

Measuring and Evaluating Intra-Party Democracy in Croatia

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A growing number of studies on intra-party democracy reports on general trends of introducing democratic procedures and broadening decision-making bodies in party leadership selection, candidate selection and policy-making within contemporary political parties. Since most of research efforts on intra-party democracy focus on West European and Anglo-Saxon countries, party development and intra-party organizational structures in post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe are mostly neglected. In this paper, we shall try to overcome the selection bias and only partly fill this evident research gap by providing quantitative and qualitative analysis of intra-party democracy in the major political parties in Croatia. In measuring the level of intra-party democracy in Croatian parties, we employ an integrated approach through deductive and standardized content analysis of party statutes, as developed by von dem Berge, Poguntke, Obert and Tipei in 2013. Party statutes are usually the focal point in the analysis of intra-party democracy since they provide the most reliable formal record of the balance of power between different party bodies. In the second step of the analysis, we rely on semi-structured interviews conducted with the prominent party leaders and officials in order to get an insight into informal distribution of power in Croatian parties. In such a way, observed results are then interpreted with regard to informal party practice and eventual consequences of both for the actual state of intra-party democracy within Croatian parties are discussed.

Keywords: intra-party democracy, party statutes, content analysis, semi-structured interviews, Croatia

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Introduction

Intra-party democracy is a multifaceted political phenomenon which has been attracting growing scholarly interest in the last two decades. However, somewhat paradoxically, the growing research on intra-party democracy has emerged simultaneously with discovery of general trends of ‘parties in decline’ and ‘democracy in crises’. This argument is made most clearly by Peter Mair who said that “[t]he age of party democracy has passed” (Mair, 2013: 1). If this is true, then how can we explain that intra-party democracy has gained importance among political actors and politicians (at least with regard to their public rhetoric), then among general public and citizens and in the eyes of political scientists?

Some scholars agree that intra-party democracy is a good thing and put forward arguments in its favor (Ware, 1987; Teorell, 1999; Scarrow, 2005). However, contemporary findings have revealed that many scholars are very cautious when it comes to the desirability of intra-party democracy and its role in system-level democracy (for an overview, see Čular, Nikić Čakar and Raos, 2015). Notwithstanding the empirical arguments that political parties are more democratic now than they were before (Krouwel, 1999; Bille, 2001; Lundell 2004), numerous studies on party democratization very often recall that “democracy is not (...) the sum of many little democracies” (Sartori, 1965: 124) or that “[d]emocracy is not found in the parties but between parties” (Schattschneider, 1942: 60) or simply that “[d]emocracy leads to oligarchy (...)” (Michels, 1911: viii). Indeed, scholars of intra-party democracy are rather neutral or even suspicious towards the concept taken as a value in itself. For example, Rahat and Hazan (2001) warn that democratization of party organization through drastic widening of selectorate in candidate selection procedures can have negative impacts on party discipline and cohesion, thus reducing the effectiveness of political parties as central organizations of political representation and interest aggregation. Their findings show that the democratization of candidate selection procedures can have negative effect on representativeness and the level of intra-party competition, while the responsiveness of legislators seems to decline when inclusiveness rises significantly, leading to lower party cohesion (Hazan and Rahat, 2006). In addition, Hazan, Rahat and Katz (2008) have shown that the increased inclusiveness of selectorate in candidate selection procedures cannot simultaneously achieve greater participation, competition and representativeness, but actually can negatively influence each other.

On the other hand, even when engaged in democratization of internal procedures, political leaders are opened for introducing principles and mechanisms of intra-party democracy mostly for instrumental reasons (attracting new members, acquiring legitimacy), rather than for their beliefs in inherent merits and internal values of intra-party democracy. Several scholars were very critical of broadening intra-party democracy in terms of more inclusiveness and participation, saying that “the result is a leadership that can legitimize its position both inside and outside the party by pointing to a large and formally empowered membership. At the same time its autonomy is enhanced, since an atomized membership is less likely to provide the basis for the mobilization of challenges, and since the position of local activists as necessary intermediaries is undercut” (Katz and Mair, 1995: 21).

Although it is reasonable to expect its support for intra-party democratization, party membership does not always exhibit straightforward support for more democratic intra-party decision-making in their own parties (see Saglie and Heidar, 2004 vs. Young and Cross, 2002). Intra-party democracy is perhaps present as a desirable political goal in the public opinion, but this is usually the case only during the election period. At first glance, it would be hard to find empirical evidence that new political parties emerging in European countries achieve electoral success much more in political systems with internally closed and undemocratic political parties or that these new parties are on average more democratic than the old ones. Simply, it seems that intra-party democracy can hardly be a solution to the problem of general declining capacities of political parties in their relations to citizens (Katz, 2013).

In this paper, we analyze the level of democracy in nine main political parties in Croatia. Since most of research efforts on intra-party democracy focus on West European and Anglo-Saxon countries, our motivation is to, at least partially, fill this evident research gap by providing quantitative and qualitative analysis of intra-party democracy in a new democratic country in Central and Eastern Europe. To do this, we analyze data from deductive and standardized content analysis of party statutes, as developed by von dem Berge, Poguntke, Obert and Tipei (2013). Party statutes are usually the focal point in the analysis of intra-party democracy since they provide the most reliable formal record of balance of power between different party bodies. In the second step of the analysis, we rely on semi-structured interviews conducted with prominent party leaders and officials in order to get an insight into informal distribution of power in Croatian parties. In such a way, observed insights into statutory rules and formal power distribution are then interpreted with regard to informal party practices and consequences of both for the actual state of intra-party democracy within Croatian parties are discussed. We start with the assumption that these two aspects dissent, which means that parties

in Croatia are formally democratic, but informal party practices reveal that the actual level of intra-party democracy is lower than expected from the analysis of party statutes. This is very much in line with Heidar and Saglie's concept of network party where formal rules and procedures lose importance, while personal connections and informal networks are crucial in decision-making processes (Heidar and Saglie, 2003).

