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Understanding Power-Sharing within Political Parties: Stratarchy as Mutual Interdependence between the Party in the Centre and the Party on the Ground

Recent literature has renewed interest in the stratarchical model of intraparty decision-making. In this version of party organization, the functions performed by parties are distributed among their discrete levels. The result is a power-sharing arrangement in which no group has control over all aspects of party life. Thus, the model potentially provides an antidote to the hierarchical version of organization. This article examines the principal parties in Australia, Canada, Ireland and New Zealand to test whether there is empirical evidence of stratarchy. An examination of candidate nomination, leadership selection and policy development finds strong evidence of shared authority between both levels of the party in key areas of intraparty democracy. Both levels accept that they cannot achieve their goals without the support of the other and so a fine balancing act ensues, resulting in constant recalibration of power relations. There is, however, little evidence of the commonly presented model of stratarchy as mutual autonomy for each level within discrete areas of competency. Instead, both the party on the ground and in the centre share authority within all three areas, resulting in a pattern of mutual interdependence rather than mutual autonomy.

THE DIVISION OF POWER WITHIN POLITICAL PARTIES IS A THEME THAT has captivated scholars for generations. Whether writing about the mass, cadre, catch-all, electoral professional or cartel model, students of parties have focused on questions relating to intraparty democracy (Duverger 1954; Katz and Mair 1995; Kirchheimer 1966; Michels 1911; Panebianco 1988).

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The significance of these questions derives from the importance of parties in contemporary democratic practice. As Schattschneider long ago observed, 'political parties created democracy' and that 'modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties' (1942: 1). Thus, while parties are often thought to be in decline (Mair and van Biezen 2001; Whiteley 2011), they continue to dominate the electoral and governmental landscape. With parties playing such a central role, it is natural that attention is turned inside the parties to examine who has influence in the decisions they take (Cross and Katz 2013).

Scholars have often identified a hierarchical tendency within parties. An 'iron law of oligarchy' is seen to apply as parties become increasingly elite-dominated, particularly as they get closer to positions of power (Michels 1911). Studies of party members in many countries find that rank-and-file memberships believe their parties are elite-dominated and that members have too little influence (Young 2013). In addition, some have suggested that advances in communication technology and the widespread availability of targeted databases reduce a party's dependence on its grassroots (see, for example, Wilkinson 2015: 441). Nonetheless, recent work by Scarrow (2014) and Cross and Gauja (2014a), among others, suggests that parties remain dependent on their members and supporters to help fulfil many of the tasks assigned to them. Within this context, much recent party scholarship examines the internal power relationships between the different faces of the party organization (for example, Helms 2014). As has long been the case, the challenge for parties continues to be the successful management of a structure that both provides a meaningful role for their members and allows central party officials sufficient authority to unify the party around a consistent brand while allowing for efficient administration and electoral campaigning (Carty 2004).

While some have suggested that oligarchy is an inevitable outcome, others have claimed that 'stratarchy' presents an alternative form of organization allowing for shared authority between both a party's centre and its local branches. Eldersveld (1964: 99) was the first to apply this model to the political party. In an inquiry focused on the question of 'the extent to which the top ruling group in an organization, such as a political party, does in actuality control or direct the activities of subordinates', he examined party organization in the city of Detroit, Michigan.

Eldersveld (1964: 9) defines a stratarchical organization as one in which: 'Rather than centralized unity of command … strata

commands exist which operate with a varying, but considerable degree of independence'. He argues that the oligarchic model of party organization is 'empirically incorrect' (Elderveld 1964: 99) and instead that there are spheres of mutual autonomy, with each level enjoying independent authority over particular aspects of party life.

In recent years, many scholars (for example, Bolleyer 2012; Carty 2004; Carty and Cross 2006; Ignazi and Pizzimenti 2014; Katz and Mair 1995) have used the stratarchical model to describe internal party organization. While the use of the term is somewhat slippery, the clearest, concise definition is found in Bolleyer (2012: 5), who writes: 'Party stratarchies … establish a division of labour between two mutually dependent yet distinguishable levels to which functionally different competences are assigned … A functional division of labour dominates which means that the levels are in charge of distinct types of competence.' The essential argument is that there is a covenant of sorts in which both levels (in most interpretations local and central) agree to cede authority over particular aspects of party decision-making in return for having autonomous authority themselves in other areas. The model is most fully developed in Carty (2004) in what he describes as a 'franchise' model of party organization, and a practical application of it is provided in Carty and Cross (2006). Katz and Mair (1995: 18) also use the term 'mutual autonomy' to describe stratarchical organization.

While stratarchy is often presented as an opposite to hierarchy, Bolleyer (2012) notes that in at least some manifestations this is inaccurate. Building on Carty's work, she highlights the centre's ability to sanction local party branches and thus to exercise some degree of control over lower levels as evidence that this is a middle ground in terms of intraparty power-sharing. She locates stratarchy on a continuum between hierarchy and what she calls 'federation', the latter describing party organization in which lower levels have independent power bases, immune from central interference.

