

# Much Ado About Nothing: Intra-Party Democracy in Poland. Analysed from Party Statutes<sup>1</sup>

Beata Kosowska-Gąstoł,  
Katarzyna Sobolewska-Myślik<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

The aim of the paper is to examine intra-party democracy (IPD) in Poland over time, assess whether it has increased or declined, and explore generational differences among parties. We analysed parties that entered parliament following the 2023 elections. Our study was based on content analysis of party statutes, employing the analytical framework developed by von dem Berge et al. (2013). We assumed that the level of IPD changed over time and that parties established within a mature political system would exhibit higher levels of IPD than those founded during the early stages of political transformation. We also hypothesised that newer parties would prove more inclined to involve their members in decision-making processes and to use plebiscitary intra-party democracy (PIPD). However, our findings revealed a more ambiguous picture than anticipated. No significant differences between the parties were identified. Assembly-based intra-party democracy (AIPD) seemed to be the standard in parties of all generations, with only a few exceptions where some form of PIPD was used as a complementary approach.

*Keywords: intra-party democracy; IPD; new parties; Polish parties; party generations*

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2 Associate professor of political science at the Institute of Political Science and International Relations, Faculty of International and Political Studies, Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland, [beata.kosowska-gastol@uj.edu.pl](mailto:beata.kosowska-gastol@uj.edu.pl), ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3555-2828>. Full professor of political science at the Institute of Political Science and Administration, University of Opole, Poland, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4971-9772>.

## 1. Introduction

Intra-party democracy (IPD) has become an increasingly important aspect of both politics and academic research in recent decades. Since their inception in the form of a mass model, modern political parties have been supposed to be internally democratic, although this principle has not always been fully followed in practice (Duverger, 1965). Until the 1960s intra-party democracy mainly took a representative form, then, in response to what was considered a crisis within political parties, some elements of direct democracy were introduced (Ignazi, 2020). These changes stimulated academic interest in IPD and renewed attention to a discussion dating back to Schattschneider (1942), who argued that democracy should operate between parties rather than within them. Although Schattschneider's idea is remembered, there is no risk in stating that it is not in the current mainstream of academic discussion of IPD. The issues discussed these days are rather the precise definition of IPD (Cross & Katz, 2013), how it is implemented in parties (Scarrow, Webb & Poguntke, 2017) and how to measure it (von dem Berge, Poguntke, Obert & Tipei, 2013).

In this paper we describe the research in which we aimed to measure intra-party democracy and track any changes over time to find out whether it had increased or decreased and whether there were differences among different parties. The subjects of our research were the Polish parties that entered parliament following the 2023 elections. They were divided into three groups that corresponded to three generations<sup>1</sup> – the first had its roots in the communist period, the second developed during the transition and post-transition era and the third comprised parties that were founded after the new political and party systems were established. We wanted to discover whether there were differences in the level of IPD between different generations and whether they disappeared as the parties developed. We expected that the level of IPD would change over time as more regulations were introduced into law and into formal party documents and as their organisations developed. The rising level of IPD could also be considered compatible with trends connected with the introduction of direct democracy that have been observed in modern European democracies (Cross & Katz, 2013). Our hypotheses were as follows:

H1: *Intra-party democracy increased in Poland over time.*

H2: *Parties of the second and third generations showed a higher level of IPD than first-generation parties at their inception.*

H3: *Parties of the second and third generations developed direct democracy (plebiscitary intra-party democracy – PIPD), whereas first-generation parties mainly used assembly-based intra-party democracy (AIPD).*

We carried out content analysis of party statutes obtained from the registration authority, the District Court in Warsaw. For each party that had adopted more than one set of statutes, the first and last statutes to be issued were examined,

which would show any changes over time. The material for analysis consisted of 16 documents. We applied the IPD index developed by von dem Berge, Poguntke, Obert and Tipei (2013) to these documents to measure the level of intraparty democracy. The index is based on two main criteria of IPD: inclusiveness and decentralisation, which are analysed in three areas: members' rights, organisational structures and the decision-making process. Although other IPD indices have been developed (e.g., Salgado, 2020; Rahat & Shapira, 2017; Scarrow et al., 2017; Poguntke et al., 2016), the von dem Berge et al. method suited our purposes, is universally applicable and had been tested by its authors on data from other CEE countries (Hungary, Slovakia and Romania) (von dem Berge & Obert, 2017).

