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MEASURING INTRA-PARTY DEMOCRACY IN POLITICAL PARTIES IN ALBANIA

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LIST OF ACRONYMS:

DAP	Democratic Alliance Party
DP	The Democratic Party
CP	The Conviction Party
IDP	Intra Party Democracy
LIBRA	The Equal List
PDJ	Party for Democracy and Justice
MCP	Movement for Change Party
NDP	New Democratic Party
PF	The Party of Freedom
SP	The Socialist Party
PSM	Moderated Socialist Party
PSV '91	Real Socialist Party
SMI	The Socialist Movement for Integration

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SUMMARY

The research focuses on the three main political parties in Albania, namely Socialist Party, Democratic Party and Socialist Movement for Integration. Its objectives are to measure the Intra-Party Democracy (IPD) in the Albanian political parties and to explore the meaning that party members attach to it. The IPD is understood and broken down in categories and sub-categories so that parties in particular and all interested actors in the field of political parties and democracy could understand, in which component of IPD parties are performing better and where they are performing worse. IPD is measured against two dimensions: inclusiveness and decentralization. Inclusiveness denotes the extent to which party members have the right to express their opinions and participate in the decision-making process. With decentralization is understood the process which makes possible the decentralization of the decision-making process from the highest national party level to party sub-national levels and party members. In a decentralized party, subnational party units enjoy a certain level of autonomy from the party in the center. The analysis is based on both primary and secondary data. Content analysis of party statutes particularly focuses on measuring IPD, while focus groups with party members and interviews with high ranking officials of the political parties are used to explore the meaning that party members have on IPD, as well as validate content analysis findings. The main findings are:

Content Analysis of Party Statutes:

Parties do have rules that govern their internal life, however these rules need to be improved in order to strengthen IPD. Especially problematic were the provisions for the role of the executive committee and party president, which provide these two institutions, especially the leader of the party with powers that don't hold him/her accountable to the party members and middle level organs. Furthermore, members were not

sufficiently involved in the procedures of candidate nominations for MPs, in the election of the national Executive and Executive Committee and in the election of the Party President. The analysis also finds that voting procedures are not sufficiently at place to allow members express their will and participate in the decision-making process and that members are not or little consulted in terms of programmatic issues. The analysis of the relationship between the national and subnational levels of party organization revealed that the center of the party has accumulated power to the detriment of the subnational units which enjoy little autonomy in the decision-making process.

Focus Groups and Interviews:

The study finds that party members linked system-level democracy with IPD and that they have a very clear understanding if IPD: what it is and how it could be achieved. They linked IPD with the structure and organization of the party, seeing it as an important instrument that allows for decentralization of power and integration of rank and file into the decision-making process. The party members considered the statute as an important educational political tool and invoked it whenever disputes rose or decisions had to be taken. They linked IPD with the electoral system and considered that closed list proportional was a system that strengthened the power in the hands of the few at the party top executive level and weakened IPD.

1. INTRODUCTION

The internal party democracy (IPD) is one of those concepts that are very frequently used in the political domain but rarely put into practice. There is a plethora of scholars who have written about the normative aspect and the empirical evidence of intra-party democracy (Cross & Katz, 2013; Scarrow, 2005; von dem Berge et al, 2013; Ware, 1979). The reason behind this interest for the level of IPD within political parties stems from the fact that the latter are considered central actors in modern representative democracies and play a crucial role in the consolidation of new and young democratic systems. They serve as intermediary institutions between the state and society and are the main mechanism of interest aggregation and candidate recruitment, which has led to their transformation from traditionally voluntary associations towards parties as public utilities (van Biezen, 2004).

1.1 Why Is It Important to Study IPD?

Political parties serve as intermediary institutions between society and government. They aim and attempt to represent and aggregate the interests of various groups of society, develop and promote policymaking, organize candidate selection, introduce concrete political alternatives to policymaking to the electorate, ensure parliamentary majorities, and govern (Hague and Harrop 2007, p. 231–232; Poguntke 1998; Scarrow, 2005, p. 3). All this can happen in a multi-party system, in a democratic system, where parties can compete with each other in an open and fair game or as Linz and Stepan (1996) have famously coined it, in a system where 'democracy is the only game in town'. One of the main contributions that parties could offer to democracy is to present clear and distinctive alternatives so that voters have clear ideas about whom to cast their vote for. When voters have clear alternatives, they can hold their elected to account, and then 'punish' them in case they fail to keep their promises. In this scenario, the party structures are judged over their capacity to support the party in its policy-making process and in the selection of personnel that reflects the characteristics of the electorate at large (Scarrow, 2005, p. 4).

Harmel and Janda (1994, p. 265) consider internal party democracy as one of the four main purposes of political parties (vote maximizing, office maximizing, and policy/ ideology advocacy). Indeed, intra-party democracy and the relationship between political platforms and intra-party organization models exert a significant impact on the way parties function (Kittilson and Scarrow 2003, p. 64). In parties with high levels of internal democratization, there are more chances to select leaders who are more capable and appealing to the electorate and to have policies responsive to peoples' problems and needs (Scarrow, 2005, p. 3).

When parties are internally democratic, they ensure that the legislature remains sensitive to the public opinion, and provide a 'vertical linkage between different deliberating spheres and a horizontal linkage between competing issues' (Teorell, p. 363). Furthermore, an internally democratic party is more likely to influence positively and strengthen the democratic culture in general (Scarrow, 2005, p. 3). Democratic parties help to create responsible citizens, cultivating in them political competencies, which in return contributes to the stability and legitimacy of the democracies in which these parties compete for power (Scarrow, 2005, p. 3). This is why re-establishing and strengthening the weak (if not broken) links with the electorate and party members and activists are seen as crucial by many political parties. Gauja (2017, p. 5) argues that political parties' organization reform becomes part of a broader rhetoric of democratization, re-engagement, and modernization delivered to diverse audiences – both internal and external to the party (in Borz and Janda, 2020, p. 5).

1.2 Why Study IPD in Albania?

Previous studies on IPD in Albania (Kajsiu, 2005; Krasniqi and Hackaj, 2013; Krasniqi, 2016) have pointed out that the Albania political parties suffer from the lack of IDP. Kajsiu (2005) noted that "[at] the heart of the structural crises facing Albania's political parties remains the relationship between the center and the local organization.... Both political parties [Socialist Party (SP) and Democratic Party (DP)] are highly centralized and the most important decisions are taken by a very limited group of people or solely by the chairman of the party, quite often even against the will of the party's local structures or in clear violations of party statutes' (p. 147). Members were not happy with the selection of candidates for Member of Parliament (MP), party presidency rarely consulted local structures, and decision-making was centralized (Kajsiu, 2005). Among

the findings on the IPD of the Albanian political parties, Krasniqi (2016, p. 11; Krasniqi, 2017) observes that the Albanian political parties do not observe their statute in their activities, they are not transparent in terms of decision-making, and statutory practices of internal party democracy continue to be formal and the real story is different from that in paper. The political parties are led by "an elite of untouchable" leaders who control the political parties and [..] the whole political system as well as the decision-making processes in Albania (Krasniqi, 2017, p.26).

IPD has recently become an important issue in the Albanian political parties. The internal conflicts in the Democratic Party (DP), after the loss of the 2021 elections, were made in the name of the IPD. The change of the name of the Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI) to the Party of Freedom (PF) is made again in the name of internal party democracy. While he does not mention it directly, the SP leader speaks, in his meetings with party members and speeches, about the opening of the party and the inclusion of the party members in the decision-making process, policy formulation and the right to elect and be elected in party forums and in parliamentary and local elections (Rama, 4 October 2020; Rama, 7 May 2022). All parties take pride in organizing party elections under the principle of 'one member, one vote' and their statute has a section dedicated to intra-party democracy. True or faked, the notion takes a special place in the party leaders' discourse and is replicated in all the levels of party organization, from top to bottom. It has been used to celebrate victories or regain forces after losing elections. The internal conflicts within the parties are made in the name of IPD and party coalitions are made and dissolved in its name.

IDP is important not only for the health of political parties but for the health of Albanian democracy in general. Hence, it has been strongly recommended by various international actors as a way to strengthen democratization. Consequently, the "one member, one vote" mechanism was introduced in mid 2000s as a practice for electing the party leadership (Redford, 2004). Its aim was to contribute to the decentralization of power within the political parties, strengthening the links between party leadership and rank and file, increasing accountability, and enhancing the inclusion of members in decision-making process.

While over 30 years after the collapse of the communist regime and the establishment of democracy, we certainly know more about the IPD, it is still important to understand the internal party dynamics in relation to this. In order to have internally democratic parties, it is necessary to

have the party infrastructure, rules, and procedures that allow parties to be democratic, and party members willing to apply the principles of democracy within their own parties.

The research conducted previously on IPD in the Albanian political parties provide very useful information, but it does not measure IPD in all its dimensions. Hence, it fails to provide clear recommendations to political parties on where they need to improve. Studies take for granted that party statutes provide a robust framework to allow political parties to lead a democratic life. However, as the results of this study show, this is far from true. In order to improve IPD in practice, parties need to improve the provisions that enables IPD in their statutes as well.

This study seeks to explore and understand the level of IPD in the Albanian political parties. To do so, we have conducted content analysis of party statutes, held interviews with high-ranking party officials, and organized nine focus groups discussions (three for each party) with party members.

To this end, the study is structured into five chapters. The second part is a literature review and reflections about the IPD. The literature review chapter paved the way for designing the research methodology and identifying the necessary methods to conduct it as well as helping to operationalize the concepts related to IPD as well as IPD itself. The fourth chapter measures the IPD of the three political parties under investigation and the final chapter provides the findings of the study and offers recommendations to be applied by political parties should they wish to improve the level of IPD.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON INTRA-PARTY DEMOCRACY

In his seminal work "Political Parties – A sociological Study of Oligarchical Tendencies in Modern Democracies', Robert Michels (1911), after conducting a thorough research on all practices of democratic parties in Western Europe in the second half of the 19th century, concluded that the party's internal democracy was not achievable and that organization, any kind of organization is destined to be oligarchic. According to the iron law of oligarchy, formalization, and bureaucratization are necessary for large and complex organizations and they ultimately lead parties to develop into oligarchies. Michels famously said: "It is organization which gives birth to the dominion of the elected over the electors, of the mandatories over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators. Who says organization, says oligarchy" (p. 355) and he further added "Historical evolution mocks all the prophylactic measures that have been adopted for the prevention of oligarchy". This pessimistic view was true at the time of the writing of the book, but does it still hold true today? Before giving an answer to this question, we will first clarify some concepts about IPD, what it is, and what factors influence it.

2.1 What is Intra-Party Democracy

Any study on a specific topic requires first and foremost the definition of its core concept/s. Therefore, a study on the IPD would require a definition of the concept itself. Otherwise, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to measure, understand, and explore the concept and its application in reality. Having said this, providing a final definition on IPD is difficult and debatable. As Cross and Katz (2013) has commented:

> 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 electorate (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? (p. 2)

According to von dem Berge et al (2013) "IPD generally refers to the implementation of a minimum set of norms within the organizations of political parties. Ideally, in a democratic party, the will should be formed "bottom-up" and the internal distribution of power should be marked by dispersion at different levels, bodies and individuals rather than by the concentration in one organ' (p. 2). The authors latter add that in order to achieve e decent level of IPD (whatever they mean with "decent") parties should be inclusive and decentralized, at least at a certain level (p. 2). This approach is shared by others as well, (Hazan and Rahat, 2006; Rahat and Hazan, 2001; Scarrow, 2005). The concepts of inclusiveness and decentralization are explained at length at the section of methodology, but here we can say that inclusiveness implies the 'extent to which individual party members can express their opinion or participate in intra-party decision-making' (p. 2) or, as Scarrow argues, inclusiveness indicates the width of the decision-making circle in a party (2005, p. 6). Decentralization is understood as the process which makes possible that 'the entire decision-making process is not centralized in one organ at the highest national level and that subnational party units enjoy a certain level of autonomy' (p. 2).

In internally democratic party, the will, policies, and strategies of the party have a 'bottom-up' approach which makes it possible that the internal distribution of power occurs at all party levels and sub-levels, and that the power is not concentrated in the hands of the party leadership. In exclusive parties, the most important decisions like the nomination of candidates for MPs, the selection of leadership, and decisions related to the party manifest, are taken and/or controlled by the party leader or a small group in the party leadership, and the rest of the party members do not play any role. The opposite is true for inclusive parties. In inclusive parties, all party members, and at times even the party supporters, have the opportunity to decide on important party matters, like the ones mentioned above.

Inclusion is very much linked and dependent upon the formal rules and regulations of a party. The more inclusive parties offer more opportunities for free and open deliberation before the decision-making process. In inclusive parties (von dem Berge and Poguntke,

2017), the power is decentralized from the center to all the levels and sub-levels of the party structure, members have the right to participate in the decision-making process, and leaders are accountable to the party organs such as congress, or even to party membership in general (p. 139). In parties with a high level of centralization, the executive committee gathers frequently and has the authority to take decisions that are accepted by the rest of the party levels. On the contrary, in de-centralized parties, the national committee gathers rarely and focuses more on coordination and communication rather than the provision of instructions for party organization (Scarrow, 2005, p. 6).

However, Scarrow (2005) and Hazan and Rahat (2006) argues that inclusive parties are not always decentralized and de-centralized parties are not always inclusive. Decentralization might occur even when the control over the candidates' nomination is transferred from the national oligarchy to the local one, resulting thus in an exclusive party (Hazan and Rahat, 2006, p. 112). On the other side, inclusive parties, where the party leader is elected by direct voting of rank and file and not from the delegates of the regional branches, become centralized, because the power of party branches and sub-branches is minimized (Scarrow, 2005). Indeed, party leaders might encourage the inclusion of rank and file, because they see it as a way to weaken the power of regional leaders within the party (p. 6).

Therefore, in this study, in order to consider a party internally democratic, it is necessary that the party is both inclusive and de-centralized to a certain degree. Only one dimension (inclusiveness or de-centralization), even though it contributes to the IPD of the party, does not guarantee its achievement.

2.2 Factors Affecting IPD

2.2.1 Organizational Structure

Scholarly studies on the changing nature of party organization due to social and economic changes of society have shown that parties have lost a great deal of their ideological roots and become professional entities looking for better electoral performance and ultimately serving as tools for the office–seeking goals of their leaders (Kirchheimer, 1966; Panebianco, 1988). In order to preserve power, parties have turned into oligopolistic organizations which have restricted the access of outsiders/ new parties, reducing thus the available political alternatives (Katz and

Mair, 1995). The transfer of the center of gravity from the party in the ground to the party in office has contributed to the transfer of public attention to the party leader and his/her abilities and personal qualities. Poguntke and Webb (2005) have labelled this "the presidentialisation of party leaders" and has coined members as 'cheerleaders' (Schumacher and Giger, 2017, pp. 164).