All these uses of stratarchy have two things in common. First, they identify a distribution of power among different levels of the party as opposed to purely hierarchical organization, and, second, they suggest a 'separation of powers' in which the different levels enjoy autonomy over distinct areas of party decision-making. The variance exists within each party's internal bargain concerning who has authority over what. Bolleyer, Carty, and Katz and Mair all suggest that a common starting point is for the centre to have control over

policy development and the local branches to have authority for candidate selection.

Bolleyer's emphasis on the fact that the centre often maintains some control over local activities is an intriguing one and suggests that 'mutual autonomy' over 'distinct competences' may be an overstatement of the stratarchical relationship between the two party levels. In recent articles on organization within the Australian parties, Cross and Gauja (2014a, 2014b) highlight a mutual interdependence with central party officials acknowledging the need for strong local branches and vice versa. They describe, for example, shared models of authority for candidate selection in which both levels play an important role. Recent work on leadership selection also suggests that many parties have adopted practices in which both levels of the party play an influential role (Cross and Pilet 2015; Pilet and Cross 2014); and, as Bennister and Heppell (2016) note, there is often a tension between the two groups.

This suggests that, rather than thinking of power-sharing as being akin to 'separation of powers', Bolleyer is correct in conceptualizing it as a middle ground – nonetheless, a significant step away from hierarchy. However, it is not the centre's ability to exercise control over the local level that tempers the relationship but rather a willingness on the part of both levels to share authority in principal areas of party decision-making with one another. To continue with the US terminology, this is a 'checks-and-balances' approach in which no single level has absolute authority within any of the party's principal decision-making areas. And, while Bolleyer highlights the ability of the centre to check the authority of local branches, there is no theoretical reason why this should not run in both directions, with the locals also able to check the actions of the centre. In this conception, stratarchical relationships are not a parcelling-out of distinct competences among different levels but rather the construction of power-sharing arrangements in which both local and central party personnel play an important role in each of the key areas of intraparty decision-making. In this perspective, both levels of the party desire to be involved in all important decision-making and accept the role of the other level in each competency. It is distinct from the federation model as local branches lack full jurisdictional authority in any of the key decision-making areas and similarly differs from hierarchy as the centre shares internal decision-making power with the party's grassroots. This, then, is a more robust model of intraparty

Table 1
Overview of Parties Included in the Analysis

Country	Party	Ideological position	Status (Jan. 2016)	Years in government (1990–2015)
Australia				
	Labor	centre-left	opposition	1990–6, 2007–13
	Liberal	centre-right	government	1996–2007, 2013–
Canada				
	Conservative	centre-right	opposition	1990–3, 2006–15
	Liberal	centre	government	1993–2006, 2015–
Ireland				
	Fianna Fáil	centre	opposition	1990–4, 1997–2011
	Fine Gael	centre-right	government	1994–7, 2011–
New Zealand				
	Labour	centre-left	opposition	1999–2008
	National	centre-right	government	1990–9, 2008–

democracy as it does not restrict participation of a party's grassroots members to discrete areas of party decision-making but, rather, includes them in all areas. At the same time, the centre is not shut out of authority in key areas such as candidate selection. This reflects an arrangement in which both levels of the party work together, if not always harmoniously, in their principal activities.

To test this model, this paper examines the power relations found in eight major, occasionally governing, parties in four parliamentary systems: Australia (Labor and Liberals), Canada (Conservatives and Liberals), Ireland (Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael) and New Zealand (Labour and National). Table 1 gives an overview of the parties. If this form of stratarchy exists in national parties it should be found in these cases as each employs a geographically based electoral system[1] and has a party structure based on local branch or electorate associations feeding into regional and ultimately a national organization. All of these parties are membership organizations and in each their leadership has recently both talked about the need for increased membership numbers and adopted reforms aimed at empowering the grassroots in party decision-making. The incentive then exists for them to adopt organizational structures that both allow for integration and preserve local authority.

While Bolleyer examines new and minor parties in her study, the emphasis here is on large, governing parties. Smaller parties, not serious contenders for the lead position in government, have often

been identified as less hierarchical in organization and more open to sharing authority with their general membership. This, then, is a more stringent test as many party scholars, from the time of Michels onwards, have suggested that the closer parties are to government, the more likely they are to develop hierarchical tendencies.[2] Thus, in this analysis, we have a balance of power-seeking parties set in institutional structures favouring decentralized party decision-making.

While a full investigation of power-sharing in these parties would include consideration of all of the principal functions of parties and their membership and organizational structures, the analysis here is restricted to three crucial party functions: candidate selection, leadership selection and policy development. These are the areas identified and examined in most studies of intraparty democracy (for example, Cross and Katz 2013) and are those identified as key to the stratarchical model by Carty, Bolleyer, Katz and Mair and Carty and Cross. They also form the basis of the 'franchise' bargain that Carty theorizes (2002, 2004).

The data in this article are primarily drawn from a series of more than 50 in-country interviews conducted with senior parliamentarians, leaders of the extra-parliamentary organizations, party activists and political observers.[3] The interviews were all conducted in person and were semi-structured. In addition, internal party documents such as rulebooks, constitutions, reform proposals, conference minutes and internal organizational reviews have been accessed and reviewed. The interviews are used to understand how party rules play out in practice and to further understand the views of both levels of the party towards the other. Thus, this examination considers both the 'formal' story as set out in the parties' statutes and the 'informal' relationships that often modify these. Human interactions and relationships are crucial to power dispersion within parties and these can only be fully unearthed through many detailed discussions with those involved in its implementation.