As our research was conducted on formal party documents, it should be remembered that our results constitute the official image of the party referred to by Katz and Mair as a kind of 'official story', which may differ from the actuality referred to as the 'real story' (Katz & Mair, 1992, p. 3). This does not mean, however, that formal rules are not important; on the contrary, according to these researchers, if people fight for rules, that is sufficient reason to consider that they are important (Katz & Mair, 1992, p. 8). Rules set the framework for action and can often have a socialising effect on actors operating within institutions (March & Olsen, 1998). The rhetoric used in party statutes is an important indicator of changing attitudes to the relationships between leaders, members and party bodies (Kittilson & Scarrow, 2003). The practical aspect is also important – statutes are often the only available sources of data, especially if we want to analyse parties from the past. Party statutes are usually the main objects of study when analysing IPD (Katz & Mair, 1992; Norris, 2006). They can also be treated as a first step to further analyses, including empirical research.

Following this introduction, this article is divided into four parts. In Part 2, we examine various approaches to defining and variants of intra-party democracy by reference to the literature, in Part 3 we present the legal rules related to IPD in Poland, in Part 4 we describe our research methods and results and in Part 5 we discuss the results and present the conclusions of our study.

## **2. What does IPD really mean? A review of the literature**

For a long time, democracy within parties (IPD) was seen in light of the dominance of the mass model of internal party organisation. Duverger in his seminal work wrote that the model in which parties are based on branches, open to all and with leaders elected by the members, 'corresponds to the requirements of political democracy' in contrast to the model in which parties are based on an undemocratic caucus (Duverger, 1965, p. 26). The core idea of democracy within

this model was the control of the elites by the members (Scarrow et al., 2017, p. 137). This type of party organisation, and particularly its democratic dimension, is described in various ways: Ignazi (2020) uses the term ‘delegate democracy’ emphasising the multi-stage internal decision-making and representative character of party assemblies; while Webb, Scarrow and Poguntke (2017) write about the ‘subscriber democracy’ model based on local branches, annual or biennial congresses as the highest party organ, smaller executive committees, membership procedures and annual fees. In the term used by Ignazi (2020), democracy based on representative logic is clearly visible; in the term ‘subscriber democracy’ the representative logic is not so clearly expressed, but it is not excluded – congresses or other collective bodies of small parties do not have to be exclusively for delegates but can include all members.

This type of party organisation came to be challenged by the mid 20th century when a crisis emerged concerning failures in party functioning, shrinking membership and growing public distrust of parties. The remedy for the crisis that gained most favour was to open up participation in party procedures – mainly leadership and candidate selection – to grassroots members. Thus, the logic of representative democracy, characteristic of the mass model, was modified by inclusion of the logic of direct democracy. One of the best-known examples of such practice was the introduction of grassroots democracy by Green parties in the 1970s (Scarrow et al., 2017, p. 137; Ignazi, 2020, p. 11), a change widely referred to as the ‘democratisation’ of political parties (Bille, 2001). The diagnosis of the crisis also stimulated academic interest in IPD, including its definition and the question of whether the level of IPD could be measured, as is suggested by the term ‘democratisation’. Cross and Katz (2013, p. 2) point out that, considering the many different ways political parties are organised and operate, there can be no universal definition of IPD. They argue such a definition may include many distinct aspects such as participation, inclusiveness, centralisation, accountability and other elements also associated with the term democracy.

In the absence of one normative definition, approaches to defining IPD generally involve one or more of these aspects of democracy, with ‘inclusiveness’ the most popular (Scarrow et al., 2017; Ignazi, 2020; Bille, 2001; Bernardi et al., 2017; von dem Berge et al., 2013). For Ignazi (2020), inclusiveness is equivalent to direct democracy, but IPD also needs three other dimensions to be fully fledged: pluralism, deliberation and diffusion. Bille (2001) also insists on inclusiveness but argues decentralisation is important for IPD too as it allows more members to participate in the decision-making process.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, von dem Berge et al. (2013, p. 5) conceptualise IPD with two criteria: inclusiveness and decentralisation. On the other hand, Scarrow et al. emphasise inclusion (‘IPD equals inclusiveness’) (2017, p. 139), accepting decentralisation as an important but not a defining aspect of IPD. In their approach to IPD, these authors differentiate between two variants of IPD – assembly-based IPD (AIPD) and plebiscitary IPD (PIPD). Both may be more

