Intra-Party Democracy Impact on Women’s Representation in Politics
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Abstract
In societies there are almost as much women as men, but in top-politics there are few women compared to men. As political parties are crucial actors in modern democracies and they have impact on who gets elected to public office. This paper examines the connection between intra-party democracy and women’s representation in top politics. On one hand electoral behaviour affects women getting into politics, but it is also influenced by intra-party democracy (IPD) and internal processes. Internally made decisions clearly affect the representation and participation ability of minorities (including women) in politics. This paper suggests to focus more on political parties internal democracy and on different important processes. Also there is a need for formal rules or laws which would provide democratic principles (for parties life). IPD evaluation and requirements for IPD which would for example be provided in the party statute or party law, would definitely promote women representation in politics. Paper’s main goal is to show that IPD has impact for women’s representation and to give examples also from Estonian government-coalition parties internal processes.


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Introduction

Parties are crucial actors in modern representative democracies and in democratic decision-making process (Kittilson, Scarrow 2003). They fulfil many functions and govern through electoral support, but to maintain internal legitimacy parties should include all members in decision making. There are authors (example Bryce 1921: 119; Schattschneider 1942: 1; Scarrow 2002; Allern & Pedersen 2007) who are pointing out parties role in representative democracy and authors who think that parties are just groups led by small elite (ex: Crouch 2009). Political parties are the most important institutions for democracyThey are representing electorate, connecting political leaders with voters and help to formulate political alternatives (Johnston 2005). Parties are also responsible for political groups to take part of elections for decision-making bodies and to find members for public office (Janda 2005). Through political parties it is possible to run for public office and their role in governing and elections is huge.
If we want to follow democratic principles (like equal opportunities) we must focus more on parties internal affairs. Evaluating parties internal processes helps to understand their actual affairs and internal democracy. Even if internally not democratic parties are not actual threat for democracy (Kittilson & Scarrow 2003). Focusing on intra-party democracy and analysing it also shows the connections how to get to public office and the reasons why women’s representation is low. Evaluating IPD is important to find most important processes for parties. Two important processes which should have the biggest influence on women reaching to public office are candidate selection process and leader selection process. Comparative empirical material is based on (18) interviews with two Estonian coalition parties, Pro Patria and Res Publica Union (further as Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit or IRL) and the Estonian Reform Party (further as Reformierakond or RE) members.

Focusing on interviews which have been done with members of different level can help describe real life and real intra-party democracy level inside the party. Formal rules don’t usually show parties internal life, but IPD can be seen through principles and norms which are accepted inside party processes and bodies (ex Zeuner 2003).

1. Intra-party democracy

There is no specific definition for “intra-party democracy“(Cross, Katz 2013). Mimpen (2007) says that even if there is no exact definition, it can be described through two criteria: 1) there has to be free, fair and regular elections, 2) all members or groups can equally participate and represent their interests. Intra-party democracy is more like a scale and through that we can evaluate how democratically the party is organized. Inside democratic party power should be distributed among different levels and decision-making should take into account individual members as also different level organ opinions (Cular 2004).

Main question is when and where political party members can share their opinions and take part of making important decisions. Von dem Berge et al (2013) are citing to different authors (ex Cular 2004, Goati 2005, Vueletic 2005, Mimpen 2007, Scarrow 2005) that regular members opportunities and rights should be focused when analysing IPD. Parties organizational structure and state legislation influence internal democracy. Different states could have different functions for parties and party organisation can be different too. Governmental institutions have
power to decide over parties regulations and to declare in national legislation (like in party law) their functions, restrictions etc (Janda 2005).