There are two final preliminary observations important to note. First, this study is not examining how power is distributed across party organizations in multilevel political jurisdictions. That is, the focus is not on whether national parties control their provincial or state branches in federal societies. Rather, the focus is on how local and central party branches share power in national politics. This is an important caveat as regional parties (at the state and provincial

levels) in Australia and Canada often have their own power bases independent of the national parties and, particularly in Australia, 'central' authority may be exercised by the state office. There are no comparable regional party bodies in the unitary states of Ireland and New Zealand (NZ).

Second, while there is an important conceptual distinction between decentralization and inclusiveness in party decision-making (see, for example, Hazan and Rahat 2010), in practice, local decision-making is today most often characterized as inclusive of party members, while centralized processes tend to be more exclusive (see Cross and Katz 2013; Scarrow 2014). Thus, the analysis contrasts the authority of the party on the ground with that of the party in both central and public office, making little distinction between the latter two.

This article concludes that, rather than following the hierarchical or federation model of party organization, real power-sharing between the two levels exists and is defined by an agreement for both groups to be involved in all areas of party decision-making. In this sense, the findings offer a refinement to the stratarchical model consistent with Bolleyer's assertion that it is a middle ground between hierarchy and complete devolution of authority. This reflects both an unwillingness of either level of the party to abstain from participation in any key area of decision-making and an awareness by both levels that they can best achieve their primary goal of electoral success by working together across the various competencies. Nonetheless, the equilibrium, in terms of who has the upper hand, is constantly contested, with both levels of the party wanting to exercise as much influence as possible in all areas. Balances are reached that represent temporary agreement (akin to Carty's franchise model) but are quickly challenged as one side or the other pushes for greater influence. Key to this model is an acknowledgement of the necessity for the active engagement of both levels of the party and, contrary to the oligarchy theory, there is little attempt by one level to dominate the other. Rather, complex and ever-evolving arrangements are reached (and then breached) in each area of party activity. These government-seeking parties recognize their 'dependence' on both levels in order to achieve their electoral objectives and it is their ability to manage these relationships that assists them in maintaining their dominant positions. At times the relationship frays, moving too far in one direction or the other, and it is the parties' ability to recalibrate their stratarchical balance that allows them to regain their place.

CANDIDATE SELECTION

Candidate selection is what separates parties from other organizations such as advocacy and lobby groups (Sartori 1976: 64). The power to choose candidates has long been sought after by competing groups within parties. This is evident in the conclusions of leading party scholars writing decades apart who all essentially agree with Ranney (1981: 103) that what is at stake 'is nothing less than control of the core of what the party stands for and does' (see also Gallagher 1988; Hazan and Rahat 2010; Schattschneider 1942).

While the stratarchical model typically suggests that this is a competency largely left to local party branches, in all eight of the parties we find authority for the selection of parliamentary candidates to be both shared and contested between local party activists and central party elites. While there is a varying amount of academic literature on the subject in each of our countries, inevitably the tussle for control between rank-and-file members and central party figures is a featured theme.

From the interviews conducted for this study, and what is reported in the literature, it does seem that there is general agreement that this is an area of party decision-making in which grassroots members should play an important role. Formal arrangements for the selection of candidates are set out in each party's constitution or rulebook and the default position is that with minimal central party oversight, candidates are picked at the local level. Central party figures often begin a discussion about candidate selection by suggesting that it is a largely decentralized process and is nearly exclusively in the hands of their local members (interviews). They often point with pride to 'democratic' innovations such as the adoption of one-member-one-vote for selections in Ireland and the recent trials with plebiscites and community pre-selections in Australia (interviews).

However, this is an area where the 'formal' and 'informal' stories clearly diverge. When pushing below the surface, it becomes clear that the reality is more complicated and that authority is shared between the two levels. The enthusiasm in elites' voices wanes as they describe the role of the central party and often they become defensive in explaining that while the ideal may be for local selections, there are countervailing needs demanding that the centre play a significant role (interviews). This is equally apparent in interviews with party activists, who often bemoan the degree of central

party involvement (interviews). What is quickly apparent is that in every party, authority is divided between the two groups and that the balance is regularly disputed and contested.

Sometimes the division of power is quite explicit. For example, in New Zealand Labour, the standard practice is for a selection committee to be formed in each electorate. The committee has a total of seven votes: four controlled by local members and three by the central New Zealand Party Council. If local parties do not meet a membership threshold the split is 3–3, with a central party body breaking tie votes. Interview subjects report that the central representatives routinely vote the same way and that it takes a determined and united local association to prevail against their wishes (interviews, see also Miller 2005; Salmond 2003). The situation is somewhat different in the National Party, which adopts a more decentralized process granting formal authority to the local electorates with no voting power reserved for the centre. Nonetheless, the centre has in recent years exercised influence. One manifestation of this is the creation of a central candidates' college. Would-be candidates apply for inclusion in the college. Those accepted receive training on how to wage a successful selection campaign and, if they perform well in the college, are promoted as quality potential candidates by the centre. The central Board also has 'unfettered discretion to approve or disapprove' any application to stand for nomination, and in cases where there are more than five candidates, a committee comprising both local and central officials interviews the candidates and reduces the pool to no more than five. The National Party's central Board also reserves the right to review decisions made by the electorates and on occasion (though relatively rarely) has refused to endorse selected candidates (interviews).