or less inclusive but follow a different logic, with AIPD being a representative and PIPD a direct variant of democracy (Scarrow et al., 2017; Poguntke et al., 2016). In AIPD, the emphasis is put on discussion within party bodies, and decisions are taken by attendees at party meetings, who vote after debating propositions. PIPD means that party decisions are reached by party members casting votes (Poguntke et al., 2016, p. 671). Measuring the level of IPD, Scarrow et al. (2017) differentiate between these two variants. However, in practice, political parties often combine both methods of decision-making using direct democracy as complementary, so in our article they are treated as components of IPD.

### **3. The laws on intra-party democracy – is IPD ‘juridified’ in Poland?**

Intra-party democracy in Polish political parties is partly ‘juridified’ or imposed by legislation. The constitutionalisation of parties in 1997 brought political pluralism (Art. 11) and a ban on parties that use totalitarian methods or sanction racial or ethnic hatred, apply violence for the purpose of obtaining power or aim to keep their own structure or membership secret (Art. 13) (Constitution, 1997). However, these rules are mainly related to party activity in the political system. IPD is covered in the Party Law of 1997, of which Art. 8 states, ‘Political parties shape their structures and principles of operation in accordance with the principles of democracy, in particular by ensuring the openness of these structures, appointing party bodies through elections and adopting resolutions by a majority of votes’. This minimal definition of IPD is supplemented in Art. 9 where the required elements of a party’s statutes are listed. The statutes should include procedures for selecting and supplementing party bodies and for creating and disbanding territorial party units. Compliance with the principles of democracy forces the creation of three types of party body: decision-making (representing party members), executive and control (Chmaj, 2011, p. 28).

Previous legislation covering party registration (in force 1990–1997) was short-lived and did not intervene in internal party structures (Party Law, 1990). However, since 1997, when a new party law came into force, the legal requirements and their judicial interpretation by the registration authority (the District Court in Warsaw) have influenced the characteristics of party statutes to such an extent that they do not differ significantly from each other and, more importantly, have determined to some extent the level of intra-party democracy. For example, when the Civic Platform of the Republic of Poland (PO) was established in 2001, its founders proposed that only the parliamentary party, as the highest authority, was entitled to change the party statutes, adopt the party programme and select the leadership (Sobolewska-Myślik, Kosowska-Gąstoł & Borowiec, 2009,

p. 83). Even though party leaders were selected in this way in other countries, for example, in the UK (Pilet & Cross, 2014), the District Court rejected PO's request for registration, reasoning that the highest authority of the party should be the assembly of members or their representatives, whose powers include deciding on the most important matters for the existence of the party (Court Decision, 2002). The party was registered only when it changed its statutes in 2002. This case shows clearly that democracy in Polish parties is to some extent shaped by the registration body, which inevitably has its own view of how IPD should look.

Other issues that can be important for IPD are the gender quotas that were introduced to the Polish political system by the Electoral Code of 2011. In proportional elections, each electoral list must contain not less than 35% of candidates of each gender. This has had an impact on the number of women on party lists, but not necessarily in parliament, as electoral success depends on many other factors such as a candidate's position on the list (Marcinkiewicz, 2014; Flis, 2014). As the article is based on party statutes, we checked whether parties introduced these provisions into their statutory documents.

#### 4. Data and methods

In scope of our analysis were those parties that won seats in the Sejm (the lower and more influential chamber of the Polish parliament) at the 2023 parliamentary elections, either running alone or as part of a coalition. This definition covered three parties: Law and Justice (PiS), the New Left (NL) and Confederation Liberty and Independence (K WiN); and two coalitions: the Civic Coalition and the Third Way. The Civic Coalition included four parties: the Civic Platform of the Republic of Poland, the Modern Party, Initiative Poland and the Greens, while the Third Way consisted of two: Poland 2050 of Szymon Hołownia and the Polish People's Party (Election results, 2023). Formally, representatives of nine parties got into the Sejm. Though candidates of other parties ran from the PiS, NL and K WiN lists, these parties were not included in our analysis as they did not take part in the election under their own labels.