The evolution of party organization from 'mass-party' to 'catch-all' and 'cartel' or 'business-firm' party has resulted in "(1) an increase in leadership domination, (2) a tremendous decrease in the number and influence for party membership, (3) and, oligopolistic form of competition with parties without clear ideologies and therefore a depreciation of political alternatives for the electorate (Schumacher and Giger, 2017, p. 165). Young (2013) also contends that "a small number of newly formed parties have achieved electoral success without a membership base, asserting that democracy takes place in the competition between parties rather than within the structures of party organizations. The boundary between party member and supporter has blurred, with supporters performing many of the traditional functions of members and – in some cases – acquiring the privileges members once enjoyed exclusively (p. 65).

The role and importance of members in a party, their level of inclusion, and the decentralization process differ from one party typology to the other (Carty, 2013; Hopkin and Paolucci, 1999; Katz and Mair, 1995; Katz, 2001; Panebianco, 1988; Scarrow, 2005; Young, 2013; van Biezen, 2004). The following table summarizes the role of the members, their inclusion, and the level of decentralization of decision-making in the different party typologies:

TABLE 1: ROLE OF MEMBERS AND DISTRIBUTION OF POWER IN POLITICAL PARTIES ACCORDING TO THEIR TYPOLOGY

Party typology	Description	Members – Inclusiveness-Decentralization
Cadre Party (Duverger, 1954)	- Denies the existence of members	- Little evidence of significant internal democracy on questions of policy, personnel or money.

Party typology	Description	Members – Inclusiveness-Decentralization
Mass Party (Duverger, 1954)	- Members are the heart of the organization; - Party is organized in a hierarchical fashion: the party in center with branches and sub-branches all over the country	- Locus of organizational power is the party in central office, which manages the electoral and membership life of the party; - Party in central office mediates between the party on the ground and the party in public office
Catch-all Party (Kirchheimer, 1966)	- Seek to broaden their appeal to a more undifferentiated support base. - De-ideologization of party life; - Sees members as partisans to be manipulated in order to provide legitimacy to the party leadership	- Strengthened party in public office and weakened party on the ground; - Downgrades the role of the individual party member; - No de-centralized structures; - No room for significant IPD
Electoral - Professional Party (Panebianco, 1988)	- Professionalization of party organization; - Lack of a strong ideological definition of political life; - Central role played by experts and professionals in advancing the party's electoral agenda.	- Dominance by the party leadership; - Experts and professionals are responsive to the elites that employ them for specific task and they are not accountable to party members; - Members are perceived as supporters to be wooed rather than citizens participating in democratically governed organizations; - Little significant role for party members.

Party typology	Description	Members – Inclusiveness-Decentralization
Cartel Party (Katz and Mair, 1995; Katz and Mair 2002) Cartel- Party: Party as a Public Utility (van Biezen, 2004)	- Professional politicians employ experts to organize capital -intensive electoral campaigns centered on appeals that promise effective management of the state apparatus. - Cartel parties depend on state subventions that free them from reliance or interests on civil society.	- The organizational triumph of the party in public office over the party in central office and party on the ground; - Little room for intense partisan differences; - Individual members are recruited to sustain the legitimacy of the leadership and the difference between members and supporters is blurred; - Popular participation is 'atomistic' with members or supporters isolated from one another and engaged in direct personal communication with the party center; - Ordinary party members as tools of leaders; - The formulation intra-party decision-making processes is a weapon of elite control; - Democratization on paper may coexist with powerful elite influence in practice.

Party typology	Description	Members – Inclusiveness-Decentralization
The Entrepreneurial party; The Business firm party; The Charismatic party (Farell & Webb, 2000; Katz, 2006; van Biezen & Poguntke, 2014; Hopkin and Paolucci 1999; Paolucci, 2006)	- Closely tied to the personality of the leader who oversees the internal life of party; - Competitive model of democracy in which leaders compete for people's votes in order to acquire power to decide; - top-down perspective of democracy	- The party leader direct membership like the owners in a private firm mobilize the work force: presidentialization of power; - Memberless parties - Populist rhetoric: participation and deliberation by members are ruled out; - Little intra-party democracy; - Grass- root engagement of the people regarded as a potential threat to the stability of the political system

Source: Carty (2013). Table is designed by the author based on the material of Carty (2013)

There is a common understanding that typologies simplify and make our understanding of the world easier, but they are not found in real life in the same form as described in theory. Nowadays, parties display features of different typologies. From the table above one can easily see that it is difficult to have internally democratic parties. Since organizational changes in political parties have occurred because of changes in the socio-economic and political environment where parties operate and function, the change in the role of members is inevitable. But knowing the typology of parties in one country helps to understand why parties fail to be internally democratic or sufficiently democratic and how this could be addressed.

2.2.2.a The Level of Party Institutionalization

Party institutionalization is also linked to the party structure and organization. The time the party comes to life has a direct impact on

its level of institutionalization and thus bureaucracy and formalization. The level of party "institutionalization" is determined by the degree to which decision-making procedures are formalized and the degree to which the party has coordinating structures for the targeted electorate. A low level of institutionalization is a characteristic of new parties. This occurs partly because it requires time to build formal structures and develop an organizational network. However, "old parties" are not always institutionalized. Parties with a high level of intra-party democracy, in general, are highly institutionalized, because they need rules to determine who has the right to participate and what is meant by victory in the internal competition.

It is important to emphasize that high levels of institutionalization are not necessarily equal to internal democratization. Non-democratic and highly institutionalized political parties are more difficult to transform than those that do not base their operation on rules and procedures. Nonetheless, high levels of institutionalization are seen as a positive attribute for the political stability of the country: internal rules help to minimize internal conflicts and negative implications that might come from fractions, or at least they help to channel conflicts in a predictive way and very often help a soft transition of party leadership. Even though institutionalization is considered a positive attribute, it is difficult to purposively create it, because it is a product of time: parties become more institutionalized over time (Scarrow 2005, p. 6).

Tradition might be equally important when determining the different roles and positions within the party. As a rule of thumb, loyal and organized supporters within the party are created only after several elections have taken place. Therefore, a high level of institutionalization cannot be imposed immediately and at once, and it is something that not all party leaders want to promote. Those who wish to build sustainable long-lasting structures and loyalties might support rank and file to formalize rules, and this in turn will help to transfer personal loyalties to party loyalties, strengthening thus party institutionalization. However, in parties with a low level of institutionalization, many leaders – especially those who have personal followership – might see institutionalization as a threat to their personal power (Scarrow 2005, p. 7).

3. A SHORT HISTORY OF ALBANIAN POLITICAL PARTIES

The party system in Albania was established with the collapse of the communist regime in December 1990. The three main political parties analysed in this study are the Socialist Party of Albania (SPA), the Democratic Party of Albania (DPA), and the Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI)[1]. The three parties have a similar organizational structure. The headquarters of the party are located in Tirana, the capital city. These parties have achieved a vast territorial coverage through their branches and cells distributed across the country. Parties have formal rules to register their members and membership is not difficult to obtain and everyone can apply for it. The membership level is high and territorial penetration is deep, which is a characteristic that puts them apart from the political parties in post-communist countries and Western Europe (Xhaferaj, 2018) where membership levels have experienced a decline. Even though they contribute very little in terms of financial support (Table 2), party members matter because they are important to organize the party on the ground.

1 At present, SMI has changed its name to Party of Freedom. However, given that the study analyzes the period until the name change, we will continue to use the old name throughout the study.

TABLE 2: FINANCIAL INCOME OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Party	Membership fees (ALL/% of total incomes	Government funding (ALL/%of total income	Total income
Year 2020			
Socialist Party	3,976,235 (5.9%)	63,417,047 (94%)	67,393,282
Democratic Party	5,377,825 (12.1%)	38,911,877 (87.8%)	44,308,810
Socialist Movement for Integration	2,913,700 (11.7%)	20,012,797 (82%)	24,949,403
Year 2021			
Socialist Party	30,617,276 (19.2%)	127,689,608 (80%)	159,549,580
Democratic Party	10,782,310 (12.5%)	71,766,253 (83.2)	86,306,956
Socialist Movement for Integration	2,199,860 (4.4%)	38,987,979 (77.3)	50,413,283

Source: Financial Report of 2021 for SP, Financial Report of 2021 for DP, Financial Report of 2021 for SMI. Central Election Commission.

The parties, especially SP and DP, have changed and amended their statute very often and in general after elections or when internal debates about intra-party democracy in the party have occurred. The chapter which analyses the party statutes elaborates on this in more details. Nonetheless, we could anticipate that the frequent changes are an indication that the document is important and a point of reference to solve disputes and manage intra-party conflicts.

The overarching document which stipulates and requires that parties should be internally democratic is the Law on Political Parties. Specifically, Article 7 stipulates that the internal organization of the party should not be against democratic principles. In order to achieve this, parties need to have a hierarchical organization, organize elections for party forums in line with democratic principles, and every member

needs to have the freedom of expression, the right to get in and out of the party freely and the right to elect and get elected (Law on Political Parties, No. 8580, dated 17.02.2000).

Democratic Party was founded on 12 December 1990 as an opposition party that challenged the communist system and the Party of Labor of Albania (the only party during communism). Since then, the party has positioned itself as one of the two main political parties in the country. The party won the elections in 1992, 1996, 2005, and 2009. In the period outside of public office, it has always been the main opposition party. Although intra-party democracy has always been present in the party's official discourse, the perceived lack of intra-party democracy has resulted in the creation of splinter parties such as the Democratic Alliance Party (DAP) in 1992 (only a few months after DP's establishment and winning of elections), Party for Democracy and Justice (1995), the Recovery (1995) the New Democratic Party (NDP) in 2001 (Krasniqi, 2009, pp. 66-74), the New Democratic Spirit in 2012, the Democratic Conviction Party in 2019 and Movement for Change Party in 2020. The head of the NDP described the political scene in Albania as something in crisis, a scene where the politicians have lost their links with the people. According to him, politicians had concentrated all their efforts to strengthen their power and increase their personal gains. Pollo described the situation as one in which the party is captured by a clan or the party chief and his supporters who were gathered together to serve their interests and not because of common values and ideas (Pollo, 2004, pp. 64-5, 7).

Both DAP and NDP aligned themselves with DP later on and to a certain extent, this was in line with the changes in the party statute, which has been very rigid in terms of membership termination in the first decade and then loosened a bit in the second decade showing signs of tolerance towards those who had a different opinion (Xhaferaj, 2018). The introduction of 'one member, one vote' in the process of local party forums election in 2007 is another indication that the party was heading toward a more democratic organization (Redford 2004, p. 3). In 2005, the party won the general elections and IPD did not take much attention from the party leaders. It became an issue in 2013, after the loss of the general elections and the resignation of the party leader and founder. The resignation posed the problem of who was going to be the successor of the founder of the party. This process mobilized all party members who gathered around the two main candidates and participated in the intra-party competition, a very important element of IPD.

However, the most critical moment of the party, the one which mobilized

members for over several months and has the concept of IPD itself as its epicenter, started in 2021 after the loss of the elections and is still going on. At the moment the party is two-headed. There are two DPs, the official one known by the judicial court and the non-official one which controls the offices and a part of MPs in parliament. The loss of the elections and the expulsion of the former head of DP from the parliamentary group in September 2021, after his Public Designation by the US Department of State, gave rise to vivid discussions within the party. The former party leader Sali Berisha initiated an initiative called 'The pulpit' and toured the country to gather support from the rank and file. Two convents, congresses, and conferences were organized in December 2021 and later on. The debates between the two branches/ divisions or currents of the party were ultimately linked to the role of the members and who better represented them. Thus, IPD took a very important part in the intra-party competition and became a battlefield for power.

The other two parties, the Socialist Party and the Socialist Movement for Integration, are linked together. The Albanian Socialist Party is successor to the Party of Labour of Albania (the former Communist Party) and as such it is very well established, institutionalized, and with a very good organization and presence across the country. Intra-party democracy has been part of the party leaders' discourse and it has been manifested in different ways, at different moments in time. The number of splinter parties is an indication of this. Similar to DP, splinter parties such as the Party for Social Democracy (PDS) in 2003, SMI (2004), the Real Socialist Party '91 (PSV91) (2009), the Moderated Socialist Party (PSM) (2011) (Krasniqi, 2017, p.16) and LIBRA in 2016 are its offspring. The biggest split has been the one which gave life to SMI. According to Ilir Meta, former Head of the Socialist Youth Forum, Prime Minister of Albania, and founder of SMI, he had been waiting in vain to see the materialization of intra-party democracy within the internal structures of SP (Meta 2004, 55). It did not happen and, therefore, he left. In the Congress of SP in 2003, two of the three candidates for the position of the party leader introduced the 'One Member, One Vote' initiative in their political platform, making it the first Albanian political party to propose such a process (Redford 2004, p. 2). After the loss of the 2005 parliamentary elections, the transition of power from Fatos Nano (former SP leader) to Edi Rama (the present SP leader) did not occur without difficulties. However, it was successfully achieved with the support of Gramoz Ruçi, who, as the Organizational Secretary of the Party, made possible the shifting of loyalties from the former leader to the new one.

Another important split that came as the result of the perceived lack of intra-party democracy in SP has been the creation of the splinter party, LIBRA, (Lista e Barabartë [the Equal List]) in 2016. The party was established by the former ally of Edi Rama, Ben Blushi, and was founded as a response to the lack of intra-party democracy in the Socialist Party. After that, voices for the lack of intra-party democracy have been silenced and those who dared to go against the party leader are sidelined[2].

SMI is the first political party in Albania to introduce the election of party forums through the process of 'one member, one vote' principle in its statute. Established as a splinter party from SP, the founding leader, Ilir Meta, considered that internally democratic parties were intrinsic to the level of democracy in the country. According to him, the political forces were led by "eternal' leaders who did not consider the common citizen and the party members to be important but turned to them only during elections. He contended that SMI has sanctioned in its statute that elections within the party would be done under the principle of 'one member one vote'. The aim of the newly established party was to send the politics to the common citizen, the decision-making to the public, and to actively engage members in the daily political life of the party and in its decision-making process. This, was thought, would contribute to the social cohesion and integration of the individual in a community of values and would establish strong material, moral and psychological links between the governors and the governed. It is important to mention that the leader of the party went on to get nominated and elected as the President of the Republic of Albania by the Parliament in 2017. Meta's party leader post was temporarily filled by one of his collaborators only to be handed over to his wife Monika Kryemadhi, who has also been Head of the Youth Forum of the Socialist Party and later on one of the founding figures of the SMI.

As shown by the above discussion, the intra-party democracy has been a constant problem for the Albanian political parties. Party leaders have consistently failed to provide mechanisms that would make possible internally democratic parties. While IPD is used to shake the status quo within the party, to challenge the existing leadership position, and to become the battlefield between competing party groups within the party, it nonetheless has never managed to gain territory within the Albanian political parties.

2 Ditmir Bushati, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, was sidelined from party and public offices once he started to hold a critical attitude towards the party leadership.