In the Australian parties, formal authority for establishing candidate selection methods is largely devolved to the state level (Australian Labor Party (ALP) Constitution 2011: Article 19(b)(i); Liberal Party of Australia Constitution 2009: Clause 103(a)). After a comprehensive survey of the different methods in use, Cross and Gauja (2014b) find that in the vast majority of ALP and Liberal Party cases, actual authority is shared between local party members and representatives of the state's central office. For pre-selections to the House of Representatives, this is the case for 10 of the 12 state parties. The balance of authority between the two levels varies dramatically, with local party vote shares ranging from a high of 60 per cent

in the Victorian Liberal Party to a low of 15 per cent in Western Australian Labor.

That the question of 'balance of power' between local members and the centre is at the heart of candidate selection in Ireland is evident in the titles of two studies conducted after recent national elections: 'Candidate Selection: Democratic Centralism or Managed Democracy?' (Weeks 2008) and 'Candidate Selection: More Democratic or More Centrally Controlled?' (Galligan 2003). In both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, the selection is formally made by a vote of local party members. However, the centre capitalizes on the multi-member electorate component of the single transferable vote electoral system to exercise significant control. First, the centre makes strategic decisions regarding how many candidates they wish to run in order to most efficiently convert their vote shares into seats (Katz 1981). Central party officials then often authorize their local associations to select one candidate less than the number the party's central campaign team desires to run in the electorate (interviews). This way, they preserve the authority to add an additional candidate.

The centre also imposes other constraints, such as insisting that those selected come from particular geographic parts of an electorate and has on occasion placed gender constraints on selection (Reidy 2011: 57; interviews). Both parties' rules vest the ultimate authority for candidate selection with a central party body. For example, Fianna Fáil's Constitution (2011: Rule 89) states that 'No protocol, or any other provision adopted, shall prejudice the right of the Ard-Chomhairle to alter the panel of candidates to be officially nomi-nated at a ... Dáil Election.' In the 2011 Dáil election, Fine Gael added 18 candidates to those selected by locals (Reidy 2011: 58). Fianna Fáil, while generally trying to lower its overall number of candidates as a response to its low standing in the polls, also added candidates while successfully 'encouraging' some incumbents not to restand (inter-views).The relationship between the two levels of the party in candidate selection is well summed up by a senior Irish party official, who can be paraphrased as saying: 'the locals are free to select who they want as their candidates so long as they select only as many as we tell them to and that they follow the instructions we set regarding where those candidates come from, and we then are free to add another candidate should they fail to choose someone we wish to run' (interview).

The general practice in Canada is for local party associations to organize the selection of candidates through votes of their members.

Some have referred to local autonomy in candidate selection as part of a stratarchical arrangement that is fundamental to Canadian party organization (Carty 2004; Carty and Cross 2006). This 'bargain', however, has always been rather high level and theoretical. In recent decades, the centre has become increasingly involved in selections and the process is now very much one in which local party organizations exercise authority granted to them from the centre and subject to limitations established by the party leadership.

In both parties, the centre exercises its authority by both appointing some general election candidates and preventing some would-be nomination candidates from standing (Cross 2004). In recent elections leaders routinely reappointed all of their incumbent MPs, appointed 'star' candidates, and on some occasions appointed female candidates (Cross 2006). Unlike the Australian parties, central authority for candidate selection is not devolved to the provincial parties but, rather, is vested with national party officials.

Central parties also exercise considerable authority by requiring potential candidates to subject themselves to a rigorous background check. This practice is increasingly common across the parties and is most extensive in Canada and Australia. Candidates are asked questions relating to their previous political and community involvement, their political beliefs, their business, professional and financial backgrounds, and any criminal or civil court dealings. Candidates are often required to waive privacy rights. For example, those seeking candidacy in the Canadian Conservative Party must complete forms 'authorizing the Canada Revenue Agency, the Canada Border Services Agency, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and the Department of National Defense to release any available information' (Conservative Party of Canada 2014: 6). An Australian state party official recounted how aspiring candidates are required to Facebook 'friend' someone in head office to facilitate a social media audit (interview). NZ Labour's screening also includes health-related questions. Through these centrally controlled processes, an untold number of aspiring candidates are eliminated from contention.

In all cases, central party officials talk about being careful not to exercise their authority too often as this can result in a backlash among local activists. One senior Australian party official drew a comparison between these and a captain's picks on a football team (interview). They are accepted when used sparingly and with

apparently good cause, but can backfire in terms of team morale if overused. In this sense, the centre acknowledges the need to keep branch activists 'on side' in order to wage a vibrant local campaign (interviews).