The parties included were divided into three generations that we supposed might differ in terms of their IPD. The first generation, deeply rooted in the communist period, was represented by the New Left<sup>3</sup> (NL) and the Polish People's Party (PSL). Both inherited their geographical organisation, and to some extent other resources, from parties that existed in the communist era and had many of the characteristics of mass parties. The second generation had its roots in the post-Solidarity movement of the 1990s. They tried to emulate the organisational solutions of post-communist parties (mostly a mass model), but without the necessary resources they were unable to do so. At the beginning of the

21st century, post-Solidarity forces ended up in two big parties, the Civic Platform of the Republic of Poland (PO) and Law and Justice (PiS). Their foundation and evolution were influenced by the transition and post-transition era when the conditions necessary for the effective development of a mass party structure no longer existed (Kopeček & Svačinová, 2016, p. 135), so they used 'catch-all' and cartel-party strategies. The latter turned out to be a success. In the 2007 parliamentary election no new parties entered parliament – all seats were won by one of the four first- or second-generation parties. It has only been since the 2011 elections that new parties have been able to overcome the electoral threshold and win parliamentary seats.<sup>4</sup> Since then, the legal and political environment has been quite different, and so have the parties, all of which were classified as third generation (Confederation Liberty and Independence, Poland 2050 of Szymon Hołownia, the Modern Party, Initiative Poland and the Greens).

We used the IPD calculation method designed by von dem Berge, Poguntke, Obert and Tipei (2013). Their conceptualisation of IPD includes two categories: inclusiveness and decentralisation. Inclusiveness refers to the group of party decision-makers. The scope of this group extends from a single leader or a small group of party elites to all members or even beyond, to party supporters who do not enjoy full party membership. Decentralisation is understood as the role the sub-national units play in the party decision-making process, particularly their independence from the influence of the centre (von dem Berge et al., 2013, p. 5). The authors distinguish three main categories in their IPD coding scheme – members' rights, organisational structure and the decision-making process. These are divided into sub-categories consisting of detailed elements of party structures or rules governing party functions (von dem Berge et al., 2013, p. 7). 'Members' rights' comprise general members' rights and the rights of minorities, such as women or young people. The sub-category 'organisational structure' includes central bodies (such as the congress, conflict-solving agencies, various forms of executive and the party leader) and their relationships with sub-national units. The 'decision-making process' includes two further categorisations: recruitment and programmatic issues. 'Recruitment' covers the selection of candidates for both public and intra-party offices at central and sub-national levels, including the role and independence of sub-national party units. 'Programmatic issues' concerns the role of party members and party bodies, both central and sub-national, in formulating the party programme.

Detailed elements were addressed by a set of 92 questions designed to assess the level of IPD according to the general conceptualisation – i.e., inclusiveness and decentralisation. For each question, there were three possible answers: Yes, No or Not Specified; and for each answer the values assigned were -1, 0 or +1, according to the operationalisation provided by the authors (von dem Berge et al., 2013, pp. 43–56). As they explain, the rationale behind this quantification is that all answers which have positive implications on IPD are attributed the value +1,

regardless whether the answer is *Yes*, *No*, or *Not Specified*, following the same logic all answers which have negative implications on IPD are attributed the value -1, regardless whether the answer is *Yes*, *No*, or *Not Specified*, 0 is allocated when no specific effects on IPD can be identified. The coding unit is a message (part of a sentence or phrase) found in a party statute, used to provide the answer to a given question. The IPD value for each party was calculated as an average from the partial values for three main sub-categories (members' rights, organisational structure, decision-making). The final IPD index ranges from -1 to 1 (von dem Berge et al., 2013, pp. 31–33).

It might be helpful to provide here a short explanation as to which statutory provisions are considered conducive to IPD, as a point of reference for the interpretation of the results of our analysis. This does not mean setting out the 92 questions included in the coding sheet; a brief review will suffice to get a general picture of solutions related to high and low IPD values.

In the category of members' rights, high IPD is connected particularly with access to information about party activities and the opportunity to express opinions diverging from the party majority. Participation in the process of decision-making is also important, though this is also included in other sub-categories (e.g., leadership election and formulating the party programme). For minority rights, which is a sub-category of members' rights, high IPD values come mainly from including minorities through a quota mechanism in the party bodies or candidate lists.