4. MEASURING INTRA-PARTY DEMOCRACY

4.1 Methodology and Theoretical Model

The study seeks to shed light on the present situation of intra-party democracy in the Albanian political parties. However, the analytical model is helpful to measure IPD even for the past period for as long as we can trace party statutes. While party statutes do not tell the whole story, they nonetheless can provide a very good picture of the 'mood' of the party toward IPD. Since the inception of pluralism in Albania, the Albanian political scene has been dominated by two main political parties, the Socialist Party and the Democratic Party. In general, the Albanian party system has been either a two-party system or a two-and-a-half-party system (Xhaferaj, 2018). Thus, the parties under investigation are the Socialist Party, the Democratic Party and the Socialist Movement for Integration. The research has drawn on different theoretical frameworks, because the scope of research required a combination of methods when assessing the internal affairs of parties. The level of IPD is measured by analysing the level of inclusion and de-centralization (von dem Berge et.al. 2013) through content analysis of party statutes and text analysis of in-depth interviews with high-ranking officials of political parties, and focus group discussions with party members. By combining all methods together, it was possible to measure the current level of IPD in the Albanian political parties and understand what meanings members and leaders attach to it, how it is understood and to what extent it is considered important.

4.1.1 Content Analysis of Party Statutes

Von dem Berge et.al. (2013) propose to measure the level of IPD by using content analysis of party statutes. The authors contend that even though party statutes do not guarantee their own implementation, their analysis is helpful to understand the level of inclusion and de-centralization and thus the level of IPD in any political party. Party statutes have a socializing effect on actors who are active within the

respective institutions. It is true that, as Katz and Mair (1992) point out, there is a distinction between the official narrative and the actual events happening within the party and that the official narrative might be that of a party whose internal life is marked by democratic procedures, while the actual events might tell a different story. Nonetheless, statutes provide a 'useful indicator of changing attitudes concerning the relationship between party leader, individual members, and party organs' (Kittilson and Scarrow 2003, p. 65). Furthermore, formal rules are often invoked in intra-party battles and thus indicate the boundaries of legitimate party action (Poguntke 2000), and even when they are bypassed, they still are a very good indicator of the atmosphere within the party.

IPD generally refers to the implementation of a minimum set of norms within the organizations of political parties (Zeuner 2003 in von dem Berge et.al., 2013), which guarantees that the political will is formed 'bottom-up' and that the internal distribution of power is dispersed at different levels, bodies, and individuals and not concentrated in one organ. Thus, in internally democratic parties the decision-making process is not centralized. According to von dem Berge et.al., the level of IPD is measured by analysing the level of inclusiveness and decentralization in the party statutes.

To evaluate how inclusive parties are and how de-centralized their decision-making process is, we have explored the three conceptual dimensions of IPD: members' rights, organizational structures, and decision-making in line with the model proposed by von dem Berge et.al. (2013). These main categories are divided into sub-categories at different levels, which are comprised themselves of individual items. The following table summarizes the conceptual framework of von dem Berge et.al.:

TABLE 3: CATEGORIES AND SUB-CATEGORIES FOR MEASURING THE LEVEL OF INCLUSION AND DECENTRALIZATION IN THE POLITICAL PARTIES.

Main Category	Sub-category Level 1	Sub-Category Level 2	Sub-category Level 3
I. Member Rights	1.1 General Member Rights		
	1.2 Minority Rights		
II. Organizational Structures	II.1 Party Congress		
	II.2 Conflict-solving agencies		
	II.3 The National Executive		
	II.4 The Executive Committee		
	II.5 The party president/ head		
	II.6 The relationship between the national level and subnational levels.		

Main Category	Sub-category Level 1	Sub-Category Level 2	Sub-category Level 3
III. Decision-Making	III.1 Recruitment	III.1.1 Recruitment to National Public Office	III.1.1.1 Candidate Nomination
			III.1.1.2 Candidate Selection for Parliamentary Office
			III.1.1.3 Candidate Selection for Head of Party Elections
			III.1.1.4 Relationship between the National Level and Subnational Levels about Candidate Selection
		III.1.2 Recruitment to National Intra-Party Office	III.1.2.1 Election of the National Executive
			III.1.2.2 Election of the Executive Committee
			III.1.2.3 Election of the Head of Party
		III.1.3 Procedures	III.1.3.1 Voting Procedures
			III.1.3.2 Relationship between the National Level and Subnational Levels with regard to Candidate Selection for Subnational Public Office
			III.1.3.3 Relationship between the National Level and Subnational Levels with regard to Candidate Selection for Subnational Intra-party Office.
	III.2 Programmatic Issues		

Source: Von dem Berge et.al. 2013. Adapted by the author of this study.

The coding of party statutes is a very complex process and the model has been developed by Von dem Berge et al (2013) for measuring IPD in political parties in post-communist countries. Content analysis allows for the quantification of the coded data and the calculation of IPD for any party at any given time. It quantifies patterns within party statutes in an objective, replicable and systemic manner. Thus, it allows us to compare parties with each other as well as to compare the democratization of the party (if this is the case) longitudinally, from the moment of its inception to the present day. Party statutes are investigated to assess how candidate selection for national parliament is made, whether there is the possibility for free, fair, and regular elections within the party, and whether there is the opportunity for equal and open participation of all members and member groups so that interests are equally represented (Scarrow 2005, p.7-20), whether the political will of the party is formed by the party members or delegates through free elections and whether there is freedom of expression and protection of minorities (Von dem Berge et.al 2013).

Von dem Berge et.al. (2013) provide a very detailed description of it. The coding procedures are adopted faithfully in this research, and for more details on how coding is done, it is necessary to consult the original work of the authors. Nonetheless for the clarity of this study in this section we provide a short explanation of how coding is done.

Table 2 shows the main categories and sub-categories to be measured. According to Von dem Berge et al:

> In the process of quantification, each answer (YES, NO and NS) to each question is attributed the value +1, 0 or −1. The rationale behind this quantification is that all answers which have negative implications on IPD with regard to its two distinct aspects (i.e. inclusiveness or decentralization) are attributed the value −1, regardless whether the answer is YES, NO or NS. According to the same logic all answers which have positive implications on IPD are attributed the value +1, regardless whether the answer is YES, NO or NS. The value 0 is allocated to an answer when no specific effects on IPD can be identified. The coding scheme is framed in the manner that YES answers usually have positive implications for the IPD of a political party (example for an exception: prerogatives of the party president, codes 25-21-0-0 to
>
> 25-25-0-0). The decisions regarding the allocation of the values to the items (question/ answer) are based on the definitions of the individual questions in Appendix [2]. (p.31)

Following this logic, the only time when an answer YES is -1 is when it refers to the prerogatives of the party president, as follows:

2.5 Party president (25-00-0-0)

• Does the statute mention the following rights (obligations) of the party president (25-20-0-0)

...To block the execution of decisions and other acts of the executive? (25-21-0-0)

...To exclude a party member? (25-22-0-0)

...To dismiss a member of the party executive? (25-23-0-0)

...To act against the general provisions of the statute in certain cases? (25-24-0-0)

...To form or to close subnational party units? (25-25-0-0)

Indeed, it is clear that if the leader of the party has the right to block the execution and decisions of other acts of the executive, to exclude party members, to dismiss a member of the party executive, to act against the general provisions of the statute and to form or to close subnational units, this would be a situation where the party leader has gathered and centralized the power in his/her own hands to the detriment of other party organs and party members. Thus would contribute to the weakening of IPD within the party.

Finally, in order to calculate the final level of IPD for each statute, the values of the three main categories are summed up and divided by the number of main categories (which is 3). In this way we obtain the final IPD value for the respective statute which ranges from −1 to 1.

As mentioned earlier, content analysis provides with information on the level of inclusiveness and decentralization of the Albanian political parties. After assigning values such as -1, 0 or +1, to the main categories and subcategories provided in Table 3, it is possible to understand the level of inclusiveness and decentralization for each of the parties. Table 4 shows to which dimension of IPD (inclusion and decentralization) contribute the categories and subcategories identified:

TABLE 4: LINK OF IPD CATEGORIES AND SUB-CATEGORIES WITH IPD DIMENSION

Inclusiveness	Decentralization
• General member rights • Minority rights • Party Congress • Conflict-solving Agencies • The National Executive • The Executive Committee • The Party President • Candidate nomination • Candidate Selection for Parliamentary Office • Election of the National Executive • Election of the Executive Committee • Election of the Party President • Voting procedures	• The Party President • Relationship between the National Level and National Sublevels • Candidate nomination • Relationship between the National Level and Subnational levels with regard to Candidate Selection • Relationship between the National Level and Subnational Levels with regard to Candidate Selection for Subnational Public Office • Relationship between the National Level and Subnational Levels with regard to Candidate Selection for Subnational Party Office • Programmatic Issues

Some categories and sub-categories provide for only one dimension and some others for both dimensions. Upon receiving the results of party statutes, we can understand how party fare in which dimension and where they lack the most or perform the better.

4.1.2 Text Analysis of Interviews and Focus Groups

In order to support the findings of the content analysis, the author has conducted interviews with high- ranking party officials and focus groups with party members. Ten semi-structured interviews are organized with representatives of SP, DP and SMI. The interviews took place in the period July-September 2022. The organization of interviews was especially difficult because a lot of those who were contacted were reluctant to express their opinions.

Nine focus groups were conducted on the premises of the respective parties. They aimed at collecting information about the perceptions that party members have on intra-party democracy, what procedures were followed to ensure it and what the level of intra-party democracy in their party was. While it is important to understand what meaning party leaders attach to IPD, it is no less important to understand what members from rank and file understand about IPD. In the preceding chapter, we saw how IPD was used in internal battles for power among party leaders. However, in order to succeed in their internal battles, the leaders need the support of their party members. The discourse generated in the public space for the public at large (members included), as well as within the party at its different levels, has created a social reality that is real for those who have absorbed it. As Gephart (2007, p. 7) says, discourse is 'an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena'. As widely discussed in the first chapter, IPD does not have a fixed meaning. It is by all means the result of the interaction and power struggles between political actors. Therefore, it was necessary to interview party members to see whether their respective parties provide the preconditions for good deliberation, to examine what kind of disagreements arise within the party and how these disagreements are addressed.

The focus groups were organized during July-September 2022. Three focus groups were held for each party: a focus group with party members in general, a focus group with the youth forum members, and one with the members of the women's forum. The group size varied between 5 and 11 participants. Conducting focus group discussions with youth and women in addition to those with mixed members was deemed important, because members within the same party face different political challenges based on their age and gender. Thus, bringing them into the discussions provided a better understanding of the state of IPD in the political parties under investigation, since members were politically committed and engaged actively in the party's internal life.

The discussions were semi-structured and lasted approximately one hour. In the beginning, focus group participants were asked about the meaning of IPD, which gave speakers an easy opening to make contributions. Then, they were asked how well they knew the statute and how often they have referred to it, what mechanisms were used by the party to collect their opinions, whether they were consulted and involved in the decision-making process, consulted with on the program

and strategy of the party and the composition of lists of candidates for MPs in the parliamentary elections or for the candidates for mayors in the local elections. Other questions were related to the existence of the fractions within the party – were they good or not and how should they be managed, to the financial burden the party faced in order to function democratically and the process of decision-making in times of emergency.

4.2 Content Analysis of Party Statutes

The study has taken into analysis: 6 statutes of SP (1999, 2000, 2003, 2011, 2015, and 2020), 8 statutes of DP (1990, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2005, 2009, 2018 and 2021) and two statute of LSI (2009 and 2012). In order to measure the level of inclusiveness and decentralization, the authors have distinguished three main theoretical categories for IPD: members' rights, organizational structure, and decision-making, which are further specified by creating other sub-categories as specified in the chapter of methodology. The level of IPD ranges from -1 (lowest level of IPD) to +1 (highest level of IPD).

The following table shows the development of IPD in the Albanian political parties. We can observe that the overall degree of IPD is fairly straightforward in all three parties, especially at SMI.

TABLE 5: IPD LEVELS FOR THE SP, DP AND SMI

Year/ IPD	1990	1996	1998	1999	2000	2003	2005	2009	2011	2012	2015	2018	2020	2021
SP				0.53	0.51	0.55			0.42		0.45		0.43	
DP	0.30	0.29	0.34	0.28			0.37	0.36				0.30		0.32
SMI										0.47				0.47

TABLE 6: SUMMARY OF IPD FOR THE ALBANIAN POLITICAL PARTIES

Party	Observa-tions	Mean	Min.	Max.
Socialist Party of Albania	6	0.51	0.42	0.59
Democratic Party of Albania	8	0.33	0.28	0.37
Socialist Movement for Integration	2	0.47	0.47	0.47

However, in order to understand better the dynamics of intra-party democracy and how they appear in the party statutes, we have analysed the three main categories: members' rights, organizational structure and decision-making, separately for every party.

4.2.1 Content Analysis of the Socialist Party

Table 7 shows how the three components of IPD, namely Members' Rights, Organization Structure, and Decision-Making, have varied from one year to the other for the Socialist Party and how the combined result for the overall IDP is produced. Among the three categories, members' rights fare better than organizational structure and decision-making. Members' right have fared well until 2003 and then experienced a constant decline, falling to 0.58 in 2020. The following tables (7&8) shed additional light on the dynamics of the three categories.

TABLE 7: IPD VALUES OF SOCIALIST PARTY IN THE THREE MAIN CATEGORIES

	1999	2000	2003	2011	2015	2020	Year	1999	2000	2003	2011	2015	2020
Members' Rights	1	0.92	1	0.75	0.75	0.58	Intra-Party Democracy	0.53	0.51	0.59	0.42	0.45	0.43
Organi-sational Structure	0.3	0.3	0.46	0.32	0.36	0.42							
Deci-sion-mak-ing	0.29	0.31	0.31	0.19	0.24	0.28							

Table 8 goes deeper into the levels and provides a better understanding for each of the main categories. Thus, one might observe that in the sub-category members' rights, minority rights have fared better than member's rights, with the exception of 2020, where minority rights experienced a sharp decline, from 0.83 in 2015 to 0.33 in 2020. This has occurred because of the reduced role of the youth forum – now dispersed and organized only at local level. This also came out during the focus group with the youth sector, where youngsters complained about the reduced role they played in the party.

In terms of the organizational structures, which deals with the formal structures within the party and their interaction (von dem Berge et al, 2013, p. 8), one might observe that the level of IPD is poor. The measured components show that the distribution of power and competencies among the various party organs fares bad.

Party Congress: According to von dem Berge et al (2013), "[if] the competencies of the party congress are extensive enough, the frequency of its sessions should indicate a high level of inclusion of the members in the opinion formation and decision-making processes" (p. 9). Considering that the sub-category 'Party Congress' is one in 2020 and has experienced a significant increase since 2003, it is safe to say that this sub-category contributes to the improvement of IDP within SP. However, and this is very important to say, the other sub-categories do not fare well.

Conflict-Solving Agencies: The sub-category of 'conflict-solving' agencies indicates the ability of the party to treat its members equally and 'rule upon request over all members including the party leadership, whenever their behaviour damage the party' (Poguntke, 2005 in von dem Berge, 2013, p.9). The SP fares at the medium level here, indicating thus that no proper measures are taken to treat all members equally and does modestly protect individual party members from arbitrary disciplinary measures by the party leadership.

The National Executive and the Executive Committee: National Executive and Executive Committee are the decision-making organs of the party. In internally democratic parties, competencies are distributed in ways that prevent autocratic leadership and the executive is accountable to and controlled by the party congress (von dem Berge et al, 2013, p. 10). Both sub-categories measure the level of inclusiveness of the party and as the table showed, this level is low and both National Executive and Executive Committee have a high degree of autonomy from the Congress.

