

**Rahat, Gideon, Reuven Y. Hazan, and Richard S. Katz (2008),
“Democracy and Political Parties: On the Uneasy Relationships
between Participation, Competition and Representation”, *Party
Politics*, 14:6, 663-683**

By Lorenzo Kamel

In the article, the authors address the question if intra-party democracy is likely to further or impede the advancement of the democratic values competition and representativeness on the system level of democracy (Rahat, Hazan, and Katz 2008, 663). One would expect that parties like, for example the European green parties, which are very inclusive, lead to more democratic results. Contrary to this assumption, however, the authors find that “the parties that are most internally democratic produce lists of candidates that are least representative and experience only medium levels of competition” (Rahat, Hazan, and Katz 2008, 663). This finding is not only of high theoretical, but also of practical relevance, when we theorize about important factors for democratization. In addition, some European foundations seek to foster internal democracy abroad, like - as the authors mention - the Swedish IDEA. When we believe the finding of the authors, however, this policy does not foster democracy, but actually hinders it.

In the following, I will argue that the authors need to put their finding in proportion. The finding is heavily impeded by two biases that they should have at least discussed: 1) a value bias concerning their definition of democracy and 2) a selection bias in testing their hypothesis with a possible outlier case.

First of all, the authors do not explicitly elaborate which concept of democracy they rely on and what lead them to choose this concept. This, however, needs to be made an explicit choice, as it limits the findings and researchers need to be aware of this. Obviously, with the factors inclusiveness, participation and representation, they rely on the “hegemonic” definition of democracy in Western Political Science by Robert Dahl, which leans to the side of liberal definitions of democracy. That the authors chose the liberal definition of Dahl is puzzling, when we remember that highly inclusive parties like the European Green parties were founded in a time, when models of participatory or deliberative democracy developed. The theoretical development of such models of democracy, as well as the practical development of such parties, which mirror deliberative and participatory models of democracy, reflect a certain trend, towards which Western democracies are moving. Subsequently, it

might be a biased choice to measure democracy with the liberal definition of Dahl. Indeed, in their findings the authors then reject the social capital hypothesis of Putnam, which exactly reflects more republican or deliberative models of democracy. In other words, by starting out with a liberal definition of democracy, they end up with rejecting more republican or deliberative models of democracy.

Second, the authors set up two hypotheses, namely that 1) competition “as measured by our indicators, will be greater with the all-inclusive selectorate of a membership ballot than with the selectorate of a small party committee, but greatest of all if the selectorate is made up of elected party delegates” and 2) that party “lists selected by a small committee will be more balanced with regard to gender than will lists chosen by a large body of elected party delegates , which in turn will be more balanced than lists chosen by a membership ballot” (Rahat, Hazan, and Katz 2008, 667). So, their independent variable is the inclusiveness in candidate selection, while their dependent variables are competitiveness and representation. The paper then proceeds to test these hypotheses with the case of the Israeli party system. Like in the case of the chosen definition of democracy, this choice is not explained. However, this choice might be actually problematic, especially when testing the impact of the variable inclusiveness in candidate selection on the representation of women. Israel can in fact be regarded an outlier case here, when we consider that the representation of women in the parliament with 14.2% is relatively much lower than in other Western democracies. The authors might have found different results when testing their hypotheses with a European case. European democracies have been going through the process of socialization on “gender mainstreaming” policies. Thus, we can expect the publics to be almost as highly aware of this topic, as is the political elite. However, this might not be the case in Israel. It could be that the political elite represented in party committees is more aware of the importance of this issue than the broad membership. Consider also the case of the European, highly inclusive Green parties, which contradict the finding of the authors, as not only their party heads are mainly women, but also their lists include a high proportion of women or are often even dominated by women.