Intra-party democracy: conceptualization and measurement

Two basic definitional dimensions of intra-party democracy are procedures and outcomes. Under procedures, we understand internal decision-making processes in political parties that have a binding character for all its members. A majority of scholars agrees on two basic issues regarding the procedural dimension of intra-party democracy – inclusiveness and decentralization. Inclusiveness implies the level of openness of decision-making processes, while decentralization stands for the level of vertical division of competencies in making decisions. Outcomes dimension refers to the practical implications of intra-party processes and is concerned with the quality of intra-party democracy and the consequences it has for a party and its broader function. This dimension includes external outcomes (balance of democratic outcomes) and internal outcomes (intra-party power distribution). The balance of democratic outcomes includes issues like participation, representation, responsiveness, accountability, deliberation and cohesion, while intra-party power distribution relates to the distribution of actual power between ordinary members, party leaders and intra-party groups.

We can also differentiate between functional and structural categories through which we can measure intra-party democracy. The functional categories are concerned with certain key processes like leadership selection, candidate selection and policy-making. The question of party leadership selection remains one of the most important categories for measuring intra-party democracy (see Carty and Blake, 1999; LeDuc, 2001; Young and Cross, 2002; Scarrow, 2005; Kenig, 2008, 2009; Lisi, 2009; Cross and Blais, 2012; Lehrer, 2012; Kabasakal, 2014). The structural categories comprise membership rights, intra-party rules of conduct and organizational arrangements. Membership rights have not only a major impact on the nature of decision-making processes, but also fundamentally determine the general character of a party. Intra-party rules of conduct include both formal rules (codified in party rulebooks), as well as informal rules and practices that create a framework within which members can take action and

procedures can take place. Finally, the organizational arrangement of a political party has a strong influence on the way a party conducts its internal work.

Figure 1: The concept of intra-party democracy

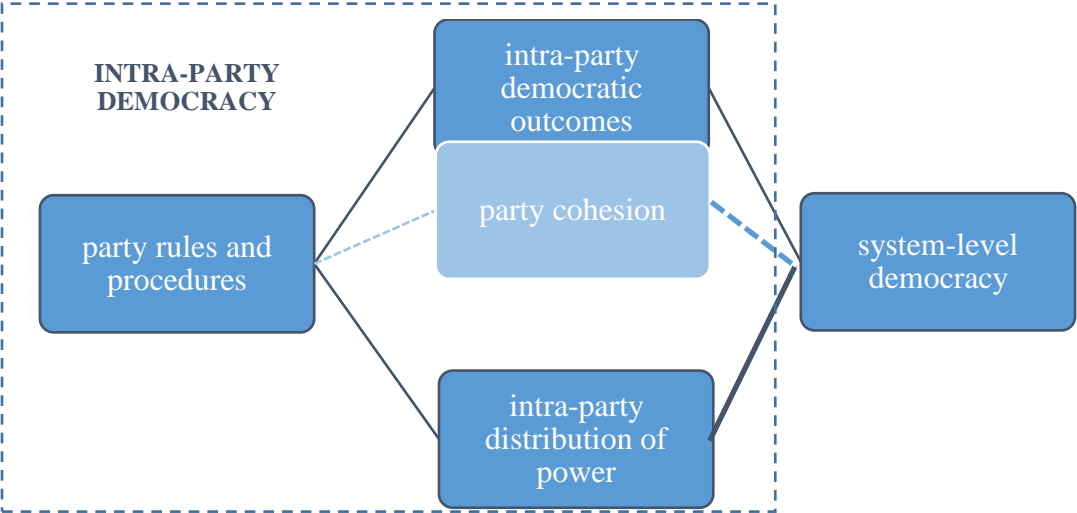


Figure 1 shows that the concept of intra-party democracy starts with a certain type of party rules and procedures. These rules produce impact on different aspects of intra-party life (outcomes). While some of the outcomes are interpreted as more or less direct evidence of intra-party democracy (viewed through different dimensions of participation, representation, competition, deliberation, responsiveness and accountability), others refer to distribution of power within a party. Both types of outcomes can be evaluated with regard to their impact on the functioning of system-level democracy. Although consequences for system-level democracy are not included in the definition of intra-party democracy, many authors, explicitly or implicitly, evaluate importance of different aspects of intra-party democracy according to their (presumed) impact on system-level democracy. Therefore, when dealing with empirical research on the impact of intra-party democracy on system-level democracy, intra-party democracy as an independent variable very often lacks definitional independence.

Numerous studies of intra-party democracy simply focus on the procedural aspect of the definition, trying to measure it by looking how well the existing rules and procedures meet the democratic standard of “giving members more say” in the party affairs. While this approach is rather straightforward in operationalization and measurement of intra-party democracy, it also rests on the definition of intra-party democracy that is completely autonomous from the functional task of system-level democracy: whatever consequences it may have for the functioning of system-level democracy, more inclusive and decentralized procedures are clear

evidence of intra-party democracy. Yet, requirements of system-level democracy determine the choice of indicators and focus the attention of scholars who prefer this approach only to some intra-party decision-making processes, namely those that have the largest impact on system-level competition, political representation and governing: leadership selection, candidate selection and policy formulation. The main shortcoming of this approach is that its focus on party rules and procedures usually measures intra-party democracy only formally, with no accurate insight into the realm of party practices. Though it can be perceived as “a useful indicator of changing attitudes concerning the relationships between party leaders, individual members and party organs” (von dem Berge et al., 2013: 2), the type of institutionalization of rules and procedures are here of crucial importance (Scarrow, 2005; Norris, 2006). Informal institutionalization of decision-making patterns and processes can jeopardize formal party rules to the extent that they cease to be a valid indicator of intra-party democracy or, even more, can employ formal procedures to support practices quite opposite to the principles and aims expressed in formal rules. This is especially important in newly established democracies that are generally marked with low levels of formal institutionalization, particularly when it comes to intra-party life (see Karasimeonov, 2005).