The measure of IPD in the category of organisational structure is mainly connected with the competencies and accountabilities of the individual party organs. Competencies are especially important in the case of party congresses and leaders. To score highly for IPD, the party congress should decide the party statutes and programme, and it should participate in elections for party offices and candidate lists, which is also included in the recruitment sub-category of the coding scheme. These competencies plus frequent meetings (every three years at least) are interpreted in terms of the inclusiveness aspect of IPD. The competencies of party leadership are framed differently – the less individual power the leader has, the higher the value of IPD, because it limits the autocratic character of power within the party. The most important aspect of collective executive organs for IPD is their accountability to party members or to congress, which also refers to the inclusive aspect of IPD. Within organisational structure, conflict-solving agencies should be independent and all party members and bodies should be equally subject to their rulings (von dem Berge et al., 2013, p. 9).

Inclusiveness and decentralisation play important roles in the category of decision-making, where recruitment, referring to the nomination and selection of candidates, constitutes the most detailed sub-category of the coding scheme. Recruitment is further divided into recruitment for national public offices and party offices. In both sub-categories, inclusiveness is measured by the role of party members in those procedures – closed primaries are the most inclusive



and party elites the most exclusive poles. Decentralisation is assessed according to the scheme proposed by Bille (2001), where, in the most decentralised variant sub-national units completely control the process of nomination and selection, and in the most centralised one complete control is exercised by national party bodies. Voting procedures, another sub-category of the decision-making process, is mostly concerned with the degree of decentralisation, so the autonomy of regional branches in electing candidates for sub-national public and party offices is quantified using Bille's (2001) ranking. The last sub-category in the decision-making process is programmatic issues, i.e., the question of who decides the contents of the party manifesto. For the IPD score, inclusiveness is again the most important element here, with all members being the most inclusive variant and party leader the most exclusive one.

The party statutes were coded by two researchers. Because of the small sample size (16 sets of party statutes), 25% of the sample, rather than the customary 10%, were considered to calculate intercoder reliability. Balancing small sample size, because of the large number of variables (92) the resulting intercoder reliability included 368 units of analysis (Neuendorf, 2002). The percentage agreement across all variables was 84% and was deemed sufficient to proceed with further coding.

## **5. Results. How much democracy is there and how has it changed?**

The first way we looked at the values of IPD obtained in our research was to rank them in order of magnitude. From this, it was obvious that Polish parties were more democratic than not. Recalling that the scale ranges from -1 (undemocratic) to +1 (democratic), the level of IPD in the parties in scope was between 0 and 0.5 with two exceptions - the Greens and the SdRP/NL parties - the scores of which exceeded 0.5. There were no meaningful differences between the generations. Surprisingly, the parties created just after the collapse of communism were not found to be less democratic than those founded in the transition period or in the democratic system established later. On the contrary, the post-communist parties (PSL and especially SdRP) were assessed to have a high level of IPD, while the newer parties were scored lower (e.g., Poland 2050 and Confederation) (Table 1).

**Table 1:**  
**Intra-party democracy scores**

Party		Statutes	Members' rights	Organisational structures	Decision-making	IPD (average)
Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland/New Left	SdRP	1991	0.500	0.781	0.449	0.576 ↔
	NL	2019	0.334	0.183	0.200	0.239 ↓
Polish People's Party	PSL	1990	0.250	0.490	0.255	0.332 ↔
		2021	0.167	0.687	0.415	0.423 ↑
Law and Justice	PiS	2001	0.250	0.242	0.294	0.262 ↔
		2021	0.167	0.287	0.247	0.233 ↓
Civic Platform of the Republic of Poland	PO	2002	-0.084	0.097	0.142	0.052 ↔
		2021	0.334	0.275	0.364	0.324 ↑
Green Party	Greens	2004	0.584	0.586	0.367	0.512 ↔
		2022	0.750	0.586	0.329	0.555 ↑
Modern Party	.N	2015	0.083	0.557	0.254	0.298 ↔
		2021	0.167	0.653	0.171	0.330 ↑
Poland 2050	Poland 2050	2022	0.000	0.192	0.083	0.092 ↔
		2023	0.000	0.225	0.083	0.103 ↑
Initiative Poland	iPL	2019	0.167	0.557	0.337	0.353 ↔
Confederation	K WiN	2022	0.000	0.107	0.019	0.042 ↔

Source: the authors

When tracking changes in the level of IPD over time, it was not possible to identify clear patterns related to party generations. While the IPD of some first- and second-generation parties increased (PSL, PO), with others (SdRP, PiS) it declined over time. Third-generation parties scored higher on their more recent statutes than their earlier rule books. However, the versions of the statutes we assessed came very close together (only one year apart in the case of Poland 2050) and some parties were so new they had only one iteration, so it was impossible to assess their development over time. In all third-generation parties, with the exception of the Greens, the initial level of IPD was low (Table 1). To explore the reasons for this we looked into the results in more detail, tracking the changes in IPD values in each of the dimensions: members' rights, organisational structure and decision-making process (Tables 2–4). The first seems to be the weakest component at first, yet in time it goes down; the second is the strongest and, in many parties, it grows; the third is the most complex and at the same time the vaguest.

According to their statutes, members of Polish parties do not enjoy many rights, it is related also to rights of minorities in their rank-and-file members (Table 2). The paradox that party membership (Scarrow, 2015) has simultaneously become less and more important is not valid in the case of Poland (cf. Winclawska, Paczeński, Brodzińska-Mirowska & Jacuński, 2021, pp. 316–317): while the general trend in Europe seems to be that, although parties have fewer members, their individual political rights have increased, in Poland both the numbers and

rights of party members remain low (Sobolewska-Mysłik, Kosowska-Gąstoł & Borowiec, 2010). The Party Law (1997) obliges parties to include members' rights in their statutes, but they do this to the minimum extent, with limited influence on the decision-making process and without allowing their members to express divergent opinions within the party or in public. Most of the parties we looked at did not impose minority quotas on party bodies or in the party lists for public offices, even though the Electoral Code (2011) insists on this. The party that stood out from those we analysed was the Green Party that, in line with its programme, decided to give members substantial rights. In its first statutes of 2004, the Greens scored 0.584 for members' rights, while in the 2022 version this increased to 0.750. For minority rights the Green Party scored the maximum of 1 for its earlier statutes, in which not only were explicit minority quotas set for party bodies and party lists, but also representatives of minorities were included in the national executive. Although the minority rights score for the Green Party's later statutes reduced to 0.833 because this last provision was removed, this was still better than all other parties (Table 2).

**Table 2:**  
**Members' rights scores**

Party	Statutes	General members' rights	Minority rights	Members' rights (average)
SdRP	1991	1.000	0.000	0.500 ↔
NL	2019	0.167	0.500	0.334 ↓
PSL	1990	0.333	0.167	0.250 ↔
	2021	0.333	0.000	0.167 ↓
PiS	2001	0.500	0.000	0.250 ↔
	2021	0.333	0.000	0.167 ↓
PO	2002	0.000	-0.167	-0.084 ↔
	2021	0.667	0.000	0.334 ↑
Greens	2004	0.167	1.000	0.584 ↔
	2022	0.667	0.833	0.750 ↑
.N	2015	0.333	-0.167	0.083 ↔
	2021	0.333	0.000	0.167 ↑
Poland 2050	2022	0.167	-0.167	0.000 ↔
	2023	0.167	-0.167	0.000 ↔
iPL	2019	0.333	0.000	0.167 ↔
K WiN	2022	0.167	-0.167	0.000 ↔

Source: the authors

The organisational structure of Polish parties contributed to a high IPD score with the exception of PO in 2002 (0.097), as mentioned above, and K WiN in 2019 (0.107), due in part to its coalition character (Table 3). Due to legal rules and decisions by the registration body, Polish party structure is primarily based

on assembly-based IPD (AIPD), with congress playing the most significant role. A possible drawback of this arrangement in the current context is that congresses usually meet every four years, in tune with the parliamentary term but less often than the three-year cycle favoured by the von dem Berge et al. framework of our analysis and thus disadvantaging their IPD score. The infrequent meetings of congresses are due to the existence of councils, subordinate decision-making bodies that are active between congresses and partially exercise their competencies, but are not considered by the analytical framework to the further detriment of the parties' IPD score. All parties had conflict-solving agencies in the shape of party courts. They all also had branches at the sub-national level that were not completely autonomous but demonstrated a certain level of independence in shaping their own leadership and composing lists for sub-national public offices. Finally, we found great diversity in executive bodies and party leadership. While in some parties, in compliance with the von dem Berge et al. framework, two executive organs could be distinguished, others had either a national executive or an executive committee. Whether a party had one or two of these bodies, the level of IPD depended on their responsibilities and accountability. The executive was usually accountable to congress or another inclusive body; however, this relationship was not always made explicit in the party statutes, leading to a lower IPD score in our analysis. The competencies of party presidents were generally limited – they usually had no power to set up or close down sub-national party units, exclude a member from the party or its executive, block decisions of the executive or act against the provisions of the statutes. Their positions could be challenged through a limit to their term, and sometimes also through a vote of no confidence. All of these provisions had a positive influence on the party's IPD assessment.