It is common that political parties have hierarchical structure and system which helps achieve their main goals. Based on Katz (2002) party structure can be divided as public office, central office and members. Non-formal structure includes also the elite. Public office members can be, but do not always have to be part of the elite. Depending of political party type, state law etc. the elite can be board members, some non-public sponsors or someone else. Central office is made up of central management staff, like the secretary general, and employees of regional and branch offices, like development managers, whose tasks include developing the organisation (ex. creating new branch offices), maintaining the network (ex. supporting existing branches) and also manage intra-party dissemination of information and communication channels. The power of party’s central office is growing and through that its influence in broader political processes because technical management and communication channels management are the basis for power (Katz 2002). Scarrow (2005) points out that for adequate intra-party democracy evaluation we should focus on key-dimensions. One important aspect is knowing how important decisions are made. Even if different authors have different opinions what are most important processes for IPD evaluation here is focused on candidate selection and leaders selection. Important is to take into account also members rights, organizational structure, policy making process etc. and formal rules and non-formal action.
All processes should be evaluated through key-indicators (Scarrow 2005):

**Inclusiveness**- how wide is decision-makers circle. Who makes decisions- one leader, small group or members can be part of it too.

**Centralization**- shows where decisions are done and how centralized party daily life is. There are parties where national board decides everything and local branches do not have any power to make any decisions. In other parties, those who are de-centralized, nationwide executive body comes together less frequently and they are focusing more on communication and coordination than decision-making. Even if de-centralization is better for IPD, leaders need some centralization to execute power (Medema & Mercuro 1997).

**Institutionalization**- internal decision-making procedures and party organizational structure formalization (Scarrow 2005).

Also there are some differences between different party-types (ex. left-wing parties are more willing to create formal rules than right-wing parties), but this article is not opening that topic.
1.1. Candidate selection process
Candidate selection is one of the most important process for political parties. On that depends their electoral success and public profile during elections. That is the reason why it is important to analyse IPD. Putting up the list for elections is assumption to take part of elections and parties take it seriously. Those, who want more inclusive candidate selection process, usually use direct elections or candidates will be listed by assembly or some other organ. It is important to analyse who is included to decide candidate list and how formal the process is. Usually national regulations do not regulate candidate selection process, but it is provided either in party internal rules or it is more commonly unregulated. Duverger (1954: 354) defines candidate selection process to be invisible for wider public, internal process for party and only those, who are part of the elite, can be part of it.

Different candidate selection process methods (Hazan & Rahat 2010):
- simple method
- assorted method
- multistage method
- weighted method

Also there are different internal voting systems (Hazan & Rahat 2010):
- Majoritarian
- Semi-majoritarian
- Semi-proportional
- Proportional

In candidate selection process it’s important how to become a candidate and also the procedure, selectorate, centralization and if there is an election or the candidates are predetermined. Level or rate of intra-party democracy in candidate selection process also depends on: regulations or criteria who can become candidate; if he/she can name him/herself as candidate for candidate selection; what criteria is there for selectorate; how formally the process is regulated etc.

Setting the candidature for the additional criteria are fairly common. Usual restrictions are for age, minimum period to be a party member, money deposit, paid membership fee, other members recommendation etc. Other important aspect, as said before, is selectorate- who selects them and how it is done.

Different possibilities to select (Hazan & Rahat 2010):
- highly inclusive- everyone, even non-members can take part of selection
- strongly inclusive- party members are selectorate
- moderately inclusive- party uses delegates
- strongly exclusive – party elite
5. *highly exclusive-party leader selects or nominates*
If there is several selectorates then main question is who has right to make final confirmation. Hazan & Rahat (2010) raised up criterias for selectorate. The more centralized candidate selection process is, the smaller is party members role.
More common solution instead of voting is that a smaller group or institutional body determines candidates as a result of the discussion. Even if it is exclusive, sometimes it can be good, because it gives opportunity to balance lists.

1.2. *Leaders selection process*
Similar to candidate selection process is leader selection. Important is to analyse selectorate, criterias to become candidate etc. Leader selection is important, because party leaders become more popular and visible, they will have more power and through that they can become more easily members of public office or decide who can be there.

1.3. *Formal rules*
Important processes are regulated by national legislation or party statute. National legislation can expand internal democracy scope, but it can limit it too. For citizens to understand parties, we need party law. On the other hand strict laws or rules are not good either, because those could unduly interfere with parties internal life. We have to remember that parties are independent organizations and balanced law is the best. For democracy it is better if national legislation parties would establish their internal procedures together (in party statute etc). Formality provides internal democracy. Usually party formal rules are enact in party’s statute. Mimpen (2007) brings up that national legislation influences party’s internal life much. Problem is that even if by formal rules there is support for minorities (including women), reality is different. Important processes are often unknown for members or formal rules are different than reality.

2. *Empirical review*
Question why there are so few women in public office is important. For example in Estonian public office there is just one female minister of 13 government members. In Parliament there are 22 women of 101 members¹. We will focus further why the situation is like that.

¹ Estonian government changed in March 2014. Here are last government who was governing 3 years, there were two-party coalition (RE and IRL). Reason why government changed was that formal prime minister (Andrus Ansip) who was prime minister last 9 years voluntarily resigned.
Estonia’s case

Estonia is a parliamentary republic with 1.3 million inhabitants. Legislative body is a 101 member parliament called Riigikogu\(^2\) where delegates serve a 4-year term. Current parliament consists of 4 parties and some independent delegates. Government\(^3\) is the executive power, which is led by prime minister and consists of ca 14 ministers. Government coalition parties are Reformierakond (RE) and Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit (IRL). Reformierakond is (ultra-)liberal right-wing party who’s popularity has been quite high for many years already. They have put together many governments and won many elections and for the last 9-years prime minister of Estonia (Andrus Ansip) has been from that party. IRL is conservative right-wing party, which was formed in 2006 when two parties, Res Publica and IsamaaLiit joined together. Both of those parties had been really successful before, but to survive they had to unite.

There are many aspects what can show democracy, but formal aspects (written in party statute) are not enough. Interviewing different level members helps to understand how processes are really happening. Focus is on candidate selection and leaders selection processes. Candidate selection defines election results and who will be in public office. That is the reason why parties want to share in this process as little power as possible. Leaders selection is important too, because it influences party’s reputation, popularity and public policy direction.

Interviews were done with:

1) party leaders (national board members, party assembly members, Estonian Parliament members) as they should be the party elite (3 from IRL and 4 from RE);
2) secretary general as the party central office representative, who is a member of the board as well;
3) different level members (mid-level activists who are members of local branch board and through that are party national assembly members (2 from IRL and RE)) and just members who do not have any position (2 from RL and RE);
4) those who have been party leaders (national board members and part of the elite), but now are regular members without any position (1 from both party).

Interviewed have indicated with letter and number: elite as IRLE (IRLE1; IRLE2; IRLE3) or REE (REE1; REE2; REE3; REE4); general secretary (IRLK or REK); activists as IRLA or

\(^2\)www.riigikogu.ee  
\(^3\)www.valitsus.ee
REA1, REA2; regular members as REL1, REL2 or IRL1; IRLL2 and formal elite as IRLX or REX.

2.1. Candidate selection process

Parties in Estonia can take part of three elections: local government elections, European Parliament elections and Estonian Parliament elections. There are different procedures and practices for candidate selection. This article focuses on Estonian Parliament elections, because it influences public office results the most.

Reformierakond:

Party statute declares that electoral list will be confirmed by general meeting where all party members can participate. RE is using internal elections to make electoral list (said the interviewees). All party members have the opportunity to present themselves as candidates for the candidate selection (REE2, REK, REL1), but you have to have a minimum number of supporters (REK), to become candidate or selectorate you have to have paid the membership fee. Reputation and internal popularity helps much.

There are two-steps- first district and then nation-wide candidate selection. At first for district selection all district party members are selectorate. If there are more people than places in the list there will be internal election. Ones with most votes will be district candidates. Next step is sharing places in nation-wide list (compensational-mandates for places 2-125, because 1 place is for party leader) and district list place numbers. Place numbers are given by party election-committee which is put together by board and general secretary is leading it. Election-committee takes into account possible candidate popularity and profile. Finally general assembly confirms final list. Interviewees knew the process well and were able to describe it. Their opinion for using internal elections were positive. On the other hand there were some criticism too. REA1 said that names in district candidates list is discussed through, but it is not so visible how and where national list candidates are coming. It is not so formally regulated and central office or somebody else is deciding those candidates. Candidate selection process is not so formalised in Reformierakond and party statute is not regulating those procedures or time frame.

The good thing is that party members have the opportunity to stand as candidate, select candidates and take part of general assembly. It shows inclusiveness. On the other hand the leaders, the elite and the central office have the real power, because electoral committee decides places in the list, timeline and leaders in the list. It shows some centralization. So it is not hard
to become candidate, but it is hard to be selected to public office. To become top of the list or in good place in nation-wide list person should have good connections with central office, high popularity inside party or be part of the elite. Non-formal process and unregulated procedures only deepen it and make it harder for minorities (like women) to run for public office.

Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit (IRL)
Their process is different than in Reformierakond. IRL statute ratifies that nation-wide candidate list and places on it will be decided by election committee (formed by governing body) who will send it for confirmation to assembly. Formally statute declares how candidate selection process has to be organized and says about internal election that members and local branches have the possibility to share their opinion about candidates and their places, but it can be just a formality. Assembly has power to determine that procedure and involving members could be just an illusion. Assembly confirms candidate lists and regulation for candidate selection and for standing. Regular members do not have much opportunity to be part of candidate selection process, mostly it is the governing body (and election committee) „thing“. Local branch has just a bit better possibility to discuss district candidates. Several interviewed members do not know candidate selection process and procedure and are critical.

IRLL1: “Honestly, I do not know. I get much information on my e-mail account, but usually candidates names are already known long before. I do not have any connection with it and do not know anything about earlier discussions“.

There is not any other requirement than members application and paid membership fee. Important is the possible candidate’s potential and earlier election results and popularity, so election committee can change list. Candidate selection process is centralized and exclusive, the elite has the power. IRLX says that there is not any discussion and it is not important for the elite. Principles and candidate selection is done in a small group and it is given to other party members as a fact.
Candidate selection process in both parties is not so formal. Main work is done by election committee who has great power over that process. Main power stays with the board/elite, because the committee is put together by the elite/board. Members can suggest or nominate some candidates, but election committee can change the list. Reformierakond involves members more. Most important aspect is that the process is quite unregulated and statute does not declare anything about it. IRLX says well that formally declared rules (example in party statute) is just one side and because all the parties desire power they are not ready to include members in that important process. In real life it is shown that people in leading position try to create their own team and get support for that team.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate selection</th>
<th>Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit (IRL)</th>
<th>Reformierakond (RE)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal</strong></td>
<td>Nominating. Appointment. Candidate’s membership fee payment, being party member; statute declares principles how candidate lists are formed for parliament elections. Candidate list rankings for parliament elections is done by central office and general assembly confirms it.</td>
<td>Upon setting your candidacy you must have paid your membership fee and be member of the party. More than 10 supporters. Statute declares parliament candidacy – general assembly confirms the list.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How it is done</strong></td>
<td>Cannot participate in forming the elite. Discussed in regional offices. Members can nominate themselves but election committee can change it. Minimal chance for members to participate.</td>
<td>Internal elections for parliament. All members can nominate themselves. Required to be party member and that the membership fee is paid. At least 10 supporters. Local branch candidates elected internally by local members. Nationwide list is ranked by members and confirmed at general assembly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Members</strong></td>
<td>Can present their opinion. Members don’t know the process and think the ranking and results are predetermined. Big emphasis on reputation. Members role has been bigger earlier. Members don’t have role- everything is corporate, small groups have big influence.</td>
<td>Know internal election process; reputation is important according to the elite. Thought of as very democratic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connection with theory</strong></td>
<td>Important for parties – affects election results, who get to public office; candidates loyalty. State regulations mostly missing and because of that process participants involvement show IPD. For analysis of the process we need understand how to set up candidacy, selectorate, centralisation and voting vs appointing. Party’s inner process, only for a small circle. Centrally controlled, the candidate stay loyal to party in the parliament. Additional criteria are common.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>Members are not included, participation indirect. Centralized, elite-centric. Internally non-democratic. Process formalized, but some body’s have power to decide. Non-formal rules are important. Process is unclear (elite decides).</td>
<td>Less formalised and institutionalized. Statute declares less (process and rules are unwritten). Formally set up candidacy exclusive, electing inclusive. However it’s easy to change procedures and rules. Some processes influenced by elite.</td>
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</table>
2.2. Leaders selection

Party leaders are the “face” of the party, they are leading party’s action and often they are decision-makers. Usually they are also in leading positions (like prime ministers etc).

Reformierakond

There are different methods and procedures how leader-positions are filled. Leader positions in Reformierakond are party leader (chairman), vice-chairmen, boardmembers (11-15), assembly chairmen, secretary general, local branches board members positions. Now the main focus is on chairman (leader) and board members election.

Leader and board members are selected in party assembly, where every member has one vote (REE1). Interviewees did not know leaders selection process as well as they knew candidate selection process. The elite thinks that those positions are open for everybody who has right values and can work hard, but all most all other interviewees (activists, regular members) shared that opinion.

REA1: „I do not know if it could be possible to be selected to the board even if I have the will to nominate myself. I do not know how fair elections are /.../ But invitations are coming that it is possible to nominate candidates“.

REL1 says that he does not know anything about that leaders selection process. He guesses that the selection is probably done in general assembly, but he has not been there. Also he thinks that leaders positions are non-accessible, because inner-circle is deciding everything.

Party statute is not declaring much about leaders selection process- it seems to be poorly formalized, there is no concrete time frame etc. Formally party members are included- they can take part of general assembly or give their vote before (e-election), also they can put themselves up (as candidates for leaders selection).

Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit

Party general assembly selects party leader (chairman), vice-chairmen (3), governing body members (20, but there could be 24-39 members). The statute declares criteria for leader, vice-chairmen and governing-body members candidacy. Candidates list will be closed 14 days before general assembly. Every member has different amount of votes. Members role is important and at least formally it is bigger than in candidate selection process.
IRLX has different opinion: „Leader comes from inner-circle. If there are different smaller groups inside the party, then leader is formed by some small group. Usually in Estonia it is known well before who becomes leader“.

Members think that it is normal to have inner campaigning. IRLE2: „Of course there are inner-campaigns when everyone who is running tries to bring their supporters to general assembly. He/she is organizing different events, makes support-letters, organizes even busses to bring supporters to meeting or buys lunches“.

The elite thinks positions are open for everyone who wants to run, but other members have different opinions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaders selection</th>
<th>Reformierakond (RE)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal</strong></td>
<td>General assembly chooses leader and board members (for 2 years).</td>
<td>General assembly chooses leader (for 2 years). Extra criteria for candidacy. Fixed timeframe and formal rules (ratified in statute).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How</strong></td>
<td>Leaders selection process less known than candidate selection process. Every party member has right to set up his candidacy. Extra criteria (membership, fee, support signatures) internal elections.</td>
<td>Board members are elected in general assembly (direct voting system). Every member has right to set up his candidacy. Some extra criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Members</strong></td>
<td>More open positions (different opinions), high value base. Persons activity is important to become candidate (or board member). Threat by inner-groups.</td>
<td>Members have different opinions (open positions; positions under elite etc). Internal campaigning. Popularity is important (to become candidate). Members do not know process procedures, elite knows it well. Back-office power.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Connection with theory</strong></td>
<td>Who selects, what criteria for candidacy and selectorate. Criteria makes process more exclusive. Public office position gives important role and support inside the party.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>Becoming candidate is exclusive, elections opened, member’s knowledge low and they are a bit sceptical. No timeframe and formal rules. Position accessibility versus person’s activity.</td>
<td>Becoming candidate is exclusive, elections opened. Process formalized even elite has some power over those. Member’s belief on positions accessibility-availability is low. “Back-office” influences internal openness and trust.</td>
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Chart 3. Leaders selection. Source: Author

Both parties leader selection process is similar. Everyone has opportunity to run as candidate, he/she need only 10 or 50 supporters (running for board member or leader). Selection process is exclusive. Both parties elite is satisfied with that process and thinks it is „open“, but regular members do not think so positively. Especially in IRL there are some problems- members think that process is non-visible and unclear.
1.3. Conclusions

“Estonian politics is as it is. It seems that there is attitude that you only have to follow written rules and principles which are unwritten, do not exist. Also it is shown by party back-offices” (IRLLI).

Unfortunately it shows that party internal life is totally different than formal rules are describing. Party members and the elite have different understanding and regular members are passive, they do not think they can change anything or really participate.

Candidate selection process which is most important, is multi-dimensional and it is hard to find intra-party democracy level on it. In Reformierakond it is more inclusive, because they are using internal elections where all party members can vote. On the other side election committee has the highest power, because they can change candidates list and they are deciding candidates place on that list. Because of Estonian electoral system candidates place on electoral list is most influential because that decides if you are going to public office or not. In IRL there are not any internal elections for nation-wide election list. Governing body puts together election committee who decides the ones who are (and in what position) in nation-wide election list.

Both parties need more formal rules for that process. In RE party election committee and in IRL party assembly has the right to make and change candidate selection process rules, criteria and time frame.

Leaders selection process is exclusive, because there are some criteria (concrete number of supporters, membership fee payment etc.). Leaders selection is inclusive as both parties members has right and possibility to choose their party leaders. Members think process is important, but main problem is that members do not believe that positions are accessible for anybody. The elite has a different view. Especially in IRL there is belief that smaller groups (or back-office) decide the candidates and leaders before and election in general assembly is just a facade.

Both elections in both parties are organized centrally and main power stays for the elite and/or central office.

There are many aspects which can show democracy inside some processes, like candidate selection process, but actually intra-party democracy might be just informal, because based on interviews with members, they don’t feel like being part of the party or included into internal processes. Party elites express different viewpoints. They are sure that members have the opportunity to be active by themselves and they can participate wherever they want. IRL and RE are different as the rationale of RE is to solve all internal issues and discussions inside the
party, but IRL practices the opposite. They think that raising internal discussions to public sphere shows that they are internally democratic. Intra-party democracy is possible when party leaders want to include members to internal processes. This study showed that members and elite have different understanding about taking part in internal processes.
Summary

Political parties are crucial actors in representative democracy. They influence the election results very much and who will be in public office.

This article main goal was to show that analysing intra-party democracy through important processes and focusing not just on formal regulations, but also on non-formal aspects (interviews with different members) gives an understanding of what is really happening inside parties. It helps to understand why there are so few women in public office. Empirical research based on two Estonian government coalition parties, Reformierakond and Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit. To understand their internal life, including important processes, several interviews with different position members were held. IPD evaluation and requirements for IPD which would for example be provided in the party statute or party law, would definitely promote women representation in politics. In evaluating IPD it is important to focus on centrally important processes for parties like candidate selection process, leader’s selection, policy formulation, election platform formulation, and important intra-party indicators inclusion, institutionalization, centralization, participation etc.

Parties like to show themselves as inclusive and open, but real life is often different. Members are not included for decision-making or they have possibility to participate, but final decisions are made by some other groups or individuals (like board-members). The central office is the main influence and arranger of important processes. The elite ensures the power through centralization. Main process procedures are often not well-known for members, because some inner institutions can change the rules (or even the results). Involving regular members to important processes helps party to become more democratic (Cross, Katz 2013).

Estonia’s case shows that women don’t get elected to public office because the power inside parties is concentrated to a small circle of people. By really opening the processes and formulating inner rules will a party become democratic and through that give the minorities a possibility to run for public office. Both of the viewed parties, IRL and RE, are not firmly formalized and they don’t have to do that because it’s not required by law to have such internal rules which would make internal processes more open and members more aware of them.

Higher intra-party democracy in important processes would make it possible for not just the elite but also the regular members to participate in those processes not just as voters but as
candidates and through that have to the possibility to run for public office. But the members and the public have to demand more openness in intra-party processes, because without pressure and understanding of the importance of intra-party democracy, the parties will not feel the need to change their ways.
Works Cited