As von dem Berge et al (2013) contended, "the division between national executive and executive committee enables us to determine how power is distributed within the party and to discover differences between varying organizational layers of the party". Indeed, having a high degree of autonomy of the Executive Committee from the Congress, one cannot speak for distribution of power between layers. Since this subcategory measures the level of obligations of these organs, how accountable they are to the party congress and what control mechanisms are in place to control them (von dem Berge et al, 2013, p.10), we can say that the level of inclusiveness measured by this sub-category is low.

The Party President: The sub-category of party president measures the extent to which the party leader has prerogatives with respect to other party organs. It determines the degree of the president's power as foreseen in the statute. The sub-category shows also whether the statute has established mechanisms that allows the challenging of the party leader. As a rule of thumb, the more prerogatives the party leader has, the lower the level of inclusiveness and decentralization is, thus the lower the level of IPD (von dem Berge et al, 2013, p.10-11). The value of Party President sub-category is 0.33 in all party statutes, which help to understand that the position of the party leader is very strong, there are not many mechanisms established in the party to help challenge his/her position and that this has been constant in all party statutes. This is very much in line with the real story of the SP. There have been only two party leaders and the change happened because the first party leader Fatos Nano resigned in 2005, after the loss of the general elections.

The Relationship between the National Level and Subnational Levels: This sub-category measures the level of decentralization in the relationship between national and subnational levels. The higher the value of the category, the less centralized and concentrated the power in the party leadership is (von dem Berge et al, 2013, p. 11). The table shows that at the moment the value is zero. Thus, the statute of 2020 makes no mention of the subnational levels, thus officially enabling the power in the hands of the party leadership. This is the worst value with regard to this sub-category. It used to be 0.75 in 1999, 2000, 2003 and 2015. It experienced a sharp decline in 2011, after the local elections, which could be understood as a 'rally round the flag effect after the SP leader lost the local elections in the capital Tirana, a loss that was perceived as unfair and as the result of manipulations from the Central Election Commission and Democratic Party. While it is hard

to understand why at the present the relationship between center and periphery is deteriorated, it is certainly an area where the party needs to improve.

TABLE 8: IDP VALUES FOR SOCIALIST PARTY – SUBCATEGORY LEVEL 2

	Year	1999	2000	2003	2011	2015	2020
Members Rights	General Members' Rights	1	0.83	1	0.67	0.67	0.83
	Minority Rights	1	1	1	0.83	0.83	0.33
Organizational Structure	Party Congress	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.6	0.6	1
	Conflict-solving Agencies	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.75	0.5	0.5
	The National Executive	0	0	1	0	0	0.67
	The Executive Committee	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Party President	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
	Relationship between the national level and subnational levels	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.25	0.75	0
Decision-Making	Recruitment	0.25	0.29	0.28	0.09	0.15	0.08
	Programmatic Issues	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.55

Decision-Making is divided in two sub-categories: Recruitment and Programmatic Issues.

Programmatic Issues: This sub-category attempts to determine who is responsible for the party manifesto. When all party members can vote upon the manifesto, it is an indication that the party is inclusive. On the other hand, when the party leader decides about the manifesto, the party is exclusive. When the sub-national units have voice upon the party manifesto, then the party is inclusive and the other way around. The data shows that until 2021, the party manifesto has been mainly an exclusivity of the party leadership and only in 2021, the party has become more inclusive in this dimension, even though the improvement is small.

In terms of Recruitment process, Table 9 provides a detailed understanding and explanation with regard to recruitment and procedures. The results could be interpreted as follows:

Recruitment: The sub-category of Recruitment provides information for the recruitment for the National Public Office, Recruitment for National Party Office and Procedures followed in these processes. As one may observe, the party ranks very low in this category. This indicate that the level of inclusiveness of party members in the process of candidate nomination, candidate selection, and the role of subnational units in the nomination of candidates for national public office is low. Thus, the party leadership is exclusive and it controls the nomination and selection process. The same is true for the selection of the executive and party leader. The party leadership has complete control of the national executive. Executive committee and not the members elect the party leader. Therefore, with regard to this category, the party is exclusive and centralized.

Procedures: This sub-category aims to determine whether the statute contains any information regarding voting procedures, such as secret voting procedures when electing the party leadership or public office candidates, or such as making election results available to party members (von dem Berge et al, 2013, p. 14). It goes without saying that parties that have secret voting are more inclusive and thus more democratic, because they this procedure reduces the risk 'of influencing the voters to comply through intimidation or bribery is smaller than by open voting procedures, where dissents might be encouraged to confirm to the official party line' (von dem Berge et al, 2013, p. 14). This sub-category has experienced deterioration. It has been at its peak in 2000 and 2003 and drastically fell in 2011. Therefore, in this sub-category the party has shifted from inclusive to exclusive, where party members

cannot fully express their will for the selection and election of the party leadership. The role of subnational unit with regard to candidate selection in party and public office is also small. Members have had more power until 2003 in selecting their candidates for public and party office. Their power was significantly decreased with the approval of the new statute in 2011 and has remained at low levels (and at times inexistent) since then. This shows a high degree of centralization where the national unit almost completely controls the election of candidates for subnational public and party office.

TABLE 9. IDP LEVELS FOR SUB-CATEGORY LEVEL 3: RECRUITMENT FOR THE SOCIALIST PARTY

	Year	1999	2000	2003	2011	2015	2020
Recruitment for National Public Office	Candidate Nomination	0.17	0.17	0.17	-0.5	0.33	-0.33
	Candidate Selection - Parliament	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.2
	Role of Subnational Unit	0.2	0.2	0.2	0	0.2	-0.2
Mean Recruitment for National Public Office		**0.19**	**0.19**	**0.19**	**0**	**0.23**	**-0.11**
Recruitment for National Party Office	Election of the national executive	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0
	Election of the executive committee	-0.2	0.2	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2
	Election of the party president	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.4
Mean Recruitment for National Party Office		**0.07**	**0.2**	**0.07**	**0.13**	**0.13**	**0.07**

	Year	1999	2000	2003	2011	2015	2020
Procedures	Voting Procedures	0.5	1	1	0.25	0.25	0.25
	Role of Subnational Unit (public office)	0	0	-0.25	-0.25	0	0.25
	Role of Subnational Unit (party office)	1	0.5	1	0	0	0.25
Mean Value Procedures		**0.5**	**0.5**	**0.58**	**0**	**0.08**	**0.25**

4.2.2 The Content Analysis of the Democratic Party

Table 10 shows that among the three main categories, decision-making is the category that suffers the more. Nonetheless even the other two categories do not fare well. In order to understand better the story behind the numbers it is necessary to go deeper into the sub-levels as described in the methodology. The logic of the analysis is the same followed for the Socialist Party.

TABLE 10: IDP FOR THE MAIN CATEGORIES – DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Year	1990	1996	1998	1999	2005	2009	2018	2021
Members' Rights	0.25	0.5	0.25	0.25	0.42	0.5	0.33	0.42
Organisational Structure	0.37	0.32	0.51	0.32	0.40	0.33	0.33	0.33
Decision-making	0.28	0.06	0.25	0.27	0.29	0.25	0.23	0.22

Table 11 provides a better understanding for the three main categories: Members' Rights, Organizational Structure and Decision-Making.

In terms of *Members' Rights*, one can observe that while general members' rights, which as a sub-category is indicative of freedom

of opinion and freedom of speech has worsened with time, the sub-category of minority rights, which corresponds to the women and youth rights as well as the inclusion of ethnic minorities, is improved and fares well. As category of Members' Rights is indicative of the inclusiveness of the party and we could recommend that in order to improve it, the party has to ensure freedom of speech and freedom of opinion and provide mechanisms that 'support members with opinions diverging from the majority opinion should have good opportunities to present and discuss their positions within the party and thus attempt to form alternative majorities' (von dem Berge, 2013, p. 8).

In terms of *Organizational Structure*, as per the methodology, Party Congress, Conflict-Solving Agencies, The National Executive, The Executive Committee, the Party President and the Role of Subnational Unit are analyzed. The analysis of the party statutes from 1990 till 2021 show that:

Party Congress: From the IPD perspective, since the Party Congress should decide about statutory issues, the party programme and the party line, the low level of this indicator shows that at the DP, the role of the party congress role has decreased from 2009 till present, and as consequence the level of inclusiveness has also decreased. According to von dem Berge et al (2013, 'a high level of inclusiveness expresses itself through the right of member assemblies and the party congress to override the decisions of other (less inclusive, more centralized) organs' (p. 8-9). Therefore, decrease in the role of the party congress is indicative that other organs are more powerful.

Conflict-Solving Agencies: In terms of the presence of conflict-solving agencies, with exception of 1998, no such agencies are in the party. This indicates that the party has not established mechanisms that protect its individual members from the arbitrary and disciplinary measures by the party leadership, should they occur.

The National Executive and The Executive Committee: Both sub-categories fare bad. Since their existence is important for a distribution of competencies at different party levels and they should be accountable to party congress, the value of these two subcategories shows that neither is power distributed, nor the organs are accountable to the party members. This is pretty much the same with the Socialist Party.

Party President: The value of this sub-category is consistent at 0.33, which is the same with the SP and, similar to SP, it shows that the party leader has accumulated a great deal of power and little limits are placed

to this power. Again here (like in SP) there are no mechanisms in place to allow for challenging the party leader in his/her position. The history of party leaders in DP confirms this, because the only change in the leadership has occurred in 2013, when the former DP leader Sali Berisha resigned after the loss of the general elections that year.[3]

Relationship between National Level and Subnational Levels: The Subnational Unit is the sub-category that fares better than all. Scoring at 0.75 it is an indicator that that subnational unit is an important unit in the party's structure and organization. It shows that the subnational unit has the ability to make itself 'heard no the national party level' (von dem Berge et al, 2013, p.11).

TABLE 11: IDP FOR SUB-CATEGORY LEVEL 2 – DEMOCRATIC PARTY

	Year	1990	1996	1998	1999	2005	2009	2018	2021
Members' Rights	General Members' Rights	0.67	0.5	0	0	0.33	0.33	0.17	0.17
	Minority Rights	-0.17	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.67	0.5	0.67
Organizational Structure	Party Congress	0.8	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.8	0.4	0.4	0.4
	Conflict-solving Agencies	0.5	0.75	0.5	0.75	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
	The National Executive	0	0	0.33	0	0	0	0	0
	The Executive Committee	0	0	0.33	0	0	0	0	0
	Party President	0.17	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
	Relationship between National Level and Subnational Levels	0.75	0.25	0.75	0.25	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75

3 The splitting of the Democratic Party in late 2021, took place as the result of events that fall outside of the category of normality.

	Year	1990	1996	1998	1999	2005	2009	2018	2021
Decision-Making	Programmatic Issues	0.33	0.00	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
	Recruitment	0.22	0.11	0.17	0.21	0.25	0.18	0.13	0.12

The Decision-Making process is indicative of the level of party members and subnational units' involvement in the drafting of party manifesto as well as the role that party members and subnational units play in the process of candidate selection for the party and public office and the selection of the party leader. The findings are as follows:

Programmatic Issues: The situation here is similar with that of the Socialist Party. The party members and sub-national units have little say in the preparation of the party manifesto. The party manifesto is 'the official self-positioning of the party' (Budge et al, 2001 in von dem Berge et al, 2013, p.15). Since members play a small role in this regard, we may say that the party is little inclusive of its members in the designing of its political program or platform.

The Recruitment determines what role the members play in the selection of candidates for public and party office as well as in the selection of the party leadership. Table 12 provides a comprehensive overview of the process.

The data show that both Recruitment for National Public Office and Recruitment for National Party Office do not fare well. The members are not included or included very little in the process of candidate nomination and selection for parliament and party organs. This show that the party is not inclusive and is centralized with regard to this category. Voting procedure does not fare well either. It used to have its good times until 2009, especially in terms of the role of subnational unit in selecting the candidates for the party organs. After 2009, the role of the subnational unit has decreased even in this aspect. Likewise, in the case of the SP, we searched the party statutes whether the statutes had stipulation for secret voting when electing the party leadership, and whether they had articles that oblige the party leadership to make available the results of voting to the party members. Another important aspect was to investigate to what degree the sub-national units were

autonomous when electing their candidates for the party and public office. The result was that party leadership controls both processes leaving little autonomy (if any) to the subnational units. This is indicative of a centralized power.

TABLE 12: IPD FOR SUBCATEGORY LEVEL 3 – DEMOCRATIC PARTY

	Year	1990	1996	1998	1999	2005	2009	2018	2021
Recruitment for National Public Office	Candidate Nomination	0.17	0.17	0.17	0	0	0.17	0.17	0.17
	Candidate Selection - Parliament	0.2	0.2	0.25	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.17	0.2
	Role of Subnational Unit	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0
	Mean	0.19	0.19	0.21	0.13	0.13	0.19	0.18	0.12
Recruitment for National Party Office	Election of the national executive	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
	Election of the executive committee	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2	0.14	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2
	Election of the party president	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.4
	Mean	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.18	0.07	0.13	0.13
Procedures	Voting Procedures	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25
	Role of Subnational Unit (public office)	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Role of Subnational Unit (party office)	0.5	0	0.5	1	1	0.5	0	0
	Mean	0.42	0.08	0.25	0.42	0.42	0.25	0.08	0.08

4.2.3 Content Analysis for the Socialist Movement for Integration

The analysis of SMI has less robust evidence compared with other two parties. The author of this research based the analysis on two available statutes: the one of 2012 and the last one which was published onto the SMI's website till the moment the party changed its name to Party of Freedom. However, the differences between the documents have been very few and therefore the categories and sub-categories have the same values as shown in Table 13. The results show that the party fares better and indeed better than the other two parties at the category of members' rights.

TABLE 13: IPD FOR MAIN CATEGORIES – SOCIALIST MOVEMENT FOR INTEGRATION

Year	2012	2020	Year	2012	2020
Members' Rights	0.83	0.83	Intra-Party Democracy	0.47	0.47
Organisational Structure	0.34	0.34			
Decision-making	0.26	0.26			

In terms of the members' rights, the party fares well both in General Member's Rights and in Minority Rights. Indeed, the party statutes recognizes the freedom of opinions and freedom of speech and what is more important the party statute recognizes the existence of fractions within the party. Similarly, the extension of rights to minority groups, such as women and youth, contributes to a good level of party inclusiveness.

In terms of Organisational Structure, SMI fares well at sub-categories of Party Congress, and relationship between National and Subnational Levels and at moderate level at the sub-category of Conflict-Solving Agencies.

Party Congress: The sub-category of Party Congress scores at 0.6, a bit higher than the medium of 0.5. This is an indicator that the Party Congress has power (to a certain degree) to decide about statutory issues, the party program, and the party line. However, this should be analysed in light of other sub-categories.

Conflict-solving Agencies: The value of sub-category Conflict-solving Agencies is at 0.5 which is an indication that members are not treated equally when disputes arise and that are protected moderately from the arbitrary and disciplinary measures exerted by the party leadership.