Focused on different dimensions of democratic practice, the outcomes-based approach to intra-party democracy follows the mainstream definition of the system-level democracy that links modern democracy to the balance of participation, deliberation, competition, representation, responsiveness and accountability. Democracy is perceived as a set of values, rules and practices that secure an optimal balance between different democratic outcomes. While some definitions insist more on one dimension over the other, there is a wide consensus that there is a trade-off between these mutually interdependent outcomes and that it is not possible to maximize all democratic dimensions. Therefore, intra-party democracy is about optimization of democratic outcomes (Hazan and Rahat, 2006). In contrast to the procedural definitions of intra-party democracy, outcome-based definitions are much more successful in measuring real intra-party life, they insist on the balance of achievements on different dimensions, thus advocating middle solution (neither too much nor too little participation, competition, representation or responsiveness). However, this is also a weak point of this approach, since it allows many outcomes' equilibriums, but without an independent set of criteria to evaluate the level of intra-party democracy. These criteria can only be inferred either from a normative position of a researcher (to value one dimension more than the others) or from a functional position when evaluating the contribution of intra-party democracy to system-level democracy, which is nicely said by Hazan and Rahat (2010: 167): “From this viewpoint, the

more democratic candidate selection method would be the one that contributes to the fulfillment of all four dimensions of democracy.”

We argue that the definition of intra-party democracy as balanced distribution of power between party bodies, faces, and levels can overcome some of the shortcomings of both procedural and outcomes-based approaches. Hazan and Rahat insists that “another way to look at democracy is as a system that is very suspicious of political power, and thus instead of attempting to stand by specific norms and produce specific products, it aims first and foremost to constrain power” (Hazan and Rahat, 2010: 167). Indeed, when referring to intra-party democracy, many scholars point to its consequences for intra-party distribution of power, but only a handful of them take this relationship seriously enough to make it the basis for conceptualization and measurement of intra-party democracy (for the clearest case of such conceptualization see Carty, 2013 and for an empirical account Loxbo, 2013). If we transfer this notion of democracy into the realm of political parties, intra-party democracy should be defined as the absence of structural and persistent concentration of power within a party agency, regardless of whether it is an individual, a group, body or a party level. Only such de-concentration and the lack of structural dominance can guarantee free expression and formation of the party will. Intra-party democracy is therefore less about participation or responsiveness and more about freedom of expression and initiative, regardless of whether it refers to a party member(s) or party leader, local branch or parliamentary caucus. In this sense, intra-party democracy also imply a practice of resolving intra-party conflicts without help of and without resulting in established structural dominance. In other words, intra-party democracy is about building a party cohesion that is not a product of structural imposing of party discipline of one agency onto the others. Unlike the procedural approach that positively evaluates intra-party democracy only if it moves towards more inclusiveness or the outcomes-based approach that sees intra-party democracy as the balance of democratic outcomes, distribution of power approach is rather minimalist and consider that intra-party democracy is found everywhere where there is no clear systematic concentration of power within a party.

When it comes to measurement and evaluation of intra-party democracy perceived through the distribution of power approach, first we engaged an integrated approach to measuring the level of intra-party democracy through deductive and standardized content analysis of party statutes developed by von dem Berge et al. (2013). By following inclusiveness and decentralization as the two main criteria of intra-party democracy and applying them to the three main theoretically derived categories of intra-party democracy – members’ rights, organizational structure and decision-making – von dem Berge et al. have created a tool to

measure numerical levels of intra-party democracy which ranges from -1 as the lowest level and +1 as the highest level of intra-party democracy. However, in order to get deeper insight into the intra-party distribution of power, we have also conducted twenty semi-structured interviews with prominent party officials, coming from the major political parties in Croatia. The selection was supposed to guarantee that respondents are well informed about power relations in their parties and that they are objective enough to take into consideration different views and initiatives within their parties and willing to talk about them as freely and unrestricted as possible. Apart from party members, several former party members and officials (who left party or were expelled) were also interviewed. The main strategy of the interviews was to try to capture genuine attitudes of respondents on intra-party democracy. When formulating questions, we wanted them to be exempted as much as possible from general and normative view on intra-party democracy, as well as to build enough confidence with respondents to push them to talk freely about intra-party relations.

Analysis of party statutes in Croatia

Building upon the analysis framework developed by von dem Berge et al. (2013), we coded current party statutes of nine most relevant political parties in Croatia. We chose these parties following the criterion of consistent parliamentary representation, and not necessarily relevance in Sartori's sense (coalition and blackmail potential). *Table 1* gives a brief overview of the parties included in this analysis.

Table 1: Parties included in the statutes analysis

Party name	European party	MPs at last election
Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja (HDSSB)	None	2/151
Croatian Democratic Union(HDZ)	EPP	49/151
Croatian People's Party – Liberal Democrats (HNS)	ALDE	9/151
Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSL)	ALDE	2/151
Croatian Peasant Party (HSS)	EPP	2/151
Croatian Pensioners' Party (HSU)	None	2/151
Istrian Democratic Assembly (IDS)	ALDE	3/151
Social Democratic Party of Croatia (SDP)	PES	42/151
Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS)	PES	3/151

Among the parties analyzed, there are two major parties, one on the center-left (SDP) and one on the center-right (HDZ), two centrist parties (the socially liberal HNS and the conservative liberal HSLS), two regionalist parties (the socially liberal IDS and the national conservative HDSSB), one agrarian party (HSS), one single-issue, pensioners' party (HSU), and an ethnic minority party (SDSS). The codebook developed by von dem Berge et al. (2013) provided example coding and subsequent measurement of intra-party democracy levels in Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania. Therefore, an analysis of party statutes in Croatia, the newest post-communist EU member state, represents a logical progression in research of intra-party democracy.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Categories and subcategories	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
IPD total	9	0.28	0.08	0.13	0.40
Members' rights	9	0.30	0.16	0.09	0.59
<i>General members' rights</i>	9	0.28	0.17	0.00	0.50
<i>Minority rights</i>	9	0.32	0.24	0.00	0.67
Organizational structure	9	0.40	0.10	0.25	0.52
<i>Party congress</i>	9	0.56	0.24	0.20	1.00
<i>Conflict-solving agencies</i>	9	0.75	0.12	0.50	1.00
<i>National executive</i>	9	-0.45	0.34	-0.67	0.00
<i>Executive committee</i>	9	0.22	0.34	0.00	0.67
<i>Party president</i>	9	0.46	0.14	0.20	0.60
<i>Relationship between the national level and subnational levels</i>	9	0.86	0.22	0.50	1.00
Decision-making	9	0.13	0.09	-0.03	0.25
<i>Recruitment</i>	9	0.21	0.16	-0.05	0.42
<i>Programmatic issues</i>	9	0.04	0.11	0.00	0.33

