in party governing bodies, either directly or through the periodic election of representatives. The German party law, for example, specifies that parties must have: regional branches (art. 7); an executive committee of at least three members, elected at least every two years (art. 11); an assembly, at least half the members of which must be allocated on the basis of membership, with the rest allocated in proportion to votes obtained at the last parliamentary election; party

⁷ In other words, the activists might rationally prefer to have less power in a way analogous to the observation of Mancur Olson (1965) that a rational individualist might prefer to be compelled to contribute to the production of public goods which would otherwise be under-provided.

courts of arbitration, whose members must be elected at least every four years, and cannot be 'members of the executive committee of the party or a regional branch, be employed by the party or a regional branch, nor receive regular income from them' (art. 14). In other cases, the law may simply require that the party be internally democratic without specifying what that means, or at the other extreme, it may define the party's internal arrangements in great detail, perhaps going so far as to identify the exact number and functions of its officers and to specify the dates on which they are to be elected. And of course, in still other cases, there may be no legal strictures at all.

Within such legal constraints as are imposed, each political party makes choices regarding how it organizes, reflecting its view of appropriate internal democratic practices, influenced no doubt by its perceived self-interest, and its conception of the political party itself. For example, parties usually decide both the criteria for membership and whether to limit the intra-party franchise in particular areas of decision-making to members, or whether alternatively to permit a broader range of supporters to participate, essentially determining who the party 'demos' is. Some parties restrict formal influence to long-time activists while others invite all partisans to take part in their decision-making. Labour parties may grant formal authority to trade unions while others restrict the internal franchise to party elites. Some parties are heavily reliant upon corporations for their funding while others explicitly reject any corporate contributions. Some may adopt gender and regional quotas for internal decision-making bodies while others choose members of these bodies at-large, and leave the distribution of positions among different categories of individuals entirely to the electors.

Two parties adopting widely different practices may both defend their choices as best reflecting IPD. For example, parties selecting their leader through a one-member-one-vote procedure often argue that this reflects a populist democratic view of equality among members and offers opportunity for expansive participation. Others, deciding to make the choice at a party conference, by delegates chosen to ensure regional and gender balance, argue that this process best respects the democratic values of inclusiveness, representativeness, and collective decision-making. On their face, neither claim is right or wrong; rather each reflects a different understanding of what democracy requires.

Analysis of parties' approaches to IPD is made more complex by their common practice of adopting different practices for different areas of party activity; for example, as parties engage in a variety of activities, the questions of who should be empowered, and in what ways, may have many different answers within a single party. It is not uncommon for a party to decide that one group should have authority over candidate selection, another should choose its leader and a third determine policy positions. Not only do the bodies with decision-making authority differ across activities, so too may the ways in which the members of those bodies are chosen and the 'demos' to whom they are ultimately responsible.

If it is important to understand the internal workings of parties because of the importance of parties to the realization of democracy at the system level, it is also impossible to understand or to evaluate those internal workings without considering the fact that parties are parts of, and enmeshed in, a wider political system. On the one hand, the choices parties make will be influenced, if not necessarily determined, by their environment. The constraints imposed by party laws are examples of one such environmental influence. The type of electoral system, the number of competitive parties, the ideological range of the party system, whether a party is in government or opposition, whether it competes in a federal or unitary state, the degree to which (and the conditions under which) state subventions are available, all might encourage a party to adopt particular approaches to IPD, as indeed might the approaches to IPD taken by other parties in the same political system.

On the other hand, because parties are only parts of the wider system, the underlying idea that the internal democracy of parties is a necessary component of system-level democracy is itself not beyond question. While some theorists argue that real democracy requires that all the institutions of society, including but hardly limited to parties, be themselves democratic, others, such as Giovanni Sartori (1965: 124), are quite clear in their claims that 'democracy on a large scale is not the sum of many little democracies'. Here the basic claim is that the essence of democracy is free choice *among* parties, rather than direct participation *within* parties—based on the further premise that parties are properly understood to be teams of politicians rather than associations of citizens.

In less stark terms, some argue that IPD cannot properly be considered on its own but must be viewed as part of the full range of democratic or participatory opportunities offered a citizen. In this view IPD is but one component of democratic life in a state and it is this full democratic experience that must be considered. IPD can add to the overall democratic experience or it may detract from it depending upon how it is structured. This argument is made most clearly by Hazan and Rahat (2010) who suggest that highly participatory candidate nomination processes may lead to less inclusive and representative groups of candidates. General elections have little opportunity to rectify an inclusiveness problem created through the candidate selection process, as parties, in most systems, are gatekeepers to elected office. On the other hand, general elections can at least partially remedy a participatory shortfall created through more exclusive methods of candidate selection, by maximizing participation in general election voting. The point is that democracy is multifaceted, and some components of it are most easily maximized by the internal workings of political parties and others through general elections. In Hazan and Rahat's argument, inclusiveness in candidate pools and legislatures may be maximized through less participatory party nomination processes, which can be remedied through highly participatory general elections.