While activists generally expressed concern regarding central party intervention in candidate selection, in every instance they acknowledged the need for the centre to ensure that standard processes are used and to scrutinize local choices for the 'acceptability' of those chosen (interviews). More controversial, but not universally rejected, is the centre's ability to appoint candidates, which all agreed should be exercised sparingly. Overall, both levels of the party accept a role for the other in this field, with the 'residual' power lying with the local branches and their members.

LEADERSHIP SELECTION

In all of these parties there is a single individual who leads both in the legislature and during election campaigns (Cross and Blais 2012). Leaders are seen to be exercising more authority in intraparty decision-making (Poguntke and Webb 2005; Webb et al. 2002), to be more central to the choices voters make during elections (Aarts et al. 2011), to increasingly be the focus of the media's coverage of politics (Mughan 2000) and are increasingly dominant in the parliamentary party room (Foley 2000; Savoie 1999). Given this importance of party leaders, it is logical to expect that various constituent groups within the party will want to influence their selection (Cross and Pilet 2015; Pilet and Cross 2014).

The default position in all of our parties is that the leader is chosen by the parliamentary caucus. In early Westminster tradition, the importance of leaders was, at least in theory, somewhat downplayed as they were seen as 'first among equals' within the parliamentary group (Weller 1985). Canadian parties were the first to expand formal participation beyond their parliamentarians and by the 1990s were selecting leaders through a plebiscite of party members (Carty et al. 2000). The parties typically define membership very loosely so that virtually any interested person is able to join and participate. In recent rules changes, the Liberals have done away with the requirement of membership, allowing registered 'supporters' to vote. Both parties have also vested the authority for leadership

removal with their extra-parliamentary organization. Conservative and Liberal leaders are subject to periodic 'review' votes by the party membership and can be removed from the leadership should they lose their members' confidence (except when serving as prime minister) (Cross and Blais 2011).

Neither party provides their central elite or parliamentarians with any privileged role in leadership selection. Candidacy is open to non-parliamentarians, and there is no requirement of central party support in terms of a nomination threshold. In recent months, however, there has been some pushback, and legislation passed in 2015, the Reform Act, empowers MPs to remove the leader and choose a new 'interim' successor fully of their own volition. While it is too early to judge the effect of the new legislation, the change does, for the first time in almost a century, offer a privileged role for the centre in leadership politics.[4]

Diversity among the parties exists in the other three countries. As recently as 2013, none of the other six parties had ever chosen a leader through anything other than a vote of their parliamentarians. Party elites interviewed at that time suggested this was part of their internal power-sharing arrangements (interviews). This is no longer the case as both the Australian and NZ Labour parties amended their rules in 2013 and chose leaders through processes that included rank-and-file members. Ireland's Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have also recently adopted similar rules for the selection of their next leaders. All of these parties have endorsed the shared authority model. In each of these cases, the argument has been made that the party's members should have a say in the choice of leader and that a more inclusive and expansive selectorate is likely to result in the selection of leaders with greater electoral appeal.

New Zealand Labour's rules allocate 40 per cent of the vote to both MPs and grassroots members. The remaining 20 per cent is allocated to affiliated trade unions. In adopting this method, considerable attention was given to the practice of the UK Labour Party, which for several decades divided leadership votes among the same three groups (interviews). The NZ party has held two contests under these rules (in 2013 and 2014), and both times the winner was not the choice of MPs but won with strong support among grassroots members and trade union voters. MPs retain the sole authority to remove the leader, and the party adopted a rule requiring that leadership candidates be parliamentarians.

There seems to be no movement afoot for similar change in New Zealand's National Party. The party is well ensconced in government, currently in its third term. Parties in this situation are highly unlikely to engage in organization reform and tend to be deferential to the parliamentary party (Cross and Blais 2012; Harmel and Janda 1994). However, when the party inevitably is removed from government, experience in other countries suggests that a contagion effect resulting from Labour's move will result in pressure for reform. Given the experience of parties in other countries, and that the first party in New Zealand to hold a membership vote for leader was the right-of-centre ACT Party (Cross and Blais 2012), this reticence seems related to being in government rather than ideologically based.

Fine Gael also divides up leadership selection three ways: among Dáil members, grassroots members and local councillors. When the party first amended its rules to include its broader membership there was significant resistance from the parliamentary party and in the end agreement was only reached by vesting members of the Dáil (TDs) with 65 per cent of the vote compared with 25 per cent for the rank and file. Fine Gael also included a provision in its constitution (2011: Section 49) that 'Candidates for the position of Party Leader must be members of Dáil Eireann', along with a requirement that leadership candidates be endorsed by 10 per cent of Dáil members, and that sole authority over leadership removal remains with TDs.

As part of its organizational reform project after being removed from government in 2011, Fianna Fáil produced a document entitled 'Election of Uachtaran Fhianna Fail: Discussion Document and Proposals' (April 2013) in which it makes the case for a shared-authority selection process. At its 2015 Ard Fheis, the party adopted new rules similar to Fine Gael's, with the vote distributed between party members (45 per cent), TDs (40 per cent) and other elected officials (15 per cent).