In *Table 2*, we can see some basic descriptive statistics for the categories and subcategories used in the coding of party statutes. The total score or level of intra-party democracy is a composite value consisting of three major categories – members' rights, organizational structure, and decision-making, which are composed of several subcategories. Members' rights category consists of general members' rights like freedom of speech and expressing one's own opinion, while minority rights focus on minority quotas and inclusiveness. Organizational

structure category deals with formal party structure and interaction between party organs like congress, party courts, national executive, executive committee and party president, while it also focus on decentralization and distribution of power between national and subnational levels. Decision-making category refers to candidate nomination and selection procedures for both national public and intra-party offices, but also to party manifesto formulation. The table shows that the scores vary substantially among categories, while the variance between parties is relatively large, given the small sample size. For three subcategories (party congress, conflict-solving agencies, and the relationship between the national level and subnational levels), the maximum values in the sample equal the absolute maximum according to the codebook, +1. On the contrary, the analyzed party statutes in Croatia yielded the worst results (in terms of negative values in measurement of intra-party democracy) considering the subcategory of the national executive. This subcategory, which measures the responsibilities of the national executive and its accountability to other party bodies, has a negative average result, indicating that all observed parties score poorly on this particular aspect of the organizational dimension of intra-party democracy.

Table 3: IPD Total Score and Major Categories

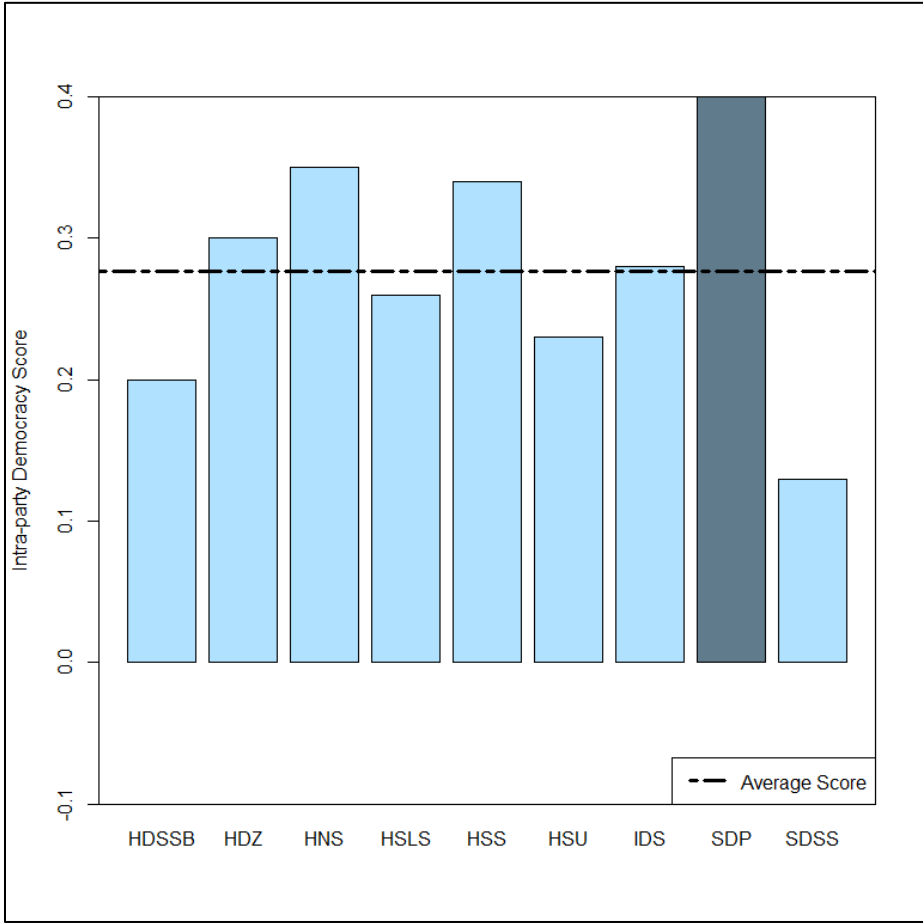
Party	IPD total	Members' rights	Organizational structure	Decision-making
HDSSB	0.20	0.17	0.42	0.0015
HDZ	0.30	0.25	0.52	0.1400
HNS	0.35	0.59	0.30	0.1600
HSLŠ	0.26	0.34	0.25	0.1800
HSS	0.34	0.34	0.44	0.2500
HSU	0.23	0.09	0.46	0.1300
IDS	0.28	0.25	0.48	0.1000
SDP	0.40	0.50	0.49	0.2100
SDSS	0.13	0.17	0.26	-0.0300

Table 3 provides an overview of scores for each observed party, achieved for the categories of members' rights, organizational structure, and decision-making, as well as their total scores, i.e. their total measurement of intra-party democracy levels.¹ The Social Democrats (SDP)

¹ For the explanation on how the total score of intra-party democracy is calculated for each statute, check for von dem Berge et al., 2013: 32-33.