The challenge is not only in balancing party and state-level democratic practices but also in prioritizing different democratic impulses within the practice of

IPD. Trade-offs and compromise are inevitable. Parties favouring deliberative decision-making may adopt institutions based on geographic, gender, or even factional representation that guarantee the inclusion of what they view as the important interests or opinions that need to be taken into account, with the objectives of compromise and accommodation 'trumping' direct member participation on a one-member-one-vote basis. Others may not face a need to accommodate widely divergent interests and may instead prefer broadly participatory processes even if these provide little opportunity for collective deliberation. The decision may reflect the character of the party (for example, catch-all versus ideological) or may result from the differences inherent between governing and opposition parties or those operating in a heterogeneous versus more homogeneous society.

In this sense, IPD cannot be measured in a way that permits a 'scientific' conclusion that one party is more democratic than another—in the same way that it is a mug's game to try to definitively determine whether Germany or Australia or the Netherlands is the most democratic. Rankings of how democratic various countries are depend on the definition they ascribe to democracy and the same is true for IPD. It is an interest in the different approaches parties take to IPD, their rationales for doing so, and the implications of these decisions that animate this book. Accordingly, we are interested in the range of questions parties face in considering whether and how to implement IPD.

SOME OF THE KEY QUESTIONS

Some of the important questions on which we hope to shed light are: what aspects of their internal activity do parties conclude should, and should not, be subject to democratic determination, which democratic values are prioritized in implementing IPD, who is empowered in making party decisions, what are the perceived costs and benefits of different approaches to IPD, and how are these decisions influenced by the context in which a party operates? While not questioning the sincerity of the commitment of parties and politicians to democratic values, we also recognize that IPD is both about the distribution of power and influence within a party, and within the broader society. As such, both internal democratization in general, and the choice of a specific variant of IPD in particular, involve winners and losers. Whose interests are served by what version of IPD?

The first big question is how parties fit into the broader scheme of democratic government. Much of the discussion above concerning IPD stems from the party model/democratic theory of the mass party of integration. In this view, parties are the political arms of well-defined social groups, and politicians—including party leaders—are the agents of those groups, with the members of

the groups (archetypically the members of a social class or a particular religion), or at least the members of the group who are sufficiently politically interested to have joined the party, being the principals. Not surprisingly, IPD has a prominent place in the overall understanding of democracy associated with the mass party (Beer 1965; Katz and Mair 1995).

The mass party is not the only party type that has been identified, and indeed most analysts of party organization regard it largely as an historical relic. A variety of types have been suggested to characterize more recent developments in party organizations, including the catch-all party (Kirchheimer 1966), the cartel party (Katz and Mair 1995), the party as public utility (van Biezen 2004), the business-firm party (Hopkin and Paolucci 1999), and the franchise party (Carty 2004). Each of these has its own interpretation of democracy, and its own implications for the proper role and implementation of IPD.

One of the consequences of the widespread perception of IPD as a positive democratic force, and in the minds of some a necessary component of statewide democracy, is the increased attempts by the state to mandate it. Once commonly viewed as strictly private organizations based in civil society, the internal organizational procedures and structures of parties have become increasingly subject to external regulation. In crafting these regulations many states have taken their cue from the classic mass party as a prescriptive model of organization. These regulatory efforts may not rest easily in societies in which the socio-economic structures supporting the mass party are no longer found. Questions of democratic legitimacy may also arise when legislatures and courts become the deciders of how parties should internally organize and conduct their affairs. These can raise concerns relating to state centralization and control over political participation and public life. Diversity in party organizational practices, reflecting prioritization of different democratic norms, perhaps in competition with one another and none *a priori* less valid than another, may be homogenized through these efforts.

As suggested above, one of the central questions a party must consider when implementing IPD is who is the 'demos'—that is, who should have authority in its internal decision making? Although there are exceptions, parties generally attempt to portray themselves as being open and inclusive and thus welcoming of participation from everyone. Most parties are membership organizations and requisites of membership are often minimal—residency, a minimum age, and payment of a small fee. This can vary, however, with some parties requiring a greater commitment to their ideals in return for membership. Significant academic attention has been paid in recent decades to an apparent decline in the number of party members. Some see this as partially reflecting citizen dissatisfaction with parties that they see as being overly hierarchical and not providing sufficient opportunities for their rank-and-file to influence internal decision-making. Accordingly, many of those who view a decline in party membership negatively argue for more robust forms of IPD as a way of providing an increased incentive for party activism. Parties may benefit from a larger membership in a number of ways including: