

## Implications of Proportional Regional Electoral System to the Internal Democracy of Political Parties

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**Abstract.** Heywood (2002), Ostrogorski (2008), Michels (1915) support the thesis that the effects of electoral systems have long-term impact on the parties system, the organization of the ideological spectrum, the nature of competition and internal democracy. This paper will analyze the implications of the electoral system concerning the internal democracy of political parties. As a case study I will refer to the two major parties, Democratic Party and Socialist Party. After modifying the electoral system in 2008, components such as: procedure for selecting the MP candidates, the importance of structures regarding their proposal and approval, the rapport between the electors and the elected, the diversity of positions or opinions within leading forums as well as the role of leadership, have further worsened the level of internal democracy. These variables are examined based on two recent elections, respectively the parliamentary elections of 2009 and local elections of 2011. The methodology used in this study based on primary resource utilization and secondary

### 1. Introduction

In a theoretical level, defining the concept of democracy is one of the biggest challenges for the simple reason that this concept is very complex and dynamic. However, there is some sort of consensus among researchers regarding some elements characterizing the democracy. One of them, Barry Holden (1), in his book "The nature of Democracy", demonstrates the principle of political equality of the individual. Other authors, Phillippe C. Schmitter & Terry Lynn Karl (2), point out another equally important principle, that of accountability.

Referring to the first perspective, democracy is explained based on the right of citizens to decide, while in the second case, the obligation for accountability of those who govern. In this context, the question is how to apply this logic of democracy to the political parties.

It is too important raise this question as the political parties have a significant role in political life and the functioning of a democracy. They are often seen as a mediators and organizers (though not the only ones) of the citizens' interests. The level of internal democracy in the parties determines the quality of tomorrow's governance. Precisely because of this fundamental position, it has been paid much attention by many researchers for their mode of operation and the space the power occupies within the political parties.

In his work Ostrogorski (3) gives priority to the stage of internal democracy of the political parties. He argues that the representation of individual interests has failed against the growing influence of the party apparatus (a style of politics, where the “bosses” of the party control the organization through patronage and favors) and against the domination exerted by a steering committee with old party figures. This phenomenon is even more clearly explained by Robert Mishels. The author explains that all organizations have the tendency to be oligarchic or, as he states: “who says organization, says oligarchy” (4).

Certainly there are many factors leading up to oligarchy and generally they are characterized by a contextual nature. However, this fact does not make it difficult to select one of the variables for which the authors, Sailer (2000), Ostrogorski (1902), Lijphart (1999), Norris (1997), Reynolds, Reilly & Ellis, Heywood (1997), believe that this variable has a greater impact than the others. This independent variable is the type of electoral system. In the Albanian context, this variable is identified by a proportional electoral system.

This aspect is the focus of the analysis in this paper. The two main political parties in Albania, Democratic Party and Socialist Party, serve as a case study, precisely to assess the implications of the proportional system with closed lists in their internal democracy. The indicators identifying this impact are: new procedure for the selection of candidates for Members of Parliament, considerable reduction of the influence of party structures in their proposals and approvals, limiting the space for the emergence of different opinions or legalization of factions, weakening the link between voter and the elected and strengthening the leadership positions at the top of the political party. At the same time, this analysis refers to a specific stage of internal democracy and considers what has happened to the level of democracy after the adaptation of the regional proportional system.

It is a widely accepted fact that electoral systems in general, in their implementation phase, face a particular socio-economic context and a well-calculated political situation. The idea that the approval of the electoral law is neutral in terms of political interest is already overcome in the theories of political philosophy, moral and law. Laws are legal norms expressing a certain ratio of political forces during the drafting and approving process. This makes it possible that in many cases the system enters into a vicious circle.

Regarding the principle on which the laws in general are approved and amended, Fuga states: “The electoral law is prepared to support some party interests and produces MPs who reproduce the same party interests. And these MPs approve an electoral law for the interests of the party they represent, whereas the electoral law defining the election system again produces the same MPs who represent the party interests or their own interests” (5). But these circumstances, the author argues, create a vicious circle where the norm is produced by the political actors and the latter are produced by the electoral norms and laws the same actors have approved. (6)

## **2. Regional proportional system with closed lists and the internal democracy of political parties.**

In the Albanian context, the amendments to the electoral code of the year 2008 clearly illustrate this aspect. The agreement for the new code between the Democratic and the Socialist Parties for the change of voting system was reached based on results of elections in 2001, 2005 and 2007, when both parties found themselves “shrunk” from the perspective of electoral weight. The opposite happened to the so-called small parties.

Referring to analyst like Baze, Dervishi, Balla (7), decline of the electoral weight of the two main forces, especially in local elections 2007, while both parties could win only 50% of the electoral support, was explained with “the tactical move rather than the increased dissatisfaction among the electorate”(8). However, based on results of previous elections of 2000, 2003, 2005, it is noticed a reduction of electoral weight of the two main political forces. (9) The following table reflects the slight difference between big and small parties. These data justify the need of both main

parties to choose an electoral system that could maximize the votes for the big parties and minimize those for the other parties (the so-called, small ones) (10). The table below shows the results of elections.

<b>Year</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2007</b>
<b>PD</b>	33 %	32 %	20 %
<b>PS</b>	43%	34%	23%
<b>PD – PS</b>	76%	66%	43%
<b>Others</b>	+52%	+32%	+24%
<b>Difference</b>			

Notes: KQZ, 2011

Another reason for the change of the system change is related to the position of the leader of the Socialist Party. The head of this political force was interested in further consolidating his position within the party in order to minimize the possibility of a return of former chairman Nano or any other potential rival within SP. On the other camp, even though Berisha did not have such concerns, as his position was consolidated, he wanted to establish solid grounds in order to extend his power within the party. In these circumstances, in 2008, the two political leaders, under the justification of the need for improving the electoral system, based on recommendations of the OSCE / ODIHR, decided to change the electoral system: form mixed majority to regional proportional.

The approval of a regional proportional system with closed lists put the MPs under thorough control of the leadership. Not that the latter had no influence on the MPs with the previous system, but actual changes strengthened further its role. “Now, it is up to the chairman of the party to assign somebody as a MP or Minister. Their assignment does not come as a result of their contribution in favor of the citizens they represent, but based on the distribution of the reward for contribution to the party, on personal acquaintance with the leaders of the party or on the loyalty to the party.” (11).

This intervention to the electoral system restructured the typology of MP behavior in relation to the voter. If until recently it was in the interest of the MP to build a road for his constituency, to appear in public, to maintain a high profile before the voters of his/her constituency, because he knew that this would result in people voting for him/her, today the politicians have no longer interest in dealing with things this way. The only interest for MPs now on is to get on well with the “boss”, because he is the one who decides on his becoming a MP. It is the list order that determines his/her victory, not the performance in the constituency. Even when the electorate provides support for him, mechanisms to verify such a thing are lacking.

In the absence of a reference point, their election was not based on the merits of the candidates, or their popularity among people, but based on the order in the multi-candidate list. The case of Fushe Kruja Mayor is a typical one to illustrate this phenomenon. The person in question did not succeed in having a mandate in the multi-candidate list of the SP in Durres District during 2009 elections not due to lack of support from the constituency, but due to the order in the list, because during the local elections of 2011 when the majority election system was applied, the abovementioned candidate won the elections becoming the mayor of Fushe Kruja city.

Another aspect regards the loss of direct contact with the voters and the representatives. The voter of a certain constituency has no possibility to ask for explanations from or to penalize him, as it happened when the majority system was applicable (12). Such fact has been accepted even by the head of the parliamentary group of SP, Gramoz Ruçi, who states: “considering this issue under the light of the Albanian mentality and psychology, the current system is not in favor of the relationship between the elected and the voter, but in favor of the elected with his party structure and the leadership.” (13).

This system provides more opportunities to the leadership to avoid his opponents or critics because of the minimal impact that the latter may cause to his political force or coalition. At the same time, it is possible that the leadership may rotate or promote the “loyal escort”, despite the low level of support they enjoy in the constituency or party (14). Such aspect was manifested during the general elections of 2009 in Albania. Non-inclusion of the supporters in the list, the low ranking of Rama’s critics and Nano’s supporters for return to Socialist Party leadership, and the promotion of persons without a political background in the SP, testified the role of the leader in determining his political future and in general his MPs future in politics. Even the DP leadership did the same thing. It excluded from the list many supporters of the former president Topi, and included leader’s prominent supporters. Such action enabled to quiet down the opposing voices within the respective parties, thus transforming the MPs, if we were to use the Marcusean term, in “one-dimensional man”.

The closed lists confined considerably the opportunities of the MPs to run independently. Unlike previous elections, when in several cases the independent candidates were successful, during the elections of 2009, the possibility to secure a mandate was zero. Proceedings of securing 20,000 signatures from citizens, the higher number of votes compared to the number needed for somebody to enroll in the candidates list of a coalition and the minimal effect that it caused in the electoral weight of the opposing political forces, rank among some of the factors which hindered the possibilities to make such a decision. The case of the DP deputy, Preç Zogaj, illustrates this at the best. This deputy’s name in the list was ranked in such order that there were slim chances to win, in spite of the strong support from the constituency. Zogaj, considering those slim chances his list ranking offered to him, decided to run as an independent candidate. PD showed no concern about that fact, because with regards to the electoral weight it lost nothing at all. But, if at that time the mixed majority system was applied and the DP did not select Preç Zogaj as a candidate, in Lezha region, the latter could run as an independent candidate, as he did, and his 2000 votes in Lezha, could turn a winner from a DP to a SP deputy. This happens because, according to the majority system, 2000 votes have a great impact, while in the proportional system they go into the “big sack” and thus they have almost no impact at all.

Another aspect relates to the avoidance of the local structures during the selection phase of the candidates by the party leadership. This often leads to reducing the level of representation. In this logic, it turns out that the chairman of the party has no longer any interest to maintain some balance within the party. As emphasized above, the chairmen decided for the candidates and zones where they were going to be voted for, but “they were forced to maintain some balance. It was difficult to exclude people with influence in a certain area, as they were “battle horses” and, in addition to the logo of the party, they used their image and personal popularity they had in the zone as campaign assets.” (15). In this situation, the chairmen are not very worried about the “maintenance of balance within the party” and are willing to compromise with those people they do not like or the ones that are not part of their loyal circle. “They can enlist anyone they want.” But, on the other hand, avoidance of local structures, in many cases, minimizes the success of this preferential list of candidates proposed by the leadership. It is worth mentioning the cases of Kavaja and Librazhd in the local elections of 2011. In these elections, the electorate voted for the party and against the

candidate.

### 3. Conclusion

In the regional proportional system with closed lists, as we tried to explain above, the parties become extremely centralized, because party leaders prepare the candidates' lists, whereas the new members try to show loyalty and obedience, hoping to secure a place in such lists. As anything focuses in the center, the leadership is free to decide on the policies and determine on members' careers. In this situation, the individual has no interest in discussing the policies determined by the leader or the leadership of a political formation. In such an environment, different voices and currents are discouraged within the party

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