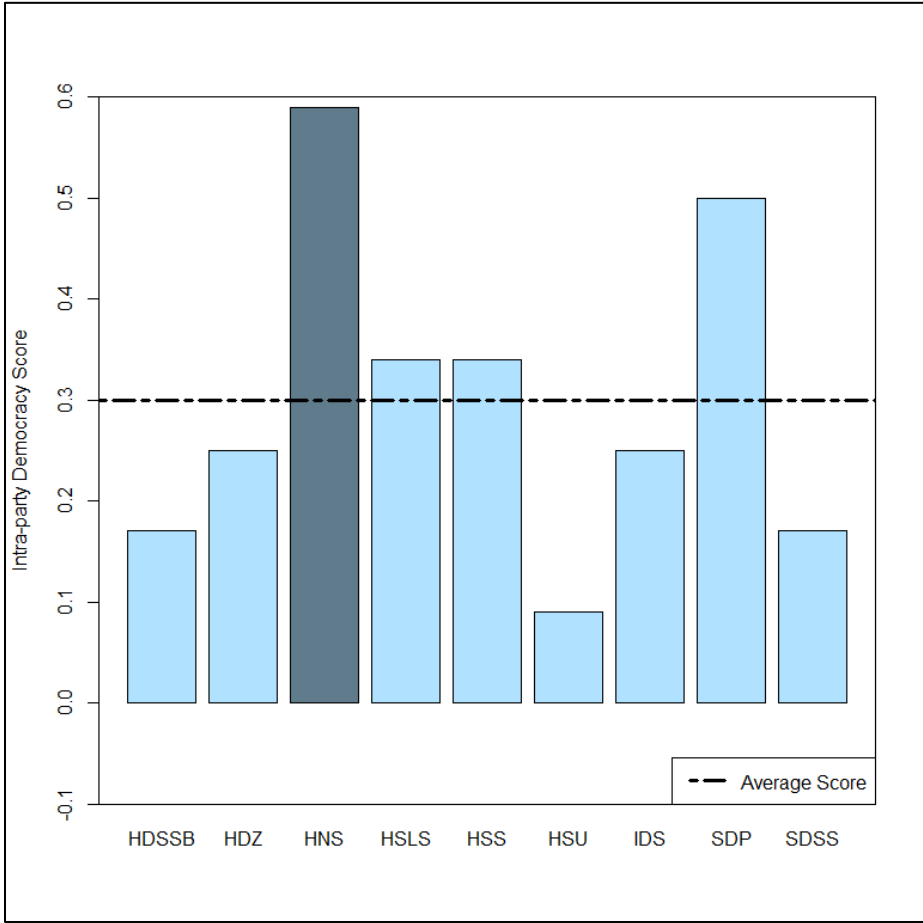
received the highest total intra-party democracy score (IPD total) among all the observed cases. Yet, the result for the SDP (0.4) does not even reach the upper quartile of the measurement scale (0.5-1.0), which is indicative of the overall levels of intra-party democracy in Croatia. For members' rights, the Social Liberals (HNS) achieved the best score (0.59), while SDP follows closely with a result of 0.5. Considering the organizational structure, we can see a much smaller variance among the parties, than for the overall score or the members' rights score. Here, HDZ scored best, with 0.52 points. Finally, the third major category, decision-making, revealed great weaknesses of all observed parties. Namely, all of them achieved extremely low results; with the Serb ethnic minority party SDSS reaching an overall negative score for this category. The Agrarians (HSS) scored best in the measurement of this dimension of intra-party democracy, receiving 0.25 points. *Figure 2* gives a graphical representation of the overall intra-party democracy scores achieved by the observed political parties in Croatia. We can see the relatively strong contrast between the Social Democrats and all the other parties. In addition, we can see that four parties score below average. Again, given the fact that the measurement scale ranges from -1 to +1, we can draw a conclusion that analysis of party statutes shows that none of the relevant political parties in Croatia managed to reach exceptionally high levels of intra-party democracy. If we draw a comparison with similar cases (statutes of political parties in Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania), we can see that, on average, Croatian political parties achieved somewhat lower scores than political parties in all of the three mentioned post-communist EU member states. While the analysis of party statutes in these three cases included means across time (see von dem Berge et al., 2013: 35-39), our analysis just looks at the latest (current) statutes of relevant political parties in Croatia. However, while in Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania, the overall score for intra-party democracy did, measured as a mean across time, reach values of 0.5 or almost 0.6 in some cases, with a general trend towards more intra-party democracy (i.e. higher results), the Croatia case shows a maximum of 0.4. This maximum accounts for the most current statutes, which leads us to an assumption that further analysis which would have included previous versions of party statutes, would have probably yielded even lower results (just like in Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania). With those results for previous versions of party statutes, the means for Croatian parties would again be lower than in the aforementioned countries, and would probably rank below 0.4. Thus, the argument that the formal dimension of intra-party democracy in Croatia, measured through the analysis of party statutes, is rather low, seems a rather plausible one.

Figure 2: IPD Total Score



The next figure provides a representation of results achieved for the first major category, members’ rights. This category consists of two subcategories – general members’ rights and special, minority rights. Minority rights in this context, include specific provisions and regulations that establish minority quotas for party bodies. *Figure 3* shows a huge difference between HNS and SDP and all the other parties, with five out of nine analyzed party statutes resulting in below average scores on this dimension. However, the low overall average for this category (0.3) is still somewhat higher than the average achieved for the total IPD score (see *Figure 2*). In addition, it is interesting to note that the variation in scores for members’ rights has nothing to do with the size of the party, i.e. smaller parties do not necessarily provide more options for members to voice their opinion and to enjoy protection against expulsion than do larger parties with a more massive membership.