The National Executive and the Executive Committee: The low figure at zero shows that there are no mechanisms that ensure accountability of these organs. When analysed in conjunction with the:

Party President: which at the figure of 0.17 shows that the Party Leader is really powerful and controls the party, it becomes clear that even though Party Congress does have an important position in the life of the party, it still does not hold accountable neither the Executive, nor the party leader.

Relationship between National and Subnational levels: shows that decentralization in the relationship between the national and the subnational level does occur. The subnational units are mentioned in the statute and do enjoy significant rights on different organizational levels.

TABLE 14: IDP FOR THE SUBCATEGORY LEVEL 2 - SOCIALIST MOVEMENT FOR INTEGRATION

	Year	2012	2020
Members' Rights	General Members' Rights	1	1
	Minority Rights	0.67	0.67
Organisational Structure	Party Congress	0.6	0.6
	Conflict-Solving Agencies	0.5	0.5
	The National Executive	0	0
	The Executive Committee	0	0
	Party President	0.17	0.17
	Relationship between National and Subnational Levels	0.75	0.75
Decision-Making	Programmatic Issues	0.33	0.33
	Recruitment	0.19	0.19

In terms of Programmatic Issues, the SMI has the same result with the SP and the DP. The three parties score 0.33 (with exception of the SP in the statute of 2020 where the value is 0.55), indicating thus a medium involvement of the party members in the preparation of the party manifesto. Medium levels of this sub-category indicate a medium level of centralization.

The Recruitment: the sub-category of recruitment attempts to understand the level of party members' involvement in the nomination and selection of candidates for MP, the election of members for the party National Executive and Executive Committee, and the voting procedures and role of subnational units in the selection process of the party in public and party in office (von dem Berge et al, 2013, pp. 14-15 (see Table 14 below). The results show that rank and file have more rights for the candidates for MP selection process and less for their nomination. In terms of the party leadership election, the members have little (if anything) to say. The values of the subcategories are very small. Furthermore, the subnational unit has no say in the election of their candidates for the party in public and party office. The process of candidate selection in the centre and in the periphery (for the general and local elections) is controlled by the party leadership. This indicative of a centralized party.

TABLE 15: IDP FOR THE SUBCATEGORY LEVEL 3 DECISION-MAKING - SOCIALIST MOVEMENT FOR INTEGRATION

Year	2012	2020		2012	2020
Candidate Nomination	0.33	0.33	Recruitment for National Public Office	0.38	0.38
Candidate Selection - Parliament	0.6	0.6			
Role of Subnational Units	0.2	0.2			
Election of the national executive	0.17	0.17	Recruitment for National Party Office	0.12	0.12
Election of the executive committee	-0.20	-0.20			
Election of the party president	0.4	0.4			

Year	2012	2020		2012	2020
Voting Procedures	0.25	0.25	Procedures	0.08	0.08
Role of Subnational Unit (public office)	0	0			
Role of Subnational Unit (party office)	0	0			

4.3 Conclusion Content Analysis

The IPD index showed that despite the many changes that the party statutes have undergone, there is still a lot to do. While in general parties scored well in terms of membership rights, including minority rights, they had poor result in the decision-making process and organizational structures. Thus, even though members and party officials place a great deal of importance on the organization as a mechanism to ensure the inclusion of members and decentralization of decision-making, in reality and on paper, there is still a lot to do. The measurement of the IPD index is very helpful to the political parties themselves. It shows the categories and subcategories that need to be improved, which is something that everyone will benefit from.

The following tables helps to compare parties with each other and to observe which dimension fares better than the other. In this table, we have extracted the data from the last available statute since recommendations for improvement would start from there. In all the three political parties, decentralization fares better than inclusiveness. All parties have to improve in terms of keeping the executive accountable. Categories which are zero or fall below zero, such as Candidate Nomination (SP), Election of Executive Committee (SP and DP), Executive Committee (which measures the accountability of Executive Committee to the party congress) (for especially DP and SMI) and the role of the subnational unit (for DP and SMI) should be addressed as soon as possible.

TABLE 16: COMPARISON OF INCLUSIVENESS AND DECENTRALIZATION IN THE ALBANIAN POLITICAL PARTIES

Dimension	Sub-Category	SP (2020)	DP (2021)	SMI (2021)
Inclusiveness	General member rights	0.83	0.17	1
	Minority rights	0.33	0.67	0.67
	Party Congress	1	0.4	0.6
	Conflict-Solving Agencies	0.5	0.5	0.5
	The National Executive	0.67	0	0
	The Executive Committee	0	0	0
Inclusiveness	The Party President	0.33	0.33	0.17
	Candidate nomination	-0.33	0.17	0.33
	Candidate Selection for Parliamentary Office	0.2	0.2	0.6
	Election of the National Executive	0	0.2	0
	Election of the Executive Committee	-0.2	-0.2	0
	Election of the Party President	0.4	0.4	0.17
	Voting procedures	0.25	0.25	0.25
	Mean Value Inclusiveness	**0.31**	**0.24**	**0.33**
Decentralization	The Party President	0.4	0.33	0.17
	Relationship between the National Level and National Sublevels	0	0.75	0.75
	Candidate nomination	-0.33	0.17	0.33
	Relationship between the National Level and Subnational levels with regard to Candidate Selection	0.2	0.2	0.6
	Relationship between the National Level and Subnational Levels with regard to Candidate Selection for Subnational Public Office	0.25	0	0

Dime-nsion	Sub-Category	SP (2020)	DP (2021)	SMI (2021)
	Relationship between the National Level and Subnational Levels with regard to Candidate Selection for Subnational Party Office	0.25	0	0
	Programmatic Issues	0.08	0.33	0.33
	Mean Value of Decentralization	**0.12**	**0.25**	**0.31**

4.4 Text Analysis – What Party Members at All Levels Understand with IPD and How They Relate to It in Their Organizational Life

4.4.1 Analysis of Interviews

In this section, the study explores the discourse used by high-ranking party officials in relation to the IDP. First and foremost, IPD is strongly linked with the structure and organization of the party. The party organization is the main mechanism that ensures the inclusion of members in the decision-making process and the decentralization of the decision-making process from the center to the periphery across all party levels. The party organization is imagined as a transmission belt that sends and receives messages, channels opinions, concerns, suggestions, and ideas from rank and file to the party leadership and the other way around, from top to bottom. It is the main channel through which the party leadership collects opinions, ideas and proposals from the members.

At the DP, one of the interviewees linked the poor performance of the party with the weak party institutions. According to the interviewee, there is this huge problem with intra-party democracy and with democracy in general because everything is linked with the party leader. One of the biggest problems of DP during these years that the party has been in opposition, is the weakening of the party institutions. Instead of decentralizing the power between the Party Leader, the Party Convent, the National Council, and the Party Leadership, all power was in the hands of the Party Leader. In a way, this has "killed" the intra-party democracy because it has destroyed all transmission belts in the party organization that is established precisely to decentralize the power at

different levels of the party and to include members in the decision-making process. Every member of Party Leadership, every member of the National Council or of the Party Convent is a representative of a group of party members and when their right to speak and get heard and participate in the decision-making process is hindered, then the will of those who have delegated their power to him/her is neglected and thus intra-party democracy is not functional. The members' vote is the foundation of the intra-party democracy and at the same time is the mechanism that strengthens and makes functional the party institutions. The structure of the organization is of paramount importance. It is the channel that organizes the communication between the different party levels and at the same time is the only mechanism that organizes the management of intra-party conflicts.

Another common pattern for all three political parties was the existence of fractions. In general, fractions were considered good and healthy for the party, because they make sure all voices are heard and those who oppose the rule of the Party Leader are protected. Especially at the DP and SMI, the attitude towards the fractions was very positive. SMI was very proud of the period when it decided to legalize its fraction outside of the SP back in 2003. One of the interviewees considered this as the period when the party was at the peak of IPD. The existence of fractions is stipulated in the party statute since the inception of the party. However, in almost two decades of party life, there have never been any fraction within the party. In the Democratic Party, a part of the interviewees was enthusiastic about the introduction of fractions in the new party statute. The ability to say your opinion and not get punished for this, was considered healthy and of paramount importance to all. However, a part of the DP interviewees commented that fractions should be dealt with very carefully because they could lead to the creation of splinter parties, which could harm the party itself.

Another interviewee commented that IPD was a "luxury commodity" and that the Albanian political parties have never been democratic. The Electoral Code has had its own share in this because it has encouraged authoritarian party leaders, whose aim has been to strengthen their positions and control the party. However, according to the interview, it is more than a matter of the Electoral Code. The recent events, when the former leaders of DP and SMI turned back and regained the leadership of the party, support the thesis that in Albania, parties are considered property of the party leader. In this kind of parties, the difference of opinions is not allowed. If you go against the party leadership, either you leave the party and create a splinter party or you are left out of the

politics. The statute is not sufficient to ensure IPD and create a culture of IPD. It is a façade. Members are ill-used and deceived. Things are said and done on behalf of members, but members' interests have never been in focus. Members are treated as numbers and not as individuals with values and their own contributions to the party. The statute of the party is designed by the party leader in such a way that it would protect the leader in every situation. The recent events at the DP[4] showed that the new party statute is approved in front of mass gatherings (assemblies or congresses) of 3,000-4,000 members who just approve what is read out to them without prior discussions and consultation. The statute is in the hands of the party leader who interprets it as he/she wishes and to his/her benefit. It has been used in internal party conflicts to serve the interests of different loci of power within the party. The intra-party democracy is not a matter of statutes, rules, and procedures, but it is rather a matter of willingness. Only when the political leaders will have the will to change political parties into democratic organizations, only then, internal party democracy will be achieved.

In terms of opportunities for making a career within the party structure, the interviewees agreed that it is possible, but it does not happen often. The composition of the Albanian Parliament with plenty of cases of individuals who do not have the right education, who do not know how to articulate problems and propose solutions, who have been incriminated in various non-legal activities, is an indicator that career progression based on merit and contribution in the party's ranks happens occasionally. However, one interviewee contended that in authoritarian parties, members are annihilated – metaphorically speaking. They do not cultivate leaders and it is not possible to have a political career in the party. If someone is talented and has the guts and energy to become a leader, he/she is crushed and excluded from the party because he/she is perceived as a threat to the party leader.

The interviewees acknowledged the importance of the electoral system and the implications it brings to intra-party democracy, even though not all of them agreed that the electoral system is a determinant in IPD. A part of them opted for a majoritarian electoral system because, the link between the party members and the candidate for MP is stronger. The change of the electoral code from mixed majoritarian to regional proportional has influenced the typology of the candidates for MPs.

4 Referring to the approval of the new Statute of DP in April 2022 from the side of the "Pulpit" of Sali Berisha.

In the mixed majoritarian the candidates were better prepared, were successful in their professions, and had good connections with the party on the ground. The change in the electoral system had implications for the profile of the candidates.[5] The parties now are no longer parties with well-known personalities, but they have turned to leaders' parties. Therefore, the majoritarian system was considered as a very good option. In this system, the party members' opinions and suggestions in a given constituency are important and taken seriously, because the approval of members is crucial to the success of the candidate. For other interviewees, it is not the electoral system but the rules and regulations that the party has, that influence the level of IPD.

The introduction of primaries in the election of all party forums at the DP was seen as a sign of party democratization. Indeed, the interviewees expressed a lot of enthusiasm and saw primaries as sort of panacea that would provide remedies for all the problems that the party has faced so far. They saw primaries as a mechanism that would empower the rank and file and would allow them to nominate the best candidates, the ones they would gladly support. They also saw primaries as a mechanism that had the potential to promote them within the party, should they wish to do so and be able to collect enough support among fellow party members.

The interviewees agreed that maintaining internally democratic parties has its own cost, which at times becomes a burden for the party itself, especially when state subsidies are not sufficient. However, regardless of the financial burden, it was worth preserving the links with the members and through them with the electorate and community at large, because only in this way the party would be close to the needs and concerns of citizens.

Establishing quota for women and youth, such as in the case of SMI, was considered a mechanism for improving the intra-party democracy. For them, the more representative the party forums were, the more democratic the party was.

5 Even though the elections of 2021 were organized under the open list proportional representation electoral system, according to interviewees, the system was not opened but semi-closed or semi-opened, because, with few exceptions, those who were in the safe part of the list were the ones who got elected.

4.4.2 Analysis of Focus Groups – Members' Perceptions of Intra-Party Democracy

The Results of Focus Groups – Socialist Party

The focus group interviewees link IPD with the level of inclusion in the decision-making process, and the ability to speak one's mind and have and exercise one's own rights. Freedom of speech and the right to 'articulate your own opinion' without being penalized, were words mentioned by the participants. When someone is requested after his/her opinion and not penalized for holding different opinions from the leader, this is considered democratic. An environment that allows them (members) to support each other was considered democratic. Democracy is strengthened among people who share the same values. The existence of different opinions is intrinsic to Socialist Party. The right to vote was another concept linked to IPD. Finally, IPD was linked with the possibility to make a career within the party's internal structures.

In terms of the mechanisms foreseen in the party statute, the interviewees mentioned the "one member, one vote" principle. The process is used in all elections taking place in the organization, from the smallest organization unit (Socialist Organization) to the main one for the selection of the party leader, as well as in elections taking place at women's forum. The statute was considered an important document to which they would refer to organize the daily life of the party organization, including the selection of the party leader, the application of a quorum to elect the chair of the party units, and the condition that alternative candidates should compete for every position, so that voting was meaningful. The party hierarchy was deemed essential in preserving IPD within the party. According to focus group participants, the hierarchical structure was helpful to channel members' ideas, concerns, suggestions, proposals, and everything they wanted with regard to the decision-making process in the party. Finally, surveys with party members for different issues are another mechanism that the party leadership uses to collect their opinions to later ensure their support.

The organizational structure was considered important and identified as a very good mechanism to share power from top to bottom and collect ideas from bottom to top. However, the participants from the youth section felt that the lack of a youth forum at the country level has diminished their chances of having their voice heard distinctly. A national organization that collects ideas, suggestions, and proposals from different parts of the country is far more powerful than many youth organizations dispersed all over the territory, which could bring

their voice only to the head of the branch at the regional level, but not further. Some participants also felt that the organization was at times "abused" by powerful delegates who have better links with the MP of the constituency and exercise more influence on him, sidelining thus the other delegates. Therefore, a hierarchical structure, while it was good per se, did not always distribute the power equally from top to bottom.

IPD was also linked with the expertise. The opportunity to bring experts from different fields of public life into the party was considered an integrative approach that made the party more democratic. Voices from the spheres of academia and civil society were considered important and a means to diversify the opinions among rank and file. Furthermore, representatives from civil society or academia could give their contribution to the party without necessarily being party members. Thus, the dividing line between members and sympathizers is to a certain extent blurred, losing thus the power of the simple members. The focus group saw this blurring as a positive thing, because according to them it enlarged the pool of party supporters, attracted expertise from outside the party, and strengthened the link of the party with the electorate at large.

In terms of the role that the statute plays in instilling the spirit of democracy within the party, at times the participants confused it with its role in organizing the life of the party. Even though very insightful to the life of the party, the given examples were not always indicators of IPD. For example, participants brought forward as an example how they have referred to the statute for determining the number of delegates to the party congress.

The procedure of selection of candidates for MPs is very often analysed to understand the power of the rank and file vis-a-vis top-level management. When asked whether they were asked about this, the responses were mixed. Some contended that the list is designed in line with the proposals and agreement of the members at the base. In general, the proposed candidates were individuals who had solid political careers and thus were well-known and supported by the people on the ground. Referring to the proportional electoral system, the participants claimed that the ranking of the candidates in the list was not important, because in the end only those who had the support of the party members were elected. The example of the 34th in the list

of Tirana[6] in the general elections of 2021 was brought to illustrate the argument. Even though almost at the end line of the candidate list, the candidate still managed to get elected due to the high number of the votes received, which is made possible under an open proportional regional electoral system. According to the interviewees, those who were elected managed to do so, because they have performed successfully.

However, some participants felt that they were not consulted with on the composition of the list of candidates for MPs. The youngsters felt especially excluded from this process. They felt that for a party to be democratic, it is necessary to allow all voices to be heard and similar practices used with women should also be used with the youth. They felt that they could give a better contribution to the party if allowed to advance to its higher echelons. The youth were not happy with the level of representation in the parliament and felt that it could have been better. A good representation of the youth at the local level came as a result of SP having the possibility to compile long lists of council advisers due to the lack of participation of opposition parties in elections, which gave SP the possibility to fill all municipality councils' seats with SP members.

Focus group participants referred to the initiative "The MP We Want"[7] as a tool to collect opinions from the base of the party. This was interpreted as a sign of a high level of IPD within the party. The digital platform was mentioned as another mechanism that the party uses to collect opinions from the base and strengthen the voices and role of rank and file. Nonetheless, the participants agreed that the final list of candidates for MPs is the result of the proposals from the ground, but at the same time, the leader(s) of the party has the final say. Since they are elected by the party members, they have also the right to take decisions.

The participants recognized that some of the candidates for MPs were not members of the party but were high-profile people coming from other spheres of public life such as academia or civil society. They considered this a sign of the party's openness, because in this way

6 Ornaldo Rakipi got 15,697 votes, ranking second in the list of Tirana for the number of votes received. Even though originally he was the 34th in the list of Tirana candidates for MP, the result allowed him to be part of the winning list.

7 In October 2020, the Chair of the Socialist Party, Edi Rama launched the initiative "The MP we want", which was an invitation to everyone that wanted to test him/herself in the difficult domain of politics and advance his or her candidacy for the general elections of 2021 under the ticket of SP.

the party was able to widen the 'recruitment' pool and strengthen its ties with the electorate and society at large. While acknowledging the importance of career advancement within the party structures, they also deemed as necessary to bring to the party newcomers, people with expertise in different fields of public life, who have never been part of SP, because only in this way the party would attract experts, people with the contribution in the community, and strengthen its ties with the society.

In terms of channels used to understand the opinions, thoughts, ideas, and proposals from rank and file, in addition to the mechanisms mentioned above (digital platform, "the MP we want") the party organizes hearings, frequent meetings with members in the SOs (Socialist Organizations). The structures of the party operate as a transmission chain that transmit the message bottom-up. The rank and file are consulted with either for organizational purposes and/or policy and strategy-wise. The smallest units serve also to link society with the party. Living with people in their everyday life offers the opportunity to understand their problems and transmit these problems to higher levels of party organization for identifying the right solution. This was done in a periodic way, thus bridging the community with mid and top-level management of the party.

Regarding the question of whether it was worth spending a part of their time volunteering for the party, participants commented that they have done it willingly and deemed it necessary. The members expressed that regardless of the financial cost that party life demanded, it was worth it to 'invest' on it.

The focus groups' participants felt they could have a career with the organizational structure of the party, which was considered a sign of IPD. Women also felt they could have a career and get promoted within the party, and this too was considered an indication of IPD. Quotas for women have made it easier for them to get included in the decision-making process of the party. The statute stipulates that each organizational unit of the party should be headed by a man and a woman. This empowers women and increases their chances to move upward in the higher echelons of the party. The young socialists felt that it was possible to make a career even though they were not happy with those 'catapulted' from outside of the party, with those who have received good positions in the party and government, without having worked for the party.

In terms of decision-making, participants agreed that IPD was not necessarily the ultimate good. In times of emergency, the party leaders, elected by the membership, had the authority to take decisions without consulting with the rank and file. This was especially true for the nomination of heads of unit organizations, which were left vacant and there was no time to organize re-elections, especially at times of general or local elections where party efforts are focused on the electoral campaign and it is preferred to concentrate all efforts working with the community for the best possible election result.

Primaries were seen by some of the interviewees as a democratic mechanism that strengthened the role of rank and file. However, some felt that primaries could increase the power of the leader to the detriment of the mid-level managers. This is in line with what Katz and Mair (1995) have pointed out that more rights allocated to members means more autonomy for the party leaders, especially from the party's middle ranks.

Fractions within the party were not seen as something positive. The interviewees had it very clear that the existence of fractions is an indication of IPD and that people should have the freedom of opinion and should not get penalized for this should their opinion go against that of the party leader. However, fractions were not considered good, but rather damaging to the party. It was commented that the fraction goes against what is stipulated in the party statute. To illustrate this, they brought the example of SMI, which was established as a splinter party from SP. However, when expressing their opinions on the fractions and different opinions within the party, the participants felt the need to add the adjective "good". Thus, they were talking about "good fractions" or "good different opinions", without clearly specifying how was to be judged on the 'goodness' or not of the said different opinions. The interviewees mentioned very vague criteria, such as "an opinion which has solid support and is well constructed", but these are not clear criteria, since it falls to the party leader to establish whether an argument has solid evidence and is well constructed. When speaking about 'good fractions', participants commented that somehow people understand when it has good or bad intentions. When the fraction or the critique is not addressed against the Prime Minister, or a particular minister but is focused on a specific problem then this is considered a good fraction. Someone who criticizes but remains in the party was considered better than someone who leaves the party to criticize because the motives for criticizing might be related to personal problems with the party leadership and not real and genuine concern for it.

There were participants who contended that if democracy is good at the macro level, then it should be good at the micro level as well. Thus, a party should be internally democratic. According to them, even in the smallest group, it is not possible that everybody has the same opinion. Therefore, in a large party, such as SP, it is true that people have different opinions and, as such, they should be free to express them. Some participants felt that the party has not dealt well with the fractions within the party. Whenever someone has gone against the will of the party leader, he/she has been sidelined. That was replicated at the lower echelons of the party where there have been cases where if someone has expressed a different opinion from the head of the section/organization/cell, he or she has been expulsed from the meeting. The participants were very careful when commented on the fractions. They kept the discussion at the superficial level, speaking mainly hypothetically, but refused to give opinions on concrete events.

For some of the participants, the size of the party had its implications on the level of IPD. Some argued that the implications were positive and some that they were negative. The big size was seen as an indicator of the openness of the party. The bigger the party, the larger the pool of opinions it has, and thus the more democratic it becomes. However, other participants commented that the size is important: in small parties, members have better access to party leadership, and the larger the party becomes, the more it adds hierarchical levels between the simple members and party leadership. However, they deemed it necessary, because the management of a big party requires more effort and more people than a small party. Irrespective of this, they made sure to confirm that were confident that even though the structure of the party was complex with many intermediate managers, their voices were still heard and their ideas were transmitted to the top echelons of the party structure.

The electoral system was seen as a factor that influences the IPD. The interviewees felt that their role was enhanced in the last elections. Voting for open lists candidates gave more power to the party members and, thus, the party leadership was forced to consult the rank and file and ensure their loyalty and support during elections. The members on their side felt they had more freedom to choose among the party candidates for MPs. Regardless of the support for the mechanisms used by the party to nominate candidates and their ranking in the party lists, they still articulated the concern that the process was not completely open. The fact that those who were placed in the top part of the list were elected was considered an indicator that the lists were semi-open and

not completely open, which has ultimately reduced their power. While it may look contradictory, it is a result of the dynamics of the focus group where everyone, in addition to expressing his or her opinion, checked also the answers of the others, to make sure that party is exposed in a good light. Thus, complaints were left 'orphaned' and without further explanation.

A part of the interviewees did not link being a party in opposition or a party in public office with the level of IPD. The party was democratic in both cases: elections within the party were organized in the same way and voices and opinions were heard with the same attention. However, some focus group participants felt that the voice of the simple members was heard more when the party was in opposition. According to them, when a party is in opposition, the level of solidarity among party members is higher and the party leadership pays more attention to its members.

The Results of Focus Groups – Democratic Party

The focus group interviewees consider a party to be internally democratic when it offers a space to generate ideas even when they oppose each other, to make critiques, to provide a space that stimulates different ideas and opinions and when decision-making is transparent. For them, an internally democratic party provides opportunities for women and young people to have a strong voice in the decision-making process and have a good share in the party leadership. They expressed their opinion that the party displays its democratic features when offering the opportunity to elect and be elected, when applying the principle of "one member, one vote", and when members offer support to each other. They considered that a party was a place where members have the freedom of expression and respect each-others' opinions, where the promotion of the people is merit-based, and voting for party leadership is free and independent.[8]

The organizational structure was seen as a mechanism that helps to ensure the party's democracy. They imagine the party as a pyramid where the decision-making process involves the whole of it and is distributed along all pyramid's levels. For them, it was not permissible that decisions were taken without consulting the membership at the

8 This is their understanding of IDP and not of the IDP in the Democratic Party.

ground level. The party statute was considered a very good mechanism that allowed for the integration of all party levels in the decision-making process and great attention should be given to its application. The statute was considered the Constitution of the party.

The opportunity to make a career within the organizational structure of the party was also seen as a sign of the party's internal democracy. While they considered the party democratic, they agreed that their involvement in the party's activities was not at the best and less when compared with the other main political parties in Albania. The interviewees expressed the concern that members do not always know their rights and responsibilities and even when different opinions were expressed in the party meetings, that was more the result of lobbying and belonging to different "clans" within the party rather than the expression of personal ideas and stances. They deemed it necessary that members should be educated, so they can refer to the party statute for the organization and implementation of the party's activities. Nonetheless, they expressed optimism that things would get better, because the primaries were introduced in the party statute and that was considered a very good sign for the intra-party democracy and for the party itself.

When asked whether they know the statute of the party, they said that they know it and have voted for its changes, whenever they have taken place. The statute in general does not change much. According to the focus group participants, about 90% of it remains the same and new improvements are introduced each time. Participants expressed the concern that the statute was not always put in practice. For example, even though the statute foresees that women should have 30% of the party leadership positions, this has not happened yet.

The interviewed referred very often to the organization of primaries as a very good mechanism stipulated in the new party statute to guarantee intra-party democracy. The right to propose candidates for MPs was considered an indicator of the highest level of party democracy. Other changes introduced included the election of the party chair, secretaries of the party's branches, the increased number of secretariats, which aim at increasing the members' role in the organization and functioning of the party. Nonetheless, they have emphasized that the former statute was not bad. A lot of good things were written there, but they were not implemented. One of the interviewees commented: "In Albania, it is a matter of will. The principles are universal. They are not invented by us. The election of the structures, of delegates, "one member, one vote" voting system...it was all there, in the Statute. But it was a matter of will

to implement it". According to them, the former statute has stipulated many things to guarantee the party democracy, such as "one member, one vote" and the application of the principle of merit-based promotion, but they were not applied. The recent elections for the National Council in June 2021, after the loss of the general elections, were a charade. Lists and everything else were prepared beforehand and the members did not have a say in that.

When asked whether they have ever referred to the statute to solve internal conflicts, they commented that in general conflicts and disagreements were solved with understanding among members and it has not been necessary to refer to the statute. However, for the daily party activities and other important processes, they have often referred to it, so that they could understand how activities and events needed to get organized. They have admitted, though, that they have referred mostly to the statute when the issues of concern were at the local level rather than at the party in the center.

The interviewees emphasized continuously the difference before and after the party elections of 25th April 2022.[9] The last elections gave more power to the rank and file. In the past, members were asked about their opinion, but in the end, it did not matter, because decision-making was not based on this opinion. They stressed the importance of primaries as a novelty that would strengthen intra-party democracy. The refreshing of membership cards was also considered as a mechanism to strengthen the links of the party in the center with that on the ground. Another novelty of the new statute[10] is the election of the head of the branch applying the "one member, one vote" principle.

When asked if they were consulted with about the preparation of the candidates for MPs, the focus group interviewees responded that the preparation of the lists has been a three-step process. In the first phase, local branches proposed the names of the candidates. In the second phase, a commission filtered the proposed candidates and prepared the

9 The focus groups took place in the premises of the Democratic Party which was under the control of the 'Pulpit' group of DP (Sali Berisha). Hence, the participants were almost unanimously critical to the period that the party was led by Lulzim Basha.

10 The participants referred to the new statute approved in the Convent of April 2022. However, the new statute was not yet finalized when the focus groups convened and even later. The members knew about the primaries and all other points related to IPD from the discussions in media and party meetings as well as because the statute was read out to DP members that attended the Convent

shortlists, which were then brought again to the members who voted for the least preferred candidate. This caused problems, because there have been a lot of cases when those who voted had misunderstood the process, by voting for their preferred candidate. Therefore, the focus group expressed the idea that to have intra-party democracy, the rules which give power to the members should also be easy to understand and implement. In the end, the proposals of the rank and file were not taken into consideration. They contended that they had a process, but in the end, their proposals were not taken into account.

When asked whether they have been able to influence the composition and raking of the candidates for MPs in the party lists, the interviewees responded that even though they were asked, still the final lists have been a surprise to them as well, which meant that rank and file did not have a much say in that process, despite rules and regulations stipulated in the statute of the party. The process was described as a farse, as a show. The members' role has been not pivotal even when selecting the head of the branch. There have been times when the head of the branch was elected without proper competition, being the only candidate. This was emphasized as something that has severely affected the intra-party democracy.

During the discussions, the interviewees referred also to the mechanisms used by the party to collect their opinions. Regardless of whether their ideas and suggestions have been taken into consideration, the mechanisms have been there and even used. In addition to the transmission of ideas and opinions through the party structure chain, the party has had various departments, each of which focussed on specific issues, such as the economy and finance, social matters, health, and the like. This configuration was similar in the central office and the local branches. Surveys, round tables, and meetings with excellent students, interest groups, and vulnerable communities were other party mechanisms to collect the opinion and suggestions of the party members and the community at large. However, these meetings were more frequent at times of elections and were not permanent mechanisms. The interviewees contended that if such meetings had been made regularly, the party would have won the elections, because it would have known better what the people want.

The opportunity to make a career within party structures was considered an indicator of intra-party democracy. There have been plenty of people who have made it to the top ranks of the party because of their contribution and dedication. The introduction of primaries was

considered as something that would enhance this process, by increasing the opportunities for people to get elected from rank and file and not in an arbitrary way from the parti leader.

Focus groups participants expressed the idea that it was easier to express freely their ideas in the party branches than in the center. Thus, the party was more democratic in the base than in the center. Especially, women forum participants emphasized that the forum is more democratic than the party itself and has supported them more than the central office.

Participants deemed intra- party democracy as very important and should be pursued at any cost. The election results showed that if the rank and file are not consulted then it is difficult to win the elections, especially when the party in public office has manipulated the elections to its advantage. According to them, the party does not need mere militants; rather, it needs to channel its human resources so that the best could be taken from everyone. The interviewees contended that even in times of emergencies the intra- party democracy should not be sidelined. The quality of decision-making was more important than the apparent emergency of the situation. The last events have shown this.[11] Members have shown willingness to participate in party meetings even when they were held at 10 pm. Thus, emergency does not justify skipping steps foreseen in the party statute for the decision-making process.

In terms of fractions, in focus group participants' understanding, fractions should not be understood as antagonistic groups, but as groups that hold different opinions. Factions were a good thing, because they reflect the different opinions running in the party and these opinions should be heard and respected. The new statute acknowledged the creation of new fractions within the party and that to have a fraction in the party, the group should be composed of at least 15 persons.

The financial expenses for ensuring intra-party democracy were deemed necessary. Regardless of the costs necessary to carry on all the necessary procedures mentioned in the statute of the party and the application of other mechanisms to collect the opinions from the base, as mentioned above, the internal party democracy was more important than these costs. One of the participants commented: "The most

11 Participants used frequently the phrase 'last events' referring to the split of the party in two parts in 2021, after the loss of the elections.

important aspect of the internal party democracy is the right to decision-making. Regardless of how costly it might be, this point is very important. The party needs to keep its members close." In addition, participants mentioned that it was worthy to give their own time to ensure the democracy of the party.

The Results Focus Groups – Socialist Movement for Integration

When questioned about what meanings they attach to the concept of internal party democracy, the members linked it with concepts such as "one member, one vote", active participation in the development of key party documents, such as the statute or the election programs, freedom of the party members, even in the smallest cells, to express their thoughts and ideas and freedom to debate on different important party issues being those related to the party program or party strategy. The party was envisaged as an organization of people who approve a set of rules (the statute of the party) based on which the party runs its daily activities. The better these rules are abided by, the better organized the party is and the more accountable the party members are. Following the rules established in the party statute was strongly linked with the core of party democracy. Members felt that only when everyone, from rank and file to the highest echelons of party organization, is clear about his/her duties the party could be internally democratic. The party elections of 2015 organized under the principle of "one member, one vote" where the ballot was cast electronically, was particularly praised and seen as an expression of intra-party democracy. The elections of 2020 held during the pandemic were also praised: they were also conducted electronically and anonymously to ensure the legitimacy of the elected organs. Even though held in difficult times, they were deemed necessary and were organized in line with the rules and regulations of the party statute.

Participants from the women's forum linked intra-party democracy with the support that members should provide to each other to ensure an all-encompassing of everyone. According to them, a democratic party is vital for the democracy of the country. In a democratic party, members feel appreciated, compete for the various posts within the organization, and put forward their candidacy for local and general elections.

Party size was also brought as a factor that influence the level of intra-party democracy. Since the size of the party was small, at least compared with SP and DP, rank and file and party leaders have a close connection and very good communication with each other which allows for freedom

of expression and openness. Hierarchy and bureaucracy are not well-established and simple members could easily communicate with the head of the party. However, participants stressed the importance of the rules for everybody. When the statute is abided by, then the size does not matter, because intra-party democracy could exist only when rules are respected and followed by everybody in the party. The right to elect and get elected in various positions within the party was also seen as an expression of intra-party democracy.[12]

All interviewees referred to the statute of the party, revealing thus that they knew and acknowledged it. The statute was very often referred to throughout the discussion as a point of departure and arrival for all decisions taken within the party. The statute of the party has remained almost the same since its drafting in 2003, with few changes.

When asked about the mechanism foreseen to install and preserve the spirit of democracy in the party management, interviewees referred to the "one member, one vote' principle, established quotes for the youth and women[13], and the right to express freely their opinion even when this opinion contradicts the positioning of the party leadership, the right to choose the delegates to the convention, to elect the head of the sections, and the right to be part of the party structures. The structure and organization of the party and forums were perceived as a mechanism that ensure its internal democracy. The distribution of power among the party leader, vice leader, deputy leaders, secretaries responsible for different fields, the National Executive Committee, the Party Convent, and even party branches and sub-branches, ensures that everybody's voice is heard. The selection of the delegates for the party convent is organized at the local level. The National Executive Committee is elected by the delegates under the principle of 'one member, one vote'. The interviewees were well aware that party decisions were to be taken in collegially and that the existence of the fractions was sanctioned in the party documents. The collegiality in the decision-making process and the stipulation for the right of fractions and expression of different opinions were considered other indicators of party democracy.

12 Focus group participants spoke in general terms at theoretical level. They became concrete only when they described personal experiences.

13 The focus groups emphasized that women comprise 50% of the party lists for general elections.

The interviews contended that they were asked and they have proposed those who represent the party structures in the National Executive Committee and that actually their proposals were taken into account and that was true for the women's organization as well.

In terms of the process of candidates' selection for MPs, the interviewees agree that even though they were asked and consulted with about the final list, their proposal in terms of candidates ranking in the party lists, was not always taken into account due to the limited number of those who would get elected. The party leadership has an important say in the preparation of the candidates' lists. Nonetheless, the liberty of the party leadership is not limitless and influences to a certain degree only the ranking of the candidates and not the full composition of the list. Therefore, the opinion of party members on the ground is important since the candidates for MP need the party members at all party levels to organize the electoral campaign. The preparation of the list is finalized after discussions between the rank and file and the party leadership.

Occasionally, the focus group participants expressed their opinion that at times of necessity, when decisions were to be taken in an emergency, the party leadership should decide without first consulting the necessary party structures. However, except for the 'burning of the mandates' in 2019, the leadership has followed the rules stipulated in the party statute in terms of consultation and decision-making. The change of the name from the Socialist Movement for Integration to the Party of Freedom was approved during the party convention with the agreement of all delegates present in the convent.

Since SMI inception, its statute stipulated the formalization of fractions. The interviewees acknowledged that the existence of fractions within a party is one of the best indicators to show that a party is internally democratic and to validate this statement they brought as an example the fact that LSI was born as a fraction of SP. They brought again the argument of the size when commented that in small parties the fractions are healthier than in big parties. Against all good judgement, the lack of fractions within the party for them was interpreted as an indicator that showed how democratic their party was. Due to the possibility to freely express their opinions, members did not feel the need to form fractions. The article of the statute that legitimizes the existence of fractions was considered a very good mechanism to ensure party democracy. The knowledge that having different opinions from the party leadership would not penalize those who held such opinions has freed people from the fear of expressing out loud their opinions. Thus,

it was given as an example the fact that the MPs that were against the withdrawal of the mandates, were not penalized and expulsed from the party. Nonetheless, they all agreed that fractions should have some limits and should be managed carefully, because it could lead to the detriment of the party itself. The minorities in a party should fight to become majorities. Finally, they concluded that fractions are good when they do not divide the party, but serve as catalysers to bring new ideas to the party. There was also some foreboding for the near future. Due to changes in the leadership and the party name, the idea of friction between the old entourage and the new one could bring fractions to the party. However, it was hypothetical and at the time of this writing, nothing has happened yet.

The interviewees denied abusing the statute for personal benefits. According to them, the statute was not used and abused in the internal battles for power within the party. Indeed, according to them, such battles have never happened, because the party has always functioned democratically, thus not leaving space for them. Since the victory goes to the one who is voted the most, as the statute itself stipulates, the rules were clear and no place for internal conflicts was left. The 'one member, one vote' voting has eliminated the backstage battles for power within the party.

The theme of the 'statute' implementation was repeated again and again throughout the discussion to make it clear that its existence was a very good mechanism to allow for the democratic functioning of a party.

The interviewees were divided in their opinion on whether the party was more democratic when in office or opposition. While, it is a claim that opposition parties tend to be more democratic, and that was true for SMI, the other claim was that the intraparty democracy was not impacted by this. SMI has been equally democratic in power and opposition.

According to the focus group interviewees, the channels of communication between rank and file and the party leadership have been always open. Platforms and strategies are discussed in groups with party members and interest groups. Tours are organized throughout the country to meet all party structures and collect ideas and opinions from them.

An indicator of the internal party democracy has identified the opportunity to make a political career within the party structures. The Youth Forum members emphasized the article of the statute which stipulates that 30% of the party leadership should be composed of

people coming from the party's Youth Forum. They brought as an example of Kejdi Mehmetaj, the youngest MP ever elected in the elections of 2013. The opportunity of making a political career within the internal structures of the party was considered an indicator of internal party democracy, because it showed that people could enter the party as simple members, but through their contribution to the party structures they could advance in the higher echelons, which shows that the party can retain its members and reward them for their contribution and, at the same time, it shows that the party structures in the ground can promote individuals out of their merit.

They all agreed that, notwithstanding the high financial burden the party has to carry to ensure intra-party democracy, it was still worthy "to pay this burden". They brought forward the example of not taking part in the local elections of 2017. Being in coalition with DP, the party followed in the same steps. However, the decision might have been different had the party leadership consulted with the rank and file. Intra-party democracy had to be ensured always. The party has an office in the capital city and branch offices in all cities. These offices are at the members' service to organize their meetings. In addition to this, members were willing to contribute financially to the running costs of the party. Of course, they acknowledged that perhaps more offices were necessary. However, offices in electoral units, for example in Tirana, open only during the electoral campaign, because it is otherwise impossible to pay the rent in the period in between elections. They were aware that the more democratic a party is, the more meetings it has to hold and the more space it needs to have. In addition, one should consider the time of people coming to the meetings as additional costs. Nonetheless, people were committed to bearing the financial burden, even though there have been cases when members had offered spaces owned by them as offices for the party, without taking any money in return.

The interviewees were divided on the role of the electoral system on the level of party democracy. Some did not consider the electoral system as a factor that influences intra-party democracy. Since party leadership has always consulted rank and file about the composition of the lists, it was not important whether the lists were open or closed. However, others contended that if lists are open, as was the case in the last elections, the party will be more careful in preparing the lists, so that it could maximize its votes. According to them, open lists make the party more democratic. However, they agreed that it was a bit early to talk about the last electoral system –open list regional proportional– because only now they have understood its implications.

Finally, the participants added that it is a bit difficult to discern a pattern in the implications of the electoral system since other factors, such as vote manipulation, patronage, and fraud, have influenced the final election result. Thus, it is difficult to evaluate the role of the electoral system. In terms of the current Electoral Code, they considered it as a system that encourages intra-party democracy, but strongly opposed the format of the ballot paper. They deemed it necessary that the ballot paper should have names and not numbers so that people know for whom they are voting. Placing numbers instead of names has caused many lost votes since voters have confused the number of the party with that of the candidate.

4.5 Conclusions of Focus Groups and Interviews

In terms of the common points, participants linked system-level democracy with IPD, which means that if democracy at the system level is to be successful, this will happen only and for as long as the very organizations which institutionalize democracy, thus the political parties, are internally democratic. What is of paramount importance is that party members had a very clear idea of what IPD is. They were able to provide clear definitions and illustrate it with examples. In general, there was a congruence between the narratives of party officials with the narratives of focus group members. They all considered IPD as very important and worthy to invest money and time to preserve it. This was especially prominent at the DP, which is a reflection of the events happening in the last two years, after the loss of the 2021 general elections.

The structure and organization of the party was important to all participants. It was perceived as the main instrument to preserve the strength of the party and at the same time to include participants in the decision-making process. The many changes in the party statutes have reflected the importance that documents have in party life. The many references that participants made to the party statutes also confirm the role of the statute as an educational tool for party members to get accustomed with the rules and regulations of the party and get integrated within its internal structure.

During interviews, it was made evident that participants were clear about the different nature of electoral competition in the two different arenas it takes place. They knew that the rules of the game within the party are different from the rules of the game at the system level. That was especially true for the two opposition parties. They wanted better

chances and better competition at the outside arena, and more solidarity within the party. Finally, the participant saw the party as an organization where they could have a career, which is very much in line with the principles of an internally democratic party, a party where people could get promoted because of their contribution. However, parties have also their specificities which need to be addressed separately.

4.5.1 The Socialist Party

What distinguished SP from the other parties was the unclear situation of the Youth Forum at country level. As one of the focus group members commented: "It has been dissolved four times so far." The forum's activities are confined within the administrative borders of the regions. There is a lack of a center that oversees, coordinates, and manages the activities of the youth forum at country level. In any political party, the youth forum is considered as a very important channel of candidate selection and a bridge that links the party with the youth. As already mentioned earlier, and emphasized by all scholars, a party cannot be democratic unless it is inclusive of the population it represents. The candidates sent to parliament should include a cross-section of society, but under the current situation the youth section lacks the mechanism to advance its interests at the party in the center in a coordinated way. Youth forum representatives pointed out, and this also is in line with what evidence and best practices suggest, that they need to be organized at the national level. All internal debates that spurred from the youth forum at local level remain confined within the borders of the locality. They are dealt with within the local branch, hindering thus a process that would help the youth in the Socialist Party to come up with distinctive opinions, ideas and platforms at the country level and challenge the status quo. If organized at the national level, the youth forum would have a stronger and more distinctive voice in the formulation of party's policies and strategies. Furthermore, the strengthening of the youth forum would improve the internal debates within the party, making it more democratic.

The second recommendation is linked with the formulation of party's policy. The focus groups revealed that the party members had high concern for the community. However, this was not done in the framework of formulating a coherent party policy that addresses community problems. Party members pursued an ad hoc approach that dealt with the community problems whenever they emerged. The understanding of party members in the formulation of the party's

policy and strengthening the party links with the community was that of the solving problems of community if and whenever they appeared. However, it is recommended that SP develop an internal policy development process to ensure the active involvement of its members and supporters and their views into coherent policy documents and platforms. Members should 'have a say' in the development of party policy. It is true that the size of the party makes it difficult to apply direct membership participation in the policy formulation process. However, other forms, such as representative, delegate or even consultative, could and should be explored. Members should be part of the policy formulation process. In this way, they have more knowledge on party's orientation, which in turns contributes to an improved level of accountability and transparency from the side of party's leadership.

Finally, the establishment of a policy formulation process is important also to "protect" members from manipulation strategies from the center. Participants could not tell the difference between consultation and manipulation. They offered cases when party leadership used party local branch meetings to understand the opinions of the members on different matters, especially coalition formation, and then steered strategies to convince party members to align with the party leadership strategy. Participants brought this as an example of consultation, without being able to distinguish between consultation, problem framing and manipulation.

4.5.2 The Democratic Party

The main challenge of the DP is its internal division into two warring camps that compete for the control of the party. None of the parts fully control the parliamentary group or the members. Despite the deep division that took place in late 2021 and early 2022, the members were committed to achieve the unity of the party. They deemed the whole process to be important, because it has re-vigored the discussions within the party. The IPD has become the hallmark of the party and all the battles fought in the last two years were made in its name. Members accepted that rules were at place, but the latter were deficiently followed. Thus, the party on the ground has not been consulted on party matters, candidate selections, party strategy and policy formulation. Even in terms of party documents, the DP had lower levels of IPD compared to the other two parties. This was also confirmed by the focus groups.