In revising its rules, the ALP decided to split vote shares 50/50 between its parliamentary party and grassroots membership. In the first contest held under these rules, it was the votes of the parliamentary party that were determinative. Winner Bill Shorten received 40 per cent of the membership vote in a two-person race and was pushed to victory with the support of 64 per cent of his parliamentary colleagues. There is no similar movement afoot for leadership reform in the governing Liberal Party but some interview subjects suggest that there is likely to be a contagion effect when the party returns to opposition (interviews).

Considering that just a few years ago, no leader in these parties was selected through a process in which voting power was split among central authorities and local party members, there is significant momentum towards a shared authority model as today both the party in public office and the party on the ground play significant roles. Similar to the case with candidate selection, both levels of the party accept a role for the other. Local activists acknowledge the need for leaders to have support in the parliamentary party and the centre acknowledges the need for the leader to be supported by the activist corps in order to achieve electoral success.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The Westminster parties have traditionally taken the approach that policy-making is a function of their parliamentary group, with only a weak, advisory role assigned to their membership (Gauja 2013). The principle supporting this position is that parliamentarians are meant to represent all of their constituents and not solely party members. Smaller parties, spanning the ideological spectrum, that do not share the responsibilities of government have sometimes taken different approaches. For example, green parties, the Australian Democrats and Canada's Reform Party have adopted practices aimed at providing real policy influence to their grassroots members (Cross 1998; Gauja 2005).

Senior party officials commented on how they need to be very careful in this area given that their activists are often more extreme on policy issues than is the electorate, and many commented on how their membership was not reflective of the overall diversity of the voters they need to appeal to (interviews). At the same time, they talked about this as a real dilemma as they identified frustration resulting from a lack of serious opportunity for engagement with policy development as one of the great challenges they face in reinvigorating their often-atrophying local party organizations (interviews, see also party reform documents by Bracks et al. 2011 and Reith 2011). The result is that all of the parties are increasingly adopting elaborate structures to encourage participation in policy development while simultaneously both maintaining the supremacy of the parliamentary group and encouraging them to be more responsive and accountable to the party on the ground.

Fianna Fáil's rules are indicative of this situation. Rule 57 states that 'The Parliamentary Party shall be the primary authority for policy development' and then follows this statement with: 'However, a. The Parliamentary Party shall consult with all members and Units in relation to policy development. b. Each year there shall be a National Policy Conference facilitated by the Parliamentary Party at which members of the Organisation shall be entitled to attend' (Fianna Fáil 2012: 17–18). This is typical insofar as the declarative statement of parliamentary authority is followed by 'however', leading to a statement offering participatory opportunity but no real authority to the broader membership.

The balance of power between the two groups in policy development is influenced by the party's proximity to government. There is an observable trend for parties in government to become more insular. In part this is because the policy positions they adopt are likely to become law and thus the argument of legislating for the entire populace has greater saliency. The membership is also typically more deferential to the parliamentary party during periods in government. However, once out of power, and faced with the task of rebuilding organizational and electoral strength, parties often aim to increase the participatory opportunities for the membership in policy development as a way of reinvigorating the broader organization (interviews).

After their second consecutive electoral defeat, NZ Labour embarked on an organizational reform project in 2012. A central part of this project was finding a way to connect its grassroots members more directly with the party's policy programme. Several party activists commented that there was a sense among the membership that the previous Clark government had grown distant from the membership in terms of policy priorities, and several complained that local branch members were expected to spend their time on organization and fundraising and not on policy development (interviews). Several senior party officials also mentioned a general uneasiness in the party resulting from the earlier Lange government's policies that were far to the right of many activists (interviews). While these concerns had remained below the surface during the term of the Clark government, with the party now in opposition there was opportunity to address them.

The principal reform in this regard was the adoption of a party 'platform'. This is distinct from the policy manifesto released during

each election campaign. The platform is meant to be a high-level document setting out the party's general principles and values. It is formally in the control of the extra-parliamentary party as responsibility for its creation lies with the party's Policy Council, which allows for five members to be selected from the parliamentary caucus along with five from constituent organizations, two from the Maori community and one from each of the party's sector councils. The platform is also subject to approval at the party's annual conference, which is dominated (at least in numbers) by the membership. In the words of a former party president, it is 'an attempt to anchor the party in a set of values that are common and widely shared' (interview). According to one current parliamentarian, MPs expressed a willingness to go along with this reform so long as the platform was general and written at a high level and not seen as a replacement for the campaign manifesto (interview). While the party's constitution sets out elaborate structures for the drafting of the manifesto, including the possibility for the annual conference, by two-thirds vote, to insist that it include certain provisions, all interview subjects agreed that the parliamentary party has the upper hand in its creation (interviews).

The New Zealand National Party's constitution (2011) places formal authority for party policy with the party's Board (see Gustafson 1986), seven of whom are elected by the annual conference and two by the parliamentary caucus. Section 45(a) provides that 'The Board shall approve for release all policy, whether prepared by the Parliamentary Section or otherwise' and provides that such approval will not be granted if there has been insufficient consultation with the party membership or if it is inconsistent with the party's vision and values. Senior officials in both the Prime Minister's Office and the party headquarters confirm that, notwithstanding these provisions, control of the manifesto is firmly in the hands of the leadership of the parliamentary party (interviews). A senior official, while pointing out that there are 15 policy advisory groups in the party that include representation from the membership, referred to the manifesto as an increasingly 'political document' that is largely constructed by the party leader and a small group of party and campaign professionals (interview). Similarly, a senior official in the Prime Minister's Office identified a shift of authority over time towards the parliamentary leadership and suggested that the leader effectively has a veto over policy in the manifesto, though one that is used cautiously.

The Australian Liberals make a similar distinction between their platform and policies. The party's constitution (2009: Section 56) provides that: 'As between the Organisation and the Federal Parliamentary Party, the Organisation shall have the ultimate responsibility for determining and from time to time revising the Federal Platform.' The platform is meant to set out the party's 'philosophical position' and 'principles'. The very next section of the party's constitution (Liberal Party of Australia 2009: Section 57) states that, 'As between the Organisation and the Federal Parliamentary Party, the Federal Parliamentary Party shall have ultimate responsibility for the determination ... of Federal Policy'. Policy is defined as the party's 'detailed means and programs by which the objectives of the Platform are proposed to be met and achieved'. The parliamentary party is also required to consider any policy resolutions passed by the organizational party and to report on the disposition of them. While there are a number of policy forums that members are invited to participate in, there is no ability for the membership party to impose policy positions on the parliamentary party.

The ALP formally takes a distinct position from the others – one more akin to that of a mass party. The ALP's constitution provides that party policy is established by the national conference and is binding on all members, including parliamentarians. The spirit of this is captured in Article 7 (ALP 2011), which states that: 'Policy within the Australian Labor Party is not made by directives from the leadership, but by resolutions originating from branches, affiliated unions and individual Party members'. It is unclear, however, whether this formal statement results in significantly different behaviour from the other parties. In part this is because party policy is established at the national conference, and since the 1980s the size of this body has been expanded, giving greater representation to central party elites, including parliamentarians. Delegates to the conference are also not directly elected, allowing central factional bosses to exercise more control.[5] Also, the conference agenda committee, over which the parliamentary leadership exercises influence, largely determines which policy resolutions reach the conference floor (interviews).

Occasionally, some controversial issues will reach a vote at conference and, given the formal prescription that the parliamentary party is meant to follow the dictates of conference, this can cause uneasiness. An example of this was the party's consideration

of a resolution supporting same-sex marriage in 2011. The resolution enjoyed majority support from conference delegates but was opposed by the party leader and a significant number of her parliamentary colleagues. Unable to convince a majority of delegates to vote against the proposal, last-minute manoeuvring resulted in a compromise in which a second resolution was passed authorizing MPs to vote according to their conscience in any parliamentary vote. A senior party official noted that in recent years the parliamentary party, particularly when in government, has successfully argued for greater policy flexibility on the grounds that changing circumstances must allow for them to be able to prioritize and interpret party policy in light of shifting demands (interview). Similar to many of the others, the ALP's rules (2011) lay out elaborate structures for a policy forum and policy commissions and include a constitutional section entitled 'Grassroots Policy Structures'.

Fianna Fáil officials note that while the organizational party has traditionally played very little role in policy development, this is meant to change with the adoption of new structures that, following the party's 2011 defeat, for the first time include an annual policy convention and formal policy groups dominated by members from the local branches (interviews). Time will tell how parliamentarians respond to these changes. One senior TD, while acknowledging the desire of rank-and-file members to participate in policy-making, highlighted the dilemma faced in this regard resulting from a declining and increasingly older and more conservative member ship (interview). As an example, he pointed to the decision of delegates at a recent party conference to oppose liberalization of abortion laws, a position that was not held by most of the party's supporters.

The Canadian Liberals provide another example of a party attempting to strengthen the role of its grassroots supporters in policy-making following poor electoral showings. After losing government in 2006, the party embarked on a series of organizational reform projects, including a 'Renewal Commission' composed of 32 task forces aiming to engage the membership on a wide spectrum of policy areas, as well as a 'Change Commission' and a 'Special Committee on Party Renewal', both of which called for greater membership involvement in the policy development process. Among the reforms adopted by the party is the establishment of a caucus accountability officer, whose tasks include reporting to party

conventions on the actions taken by the parliamentary party on policy resolutions adopted at previous conventions and to ensure that these are considered for inclusion in subsequent manifestos. A proposal to remove the leader's veto over the content of the manifesto, however, did not succeed.

While this is the area of intraparty democracy that the centre has traditionally most struggled with in finding a meaningful role for the membership, significant recent reforms in this direction are evident. In sum then, authority over party policy also appears to be increasingly contested. Many parties now require that parliamentarians justify their policy actions and members are demanding a greater role in the formation of things like a high-level party platform. Central officials are also well aware of members' increasing desire to influence policy-making and their unwillingness to be as deferential as in previous decades (interviews). Desirous of having a stronger grassroots base, and facing a decline in membership numbers and levels of activism, several of the parties are experimenting with offering policy-based as opposed to only geographically organized branch memberships and with structures aimed at providing members with more opportunities to engage in policy deliberation. This 'issues-based activism' results in the rise of vibrant, grassroots organizations such as the ALP's Rainbow Labor and Labor for Refugees.