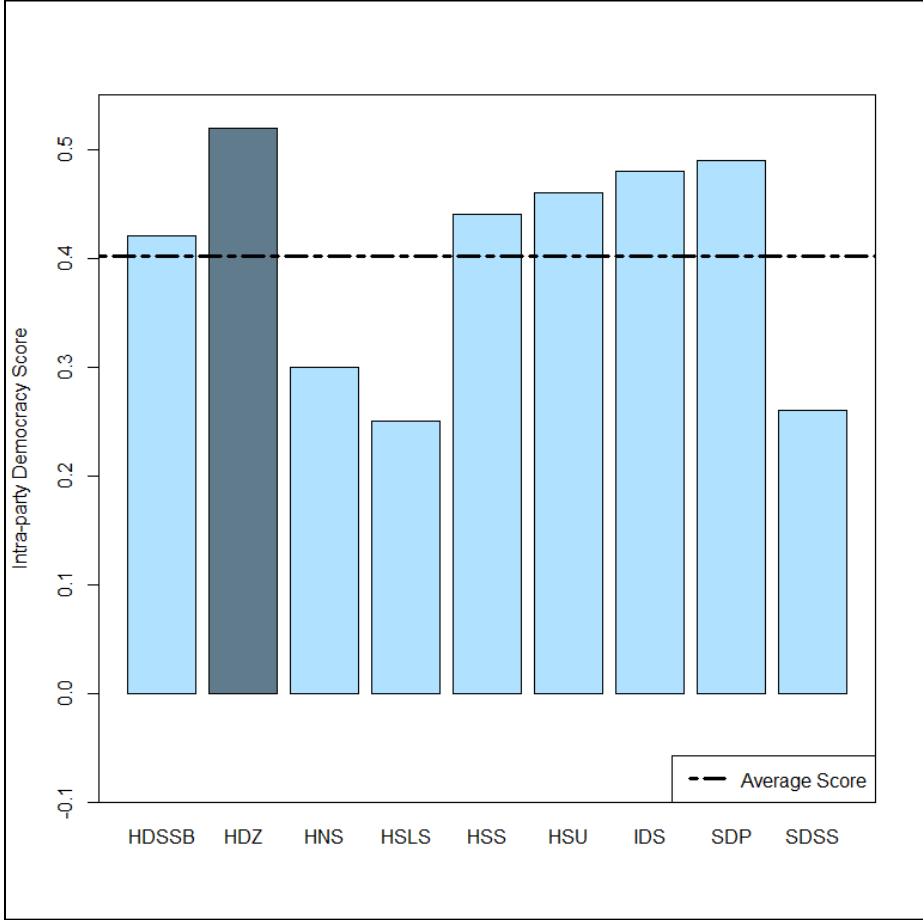
Figure 3: Members' Rights



The graphical representation (*Figure 4*) of the results on the second major category (organizational structure) shows that those parties whose scores surpass the group mean score do not differ much, with the exception of HDZ, a party that achieved the best score for this dimension. SDSS, a party that had a significantly lower overall IPD score than all the other parties, just like in the previous major category, reached a score well below the average. The category of organizational structure has the most components, i.e. subcategories, from all three major categories (party congress, conflict-solving agencies, national executive, executive committee, party president, and the relationship between the national level and subnational levels) which could lead to the assumption that we might see greater variation in party scores on this level of measurement of intra-party democracy. However, a closer look at *Figure 4* shows a much lower variation than in the previous category that covered members' rights. The average for this category (0.4) is higher than for members' rights (0.3), which implies that the analyzed party statutes, at least nominally, provide a much more balanced set of relations and

mutual obligations between party bodies (both horizontally and vertically), than do they enable freedom of expression and action for party members.

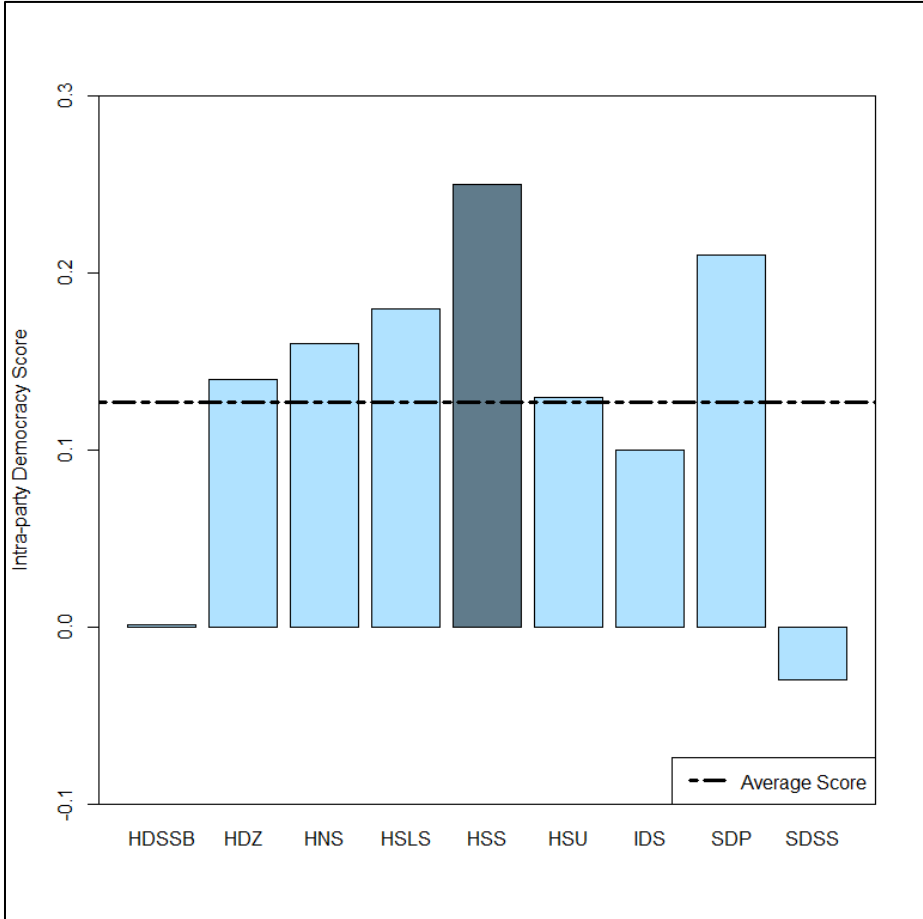
Figure 4: Organizational Structure



Finally, *Figure 5* depicts an assessment of the results in the third major category, decision-making. This category includes recruitment and programmatic issues, i.e. questions of candidate selection and nomination, as well as policy questions, especially considering the rights of party members and party bodies considering the drafting and adoption of manifestos. Here, the Agrarians (HSS) achieved the highest score. Yet, a closer look at this figure reveals that the scores for all parties are very low, so that the average is only slightly over 0.1. The Slavonian regionalist party (HDSSB) had a score of 0.0, showing that its party statute makes the internal decision-making process considering both candidate selection and policy development very exclusive and concentrated in the hands of the party leadership. The Serb ethnic minority party (SDSS) even reached a negative score on this dimension. Overall, this

party consistently had the lowest results on two out of three major categories and on most subcategories. The Social Democrats, who had the highest overall IPD score, achieved a high score on this dimension in comparison to otherwise noticeably low results of other observed cases.

Figure 5: Decision-making



The analysis of statutes of nine relevant political parties has revealed that the nominal levels of intra-party democracy in Croatia are moderate to low. Statutory regulations considering members’ rights and decision-making in key areas of intra-party life, such as procedures of candidate selection and the adoption of manifestos, create a somewhat closed framework of action, with possibilities for strong power concentration. The analysis of results for the category of the organizational structure showed comparably higher scores than for the other major categories, yet the overall picture remains the same. Although the Social Democrats achieved the best overall score in intra-party democracy levels and have consistently reached relatively good (well above average) results, they do not stand out that much, given the fact that for each

major category, a different party had the best score – HNS in members' rights, HDZ in the organizational structure, and HSS in decision-making. Thus, we can draw a conclusion that there are clear differences between the observed parties in their levels of nominal (statutory) intra-party democracy. Nevertheless, these differences are not that strong, and all parties in the sample in fact enjoy rather low levels of intra-party democracy, both on the dimension of the respective categories, as well as considering the overall result (IPD total score).

Interviews with party officials

In order to compare the results of the level of intra-party democracy in Croatian political parties, obtained by the analysis of formal statutory rules, with a more in-depth insight in actual party practice, we conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with high party officials (in some cases also former party leaders), almost all of them members of the Croatian Parliament. The aim of these interviews was to see how high party officials perceived intra-party democracy in their own parties, what are their normative stances toward intra-party democracy, what structural elements and processes within the party they consider crucial for improvements of the level of intra-party democracy and what are the main obstacles to such improvements. The number of respondents roughly mirrored parliamentary party strength: 6 (SDP), 4 (HDZ), 3 (HNS), 2 (HDSSB) and 5 from four smaller parties and independent MPs.

Generally speaking, many respondents pointed to a divergent way actual party practice functions compared to formal statutory rules (for a different approach to formal and informal aspects of intra-party life, see Moon and Bratberg, 2010). While only a few of respondents pointed to the existence of an open breaking of formally established rules in certain party procedures, the majority of respondents actually referred to the fact that informal practice and internal party relations do not back formal rules, which makes them not achieve the purposes for which they were introduced. So, despite formal rights that party members enjoy, when it comes to discussing the party program or expressing their views in the procedures of leadership or candidate selection, they rarely use them, they are rather passive observers and prone to let the leadership make all the decisions. For instance, although SDP comparatively shows a remarkable level of general members' rights, several Social Democratic officials pointed to the fact that members rarely start any initiative or offer suggestions to local or national party leaderships.

This is especially problematic when it comes to the middle or even higher party echelons, members of party assemblies or even main executive bodies like central committees and party presidencies. Although these bodies are created to discuss party policy and pass important party decisions, very often members of these bodies adopt proposals, usually coming from the party president, without much discussion. There is a general impression that even highly positioned members leave the most important decisions to party presidents. This pattern also repeats itself at lower party levels, even to a greater extent, which pushed some of the respondents to say that intra-party democracy in local party organizations looks worse than at the level of the party in the central office (on vertical intra-party relations, see van Houten, 2009).

Since our analysis of party statutes showed the lowest score of the intra-party democracy level for national party executives, it seems that the structural dominance of the narrow leadership over other party bodies has both formal and informal sources. While the power of the collective executive bodies already prevails formally, the process is additionally supported by the informal practice that other, broader bodies and assemblies, which formally should have control over the main party decisions, turns into bodies almost fully subordinated to the party leadership. Qualitative interview analysis has shown that formal relationship of the national executives and party presidents more hides than reveals. While national executives are really empowered by formal statutes, their informal subordination to the narrow leadership and very often party presidents themselves actually transmits this power to several most prominent party leaders or the president himself or herself. Since formal analysis showed much better results with regard to intra-party democracy for executive committees and particularly party presidents (*Table 2*), the only conclusion we can draw from this is that formal analysis is not able to detect real informal power concentrated in the hands of a narrow party leadership. Thus, while formal rules make central committees powerful in relation to party assemblies, local party organizations and party membership, narrow executive bodies and the party president, by employing informal dominance, make use of such formal constellations.

Interviews with high party officials also revealed the main causes of such dominance. A substantial number of respondents pointed to a specific element that gives the party leadership such vast informal power. The key lies in the candidate selection process. Candidate selection procedures in Croatian parties are formally, and even more so informally, very centralized (on formal and informal rules regarding candidate selection, see also Reiser, 2014). In principle, party presidents or presidencies propose, while central committees or national executives adopt party lists for national elections. There is no party that relies on any broader or more inclusive selectorate in its process of candidate selection. Although in their statutes, most parties name

local or regional party organizations as preliminary proposers of candidate lists, none of the parties truly bind party leadership to follow those suggestions. Moreover, the party leadership is free to choose candidates who were not preliminary proposed on lower party levels. Although Croatian parliamentary elections follow an electoral system with ten 14-member electoral districts, not a single party allows candidates to be selected at the electoral district level. Instead, all of them are selected at the central (national) level. These rules actually make party presidents and their narrow executive bodies the main “gatekeepers”, completely at liberty in proposing all candidates for national elections. On the contrary, even in parties where a final say about such a proposal lays in the hand of the central committee, in none of the parties the formal procedures assure a real possibility of any influence of the national executive over final look of the lists. This is because national executives pass their final decisions in a bloc vote, supporting or opposing the whole list, without possibilities to cast preferential votes for each candidate and change the list order. Since the candidate selection procedures happen usually one to two months prior to national elections, to completely reject a party list proposed by the party president would be a very risky game in times when the party is already fully engaged with the electoral campaign. That is why up to now there has not been a single case that a national executive of any party rejected a single party list proposed by the party leadership.