However, the party has an organizational structure which exists and is functional. While members were voicing 'one member, one vote' as the solution to the perceived lack of democracy within the party, such solution should be taken carefully.

'One member, one vote' is a sort of plebiscitary intra-party decision-making process. Assembly-based and plebiscitary intra-party decision-making are two distinct types of IPD. The two could and should co-exist together. One should not be given more importance than the other, because an increased involvement of party members through direct voting could harm the assembly-based decision-making process, where ideas and opinions are discussed more thoroughly and all voices are heard. An increase in direct voting does not necessarily increase IPD, if and when it undermines the role of the middle-rank party officers and other party structures. In order to have an improved level of IPD, both types of decision-making processes should coexist. Therefore, in these moments of crises, while introducing and applying plebiscitary models of decision-making, the party should also invest on strengthening party structures and the application of internal rules and regulations as stipulated by the statute. The DP is a large-sized party. It cannot 'put all the eggs of IPD' in the basket of 'one member, one vote'.

4.5.3 The Socialist Movement for Integration

The SMI is the smallest party among the three main political parties in Albania. The size of the party has its own advantages and disadvantages in terms of IPD. The party has been very keen to adopt 'one member, one vote' practices, but this has worked to the detriment of the power of the middle-ranked officers. Being a small party, or a 'as a family'[14] party, where everybody feels comfortable establishing direct links with party leadership, diminishes the power of the middle-ranked party leaders, and concentrates it in the hands of one or few party members in leadership positions. The decentralization of power is one of the key parameters of IPD. When this lacks, when power goes from bottom to top and from top to bottom without intermediary bodies, it strengthens the position of the one at the top. Direct linking of party leadership

14 The party is run by a family: husband and wife. However, even though this is a distinctive feature of the party, the participants considered the party as a family and their fellow party members as members of their family. It was an expression that came out very often.

with party members confers an enhanced sense of legitimacy on party leaders who have strengthened their autonomy to steer policy and design strategies.

Policy-wise, the SMI had the same approach of the SP. Policy was linked with reporting and solving problems of community, but nothing beyond that.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study was an attempt to measure the level of IPD in the Albanian political parties and to explore the meaning that members and party officials attach to it. For doing so, the author has conducted content analysis of party statutes, focus groups with party members and interviews with high-ranking officials. The results are discussed at length in the section of analysis, however it is important to emphasize that the research serves two purposes.

First, it maps the situation of IPD in the Albanian political parties, in the past and at the present, which was one of the objectives of the research and helps to shed light on the internal life of political parties. Second it provides a measurable instrument to political parties which could help them (should they wish to do so) to improve the level of IPD by investing more in those dimensions where they perform not well. Thus, the study reveals that parties need to make the party leader and the party executive more accountable to party members and party congress/ convent. Decentralization of decision-making could be achieved by extending more rights to subnational offices and bringing members into this process. The content analysis results were in line with the results of the interviews and focus groups. Members are not sufficiently involved in the procedure of candidate nominations for MPs, in the election of the National Executive and Executive Committee and in the election of the Party President, even though members wanted to be involved. Procedures need to get improved in order to allow members to express their opinions, ideas and will in the matters of party life, be it a policy position or candidate nomination for MP or party executive.

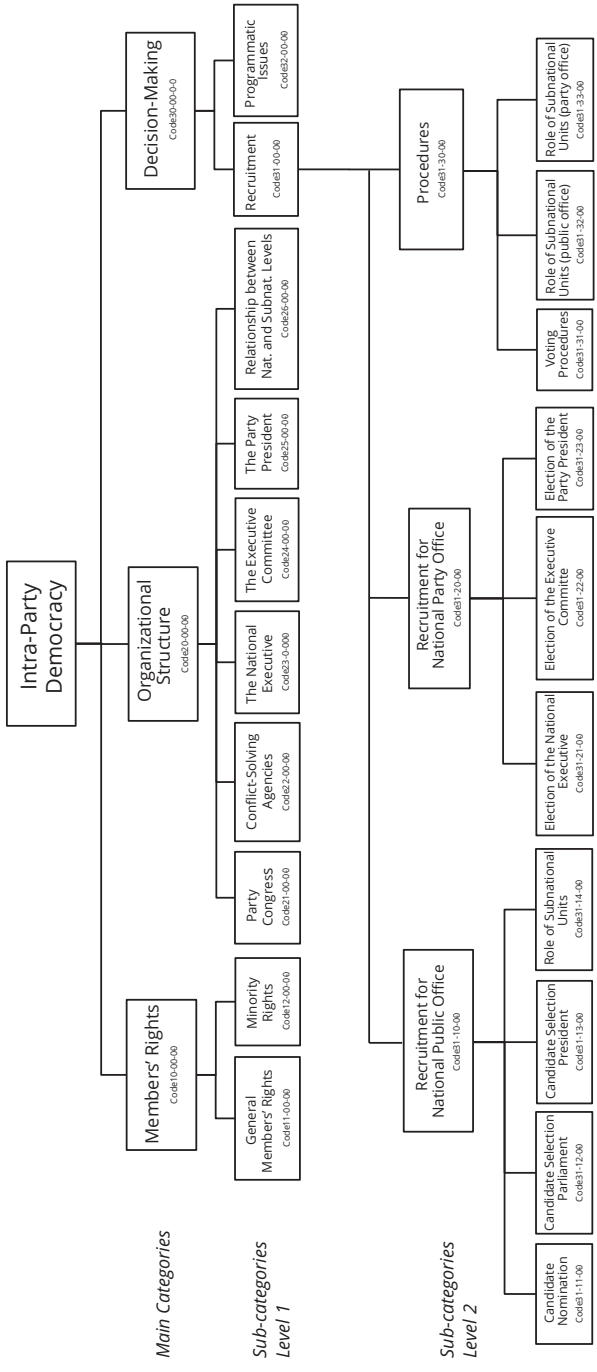
The lack of legalized fractions in the real life within the parties shows that IPD still suffers in the Albanian political parties. Even when, like in the case of SMI, that in her statutes recognizes the existence of fractions, the lack of an actual fraction indicates that freedom of opinion is not something that is tolerated, at least not in the higher echelons of the party. Different opinions should co-exist within party structures. Those who represent fractions should not get punished and expulsed from the party. IPD cannot be measured with opposition voices in the rank and file, but with the number and strength of fractions in the higher echelons of party organization. The logic of the party as an organization

is to assure cohesion and act as a single body in the political arena. The logic of IPD is to make known the different opinions within the party. A successful party is one that accommodates the different opinions within itself and yet manages to work efficiently in the public political arena.

The study doesn't pretend to be exhaustive in the field of IPD in Albania, however, the data gathered could be used by researchers in the field and foremost by political parties which want to bring members into the decision-making process. In doing so political parties will establish healthier links with the electorate and become accountable to their members and the electorate.

ANNEXES

Annex 1. Diagram of Intra-Party Democracy



Annex 2: Structure of the categories, subcategories and questions for each of them.

Main Category 1: Members' rights (10-00-0-0)

1.1 General members' rights (11-00-0-0)

• Are the principles of intra-party democracy explicitly mentioned in the statute?

• Are party members' rights explicitly mentioned in the statute?

According to the statute, do party members explicitly have the following rights: –

...To be informed about party activities?

...To express a divergent opinion within the party and/or in public?

...To participate in party decision-making?

...To form factions within the party?

1.2 Minority rights (12-00-0-0)

• Is there an explicit reference to minorities in the statute?

• Are there any quotas explicitly mentioned in the statute with respect to minorities?

−Is it explicitly mentioned, that the quotas are binding?

−Does the statute explicitly mention minority quotas in party organs?

- Does the statute explicitly mention minority quotas in the party lists for public office?

• Do certain members (i.e. representatives) of the minority groups automatically become members of the party executive?

Mani Category 2: Organizational structure (20-00-0-0)

2.1 Party congress (21-00-0-0)

• Is the existence of a party congress or equivalent mentioned in the statute?

−Does the party congress play a role in defining the party statute?

- Is the party congress the sole organ responsible for elaborating/ amending the statute?

−Does the statute mention that the party congress should meet at least once every three years?

−Does the statute explicitly mention that the party congress has the highest authority within the party?

2.2 Conflict solving agencies (22-00-0-0)

• Are any conflict-solving agencies/mechanisms within the party mentioned in the statute?

−Is the existence of an independent party organ (e.g. party court) mentioned, which decides on disciplinary measures?

−Is it explicitly mentioned that the party court's decisions are equally binding for everybody, including the party executive?

−Is it explicitly mentioned that the party court's jurisdiction includes the party executive and the party president?

2.3 The national executive (23-00-0-0)

• Does the statute mention the responsibilities and accountabilities of the national executive?

−Does the statute mention that the national executive is accountable to the party

members or to the party congress?

−Is there any party body/mechanism explicitly mentioned, which is specifically entitled to control the national executive?

2.4 The executive committee (24-00-0-0)

• Does the statute mention the responsibilities and accountabilities of the executive committee?

−Does the statute mention that the executive committee is accountable to the party members or to the party congress?

−Is there any party body/mechanism explicitly mentioned, which is specifically entitled to control the executive committee?

2.5 Party president (25-00-0-0)

• Does the statute mention that the party president can be challenged in his position? (25-10-00-0)

• Does the statute mention the following rights (obligations) of the party president (25-20-0-0)

...To block the execution of decisions and other acts of the executive? (25-21-0-0)

...To exclude a party member? (25-22-0-0)

...To dismiss a member of the party executive? (25-23-0-0)

...To act against the general provisions of the statute in certain cases? (25-23-0-0)

...To form or to close subnational party units? (25-23-0-0)

2.6 Relationship between the national level and subnational levels (26-00-0-0)

• Does the statute mention subnational party units?

−Does the statute mention any rights of subnational party units?

−Does the statute mention that subnational units influence entities at higher levels?

−Is it explicitly mentioned that subnational units have autonomy?

Main Category 3: Decision-making

3.1 Recruitment (31-00-0-0)

3.1.1 Public office—National level (31-10-0-0)

3.1.1.1 Candidate nomination (31-11-0-0)

• Does the statute mention the rights to suggest/nominate candidates for public office?

− Do nominations for candidates come from the executive committee or a nomination committee chosen by the executive committee?

− Do nominations for candidates come from the national executive or a nomination committee chosen by the national executive?

−Do nominations for candidates come from the party congress (or individual members)?

−Do nominations for candidates come from subnational units?

−May each candidate suggest him- or herself for at least some public offices?

3.1.1.2 Candidate selection—parliament (31-12-0-0)

• Does the statute mention who has the right to select candidates for parliament?

−Do registered party members select candidates by election ("closed primary")?

−Do delegates select candidates by election? 31-12-1-2

−Does the national executive or a committee chosen by it select candidates?

−Does the executive committee, president or a committee designed by them select candidates?

3.1.1.3 Candidate selection—president (31-13-0-0)

• Does the statute explicitly mention who has the right to select candidates for president?

−Can the party president select him-/herself as a presidential candidate?

−Do registered party members select a candidate by election ("closed primary")?

−Do delegates select a candidate by election?

−Does the national executive or a committee designed by them select a candidate?

−Does the executive committee or a committee designed by them select a candidate?

3.1.1.4 Relationship between the national level and subnational levels (national public office) 31-14-0-0)

• Do national party units completely control the selection of candidates?

• Do subnational party units propose candidates, but the national party organs make the final decision?

• Do national party units provide a list of names from which the subnational party organs can select the final list?

• Do subnational party units have suspensive veto rights regarding candidate selection for public office?

• Do subnational party units completely control the process and make the final decision about public office candidates?

3.1.2 Intra-party office—National level (31-20-0-0)

3.1.2.1 Election of the national executive (31-21-0-0)

• Are there any rules regarding the election of the national executive explicitly mentioned in the statute?

−Are individual party members directly involved in electing the national executive?

−Are delegates in the party congress or a central committee directly elected by the congress directly involved in electing the national executive?

−Is the executive committee directly involved in the election of the national executive?

−Is the party president directly involved in electing the party executive?

3.1.2.2 Election of the executive committee (31-22-0-0)

• Are there any rules regarding the election of the executive committee explicitly mentioned in the statute?

−Are individual party members directly involved in electing the executive committee?

−Are delegates in the party congress or a central committee directly elected by the congress involved in electing the executive committee?

−Is the national executive directly involved in the election of the executive committee?

−Is the party president directly involved in electing the executive committee?

3.1.2.3 Election of the party president (31-23-0-0)

• Are there any rules to the election of the party president mentioned in the statute?

−Are all party members directly involved in electing the party president?

−Are delegates of the party congress directly involved in electing the party president?

−Is the national executive directly involved in electing the party president?

−Is the executive committee directly involved in electing the party president?

3.1.3 Procedures (31-30-0-0)

3.1.3.1 Voting procedures (31-31-0-0)

• Do the statutes contain any information about the manner of voting for intraparty or public positions?

• Is a secret method used when electing candidates for either intra-party or public positions?

• Is a secret method always used when electing candidates for both intra-party and public office?

• Is it explicitly mentioned that the voting results are presented to all party members within the party to justify and legitimize the candidacy?

3.1.3.2 Relationship between national and subnational units—subnational public office (31-32-0-0)

• Is it specified how subnational units elect their public office candidates

−Do subnational units enjoy regional autonomy when electing their public office candidates?

−Is it explicitly mentioned that the subnational units cooperate with national branches when electing their public office candidates?

−Do the national units completely control the election of the subnational public office candidates?

3.1.2.3 Relationship between national and subnational units—subnational intra-party office (31-33-0-0)

• Is it explicitly specified how subnational units elect their leadership?

−Do subnational units enjoy regional autonomy when electing their leadership?

−Do subnational units cooperate with national branches when electing their leadership?

−Do the national units completely control the election of the subnational party leadership?

3.2 Programmatic issues

• Does the statute explicitly specify who is in charge of the manifesto?

−May individual party members vote upon the manifesto?

−May the party congress vote upon the manifesto?

−May the party executive vote upon the manifesto?

−May the party president vote upon the manifesto?

−May subnational party units have a separate vote on a manifesto?

Annex 3. Focus Groups Questions

The questions of focus groups are as follows:

1. What meaning do you attach to intra party democracy: what is an internally democratic party for you?
2. Do you know the statute of the party?
3. What mechanisms are foreseen in the party statute to ensure the IPD?
4. Have you ever referred to the statute to protect the IPD?
5. Have you ever been asked about the election of the candidates for MP?
6. Do you know cases when the content of party lists and the ranking of the candidates for MP has been changed due to request from members?
7. Have you ever been asked about the election of party leaders?
8. What mechanisms does the party use to gather the opinion of the rank and file?
9. Is it possible to make a career within the party?
10. Do you agree with the statement that IPD is the best option in every situation?
11. Do you agree that in cases of emergency, the membership could be side-lined?
12. What do you think about the factions within the party? Are they good? Are they harmful to the party? Are they necessary?
13. Do you think that the size of the party influences IPD?
14. When it is easier to have a high level of IPD, when in opposition or in government?
15. Do you know what is the financial burden on the party to organize frequent meetings with the members in order to ensure IPD? Do you agree that regardless of their cost, IPD still prevails?

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