CONCLUSION

This examination of candidate nomination, leadership selection and policy development makes clear that authority within parties is both shared and contested. While the common presentation of the stratarchical model is useful in that it predicts shared as opposed to either hierarchical or completely devolved distribution of power within a party, its characterization of individual areas of authority parcelled out to different levels of the party is not supported.

Where the common use of the stratarchical model requires refinement is in its failure to identify the unwillingness of either level to cede full authority in any of the important activities conducted within the parties. Unlike the Detroit party bosses that Eldersveld studied, the leadership of the national parties is neither unaware of nor uninterested in the activities of their local party associations.

Similarly, the local party branches are assertive in wanting to influence important decisions of the party as a whole and not just those limited to their own geographic bailiwick. The common representation of a franchise-like 'bargain' in which local branches select candidates and central party officials (either in government or central office) choose leaders and set the policy course is challenged by a model in which both levels of the party share authority over all of these key decisions. Increasingly, both recognize and accept the importance of a role for the other in all key areas of intraparty democracy.

Through an empirical investigation of both the formal and informal stories, we find that there is an ongoing tension between the two levels as both continue to assert their claims for greater influence. Rank-and-file members agitate for more power and the centre often tries to resist until it finds that it is in its interest to both placate the membership (lest they exit the party) and to benefit from their views. Failure to do so, they fear, will have an electoral cost. Agreements are reached from time to time, reflecting the current state of power between the two groups. Inevitably, these are challenged as one side or the other moves for greater influence.

Several factors no doubt influence the relative balance of power at any given time. Chief among these appears to be the proximity of the party to power. When in government the centre has the upper hand, and after electoral defeat this often shifts to the rank-and-file membership. As many have observed, electoral defeat is often a precursor to party organizational reform, almost always in the direction of granting greater authority to the local branches and their members (Harmel and Janda 1994). This is apparent in the parties in this study as almost all of the organizational reforms were adopted after an electoral setback.

While it is beyond the scope of this article to identify and assess the various factors influencing the relative balance of powers, what is clear is that authority in the principal areas of party life is shared within each competence. In that sense, stratarchy, rather than the hierarchical or federation model, defines these relationships. However, it is a bargain based around a checks-and-balances form of power-sharing rather than of separation of powers. We find mutual interdependence between a party's grassroots membership and its central party elite. The centre acknowledges that it requires an active and engaged membership in order to accomplish its electoral and

governing objectives, and the membership accepts the need for some central control and authority in order to provide the efficiency, branding and consistency required for the party to succeed.

These are all government-seeking parties, but set in contexts with different electoral systems and in similar but not identical institutional settings. Nonetheless, the stories and concerns recounted in the many interviews were strikingly similar across parties and jurisdictions. And while the power-sharing arrangements are not identical, in every case, authority for key party decision-making is complex in that it involves both levels of the party. In this regard, no meaningful differences are found between unitary and federal states. And, while parties on the left may often be first to democratize, they are typically quickly followed by their principal competitors.

The parties in this study have all, for many decades, existed as principal players in their party systems weathering electoral defeats and enjoying stretches in government. Their ability to calibrate their internal power-sharing mechanisms to reflect their contextual circumstances likely contributes to their longevity. As Hanley (2015) suggests, one of the great strengths of successful parties is their ability to adapt their organizational practices to changing democratic contexts. Though this can create moments of tension and uneasiness in internal party relations, it is probably a healthy dynamic. Political parties are meant to serve as a link between citizens and their parliament, and in doing so to offer participatory opportunities to influence public affairs, and to provide a cohesive and coherent personnel and policy option to voters during election campaigns. These different objectives can lead to competing organizational demands which are best sorted through the ongoing tension between local party activists and central party elites. After all, both share the same ultimate objective of seeing their party in government and generally understand that the only way to get there is to work together towards this common goal.

NOTES

[1] This analysis is restricted to Australian members of the House of Representatives and electorate members of the NZ Parliament.

[2] It is worth noting that Peter Mair (1995) proposes the alternative view that hierarchical parties, common in his cartel thesis, manage to accumulate more power vis-à-vis their activists by 'granting' authority over some decision-making to the membership at large. The argument is that this neuters the party's activist base, which is better equipped to challenge the leadership than is a diffuse and modestly interested general membership.

[3] Forty-two interviews with party officials, party activists, parliamentarians, political journalists and observers were conducted between 2011 and 2014 in Australia, Ireland and New Zealand specifically for this project. Data from interviews with similar sources, in all three countries, conducted between 2008 and 2010 for a related project, are also drawn upon, as are interviews with Canadian party officials conducted over a longer period of time. Some of the interviews were primarily informational in nature. For example, party secretaries were asked to explain and clarify formal rules and informal practices relating to intraparty decision-making. Other interviews, for example with party activists and MPs, were more focused on informal practices and the respondents' views relating to intraparty power-sharing. The interviews were all semi-structured with subjects asked a series of common questions and then encouraged to expand on what they thought were the important aspects of the subject. The interviews were typically 45–60 minutes in length and all respondents were promised anonymity.

[4] For a full discussion of this legislation, see Cross (2016).

[5] At its 2015 conference, the ALP adopted rules allowing for a portion of delegates to future conventions to be directly elected.

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