Beside this rational choice trap aiming to sociotropic calculations of members of the main selection body, members of national executives also face their personal egocentric calculations. In almost all the parties, there is a great personal overlap between the national executives and the parliamentary party group. Even in parties where there is no *ex-officio* membership of MPs in the national executive, the majority of its members are MPs or likely MP candidates. In order to regain their seats or just because they are included in the party list, members of the national executives are very cooperative and silent when they decide on list proposals by the party leadership. The party leadership, on the contrary, only has to bear in mind that its proposal should meet personal interests of the majority of the national executive. In this way, the formal power of the main selectorate in the candidate selection procedure becomes actually a real power in the hands of the party leadership.

Many of our respondents pointed to the power of the party leadership (which, in fact, often means only the party president) in the candidate selection process, as the main cause of their overall, direct or indirect, dominance over other dimensions of party life, over local and functional organizations, parliamentary faction, membership, etc. While a formal analysis of party statutes measured intra-party power on separate dimensions, it appeared to be incapable to detect the overflow of real power of a party body from one dimension to other dimensions

of intra-party life. Since we consider intra-party democracy to be a state of absence of a structural dominance of a party body over other party levels, faces or bodies, it is clear that an analysis of formal party rules can not suffice to provide a comprehensive analysis of intra-party democracy conceived in terms of intra-party power relationships.

Another important remark of our respondents refers to the capabilities and willingness of the broad membership to be actively included in decision-making processes within the party. Despite the fact that each party statute lists rights and obligations of party members, in-depth insight reveals that high party officials are rather suspicious with regard to wider inclusion of the party membership into decision-making processes. One can receive an impression that they are not *a priori* against such an inclusiveness, but that their experience objectively sets some natural limitations to such a moves. Firstly, some of our respondents expressed their disappointment with the level of participation of ordinary party members in the decision-making processes or organized discussions within the party. Our respondents claimed that members were mostly passive and that it was hard to mobilize them. Secondly, even when members participated in such processes, they showed a rather low level of cognitive inclusion, they lacked correct information and approached party issues very superficially.

In addition, several party officials pointed at authoritarian mentality as the main reason for this overall members' passivity. They argued that party members were accustomed to doing things in accordance with the principle "business as usual" and they thought that it should suffice only to have a good relationship with the party leader. Members did not want to participate in intra-party processes because they considered personal relations to be much more important than participation. They expected of a strong leader to get in charge and they preferred to leave all decision-making to him or her. As one party official accentuated: "The President is president, the president is God, and the president can do anything." Such findings support the validity of the cultural approach in party research, which emphasizes historical, *longue durée* structures that affect values and identities that shape both voters and party members.

Some of the respondents were very critical towards introduction of the one-member-one-vote system for the election of the party president and party leaders at lower organizational levels, despite the fact that they themselves had wholeheartedly supported such an innovation in their parties. One could deduce that party officials favored meritocratic over democratic principles in intra-party decision-making. Some of them were completely aware of the fact that the introduction of the one-member-one-vote system in leadership selection in their parties produced unintended consequences of more power concentration in the hands of party

presidents and local party leaderships. The fact that the party president now enjoys a broader legitimacy base than any other party official, as well as the fact that party presidents are not anymore dependent on the support from middle-party echelons, make party presidents even more powerful than they were before. This is especially important in the case of the two main parties, which introduced one-member-one-vote elections of their party presidents: first SDP in 2008 and then HDZ in 2012. This shows that a higher level of formal inclusiveness, positively valued by the analysis of party statutes, can indeed further concentrate real power in the hands of the party president and, viewed from the definition of intra-party democracy that emphasizes the absence of structural dominance of a party body, yield opposite results.

Conclusion

In this paper, we examined intra-party democracy in Croatia, a relatively new European democracy, by assessing formal rules through quantitative content analysis of party statutes, as well as informal rules and actual practices, observed through a qualitative analysis of interviews with party officials. We conducted our analysis following an understanding of intra-party democracy as balanced distribution of power between different party bodies, party faces, and party levels. Our starting assumption was that Croatian political parties would fare rather well considering the formal aspect of intra-party democracy (rules codified in party statutes), yet would paint a different picture when formal rules were juxtaposed with informal practices revealed through semi-structured interviews with party officials. The first phase of our analysis, which looked into formal rules written down in party statutes, actually yielded even lower results than expected. When compared to political parties in similar political cases (post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe), such as Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania, Croatian political parties scored lower on all observed levels – members’ rights, organizational structure, and decision-making. Yet, the second phase of our analysis, which built upon interviews with party officials, showed that informal rules and practices were, in fact, much more important for intra-party life. Thus, the second part of the analysis not only confirmed low levels of intra-party democracy already assessed on the formal level, but indicated at a great discrepancy between formal and informal rules, and finally pointed to the fact that the informal aspect was actually more important. In this way, our examination of the Croatian case serves as a good example of the “network party” model (Heidar and Saglie, 2003), at least in some of

its aspects, in which formal rules lose importance in favor of personal connections and informal arrangements. Furthermore, such personal connections of Croatian party officials and local party leaders with the national party leadership, and especially the party president, were supported by an authoritarian mentality, inherited from pre-democratic period. Thus, Croatian political parties showed an inability to shed away its centralized, leader-oriented nature and perpetuated patterns of a subject political culture. We can conclude that formal, statutory rules applied in Croatian political parties already established a framework for power concentration in the hands of the party leadership and/or the party president, while informal rules, and actual practices, especially in the case of candidate selection for national elections, further entrenched such unbalanced power relations and thus undermined substantial intra-party democracy.

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