In almost all parties with more than one edition of their statutes, the IPD score for organisational structure was higher on the second document. The exceptions were the Greens, where it stayed the same, and the New Left (SdRP/NL) where it decreased from an originally high level of 0.781. As shown in Table 3, the parties with the most democratic organisational structures, next to the Greens (0.586 both in 2004 and 2022), were the Modern Party (.N) (0.557 in 2015 and 0.653 in 2022), Initiative Poland (iPl) (0.557 in 2016) and the Polish People's Party (PSL) (0.490 in 1990 and 0.687 in 2021).

Table 3:  
Organisational structure scores

Party	Statutes	Party congress	Conflict solving agencies	National Executive	Executive Committee	Party president	Relationship between national and sub-national levels	Organisational structure (average)
SdRP	1991	0.600	0.750	1.000	1.000	0.333	1.000	0.781 ↔
NL	2019	0.000	0.500	-0.667	n/a	0.333	0.750	0.183 ↓
PSL	1990	0.200	0.500	n/a	0.667	0.333	0.750	0.490 ↔
	2021	0.600	0.750	n/a	1.000	0.333	0.750	0.687 ↑
PiS	2001	0.200	0.500	1.000	-0.667	-0.333	0.750	0.242 ↔
	2021	0.600	0.750	n/a	-0.667	0.000	0.750	0.287 ↑
PO	2002	0.400	0.500	n/a	-0.667	0.000	0.250	0.097 ↔
	2021	0.400	0.500	1.000	-0.667	-0.333	0.750	0.275 ↑
Greens	2004	0.600	0.500	0.667	0.667	0.333	0.750	0.586 ↔
	2022	0.600	0.500	0.667	0.667	0.333	0.750	0.586 ↔
.N	2015	0.200	0.500	n/a	1.000	0.333	0.750	0.557 ↔
	2021	0.600	0.750	n/a	1.000	0.167	0.750	0.653 ↑
Poland 2050	2022	0.400	0.500	-0.667	0.000	0.167	0.750	0.192 ↔
	2023	0.600	0.500	-0.667	0.000	0.167	0.750	0.225 ↑
iPL	2019	0.200	0.500	n/a	1.000	0.333	0.750	0.557 ↔
K WiN	2019	0.200	0.750	0.000	-0.667	n/a	0.250	0.107 ↔

Source: the authors

The analytical framework allots an IPD score for the decision-making process a party uses to determine recruitment and programmatic issues. The picture obtained of the process from party statutes was ambiguous – the IPD levels that emerged from our analysis were low, ranging from 0.019 for the Confederation (K WiN) in 2019 to 0.449 for SdRP in 1991 (Table 4, column 16). While in some parties IPD increased over time (PO, PSL), in others it declined (SdRP/NL, PiS, Greens, .N) or remained the same (Poland 2050), or there was no change of statutes so no trend can be ascertained (iPL, K WiN).

Decision-making on programmatic issues, except Poland 2050 and K WiN, emerged generally as more democratic than on recruitment for both national public and party offices. IPD, at 0.5, was highest in SdRP in 1991 and in the Modern Party in 2015, in both parties – members could participate, along with the party congresses, in creating party programmes (Table 4, Column 15).

The values of the index were low for candidate selection, in recruitment for both national public and party offices (Table 4, Columns 5 and 9 respectively). This is because the party statutes contained only general rules on the intra-party selection process as details were specified in internal regulations adopted before each election (Bichta, 2010, p. 172-173). The values were much higher for procedures (Column 13), especially when the role of sub-national branches in the selection of candidates for public offices at the sub-national level (Column 11) and their

own leadership (Column 12) were considered. The latter has been impressive in all parties since the beginning of the post-communist transformation, except for the Modern Party (.N) in 2015, where the role of sub-national party branches in deciding their leadership was poor (-0.5). This was largely because the party was created top-down and, since the regional and local branches were yet to be established, the national party office nominated its representatives to create territorial structures. When the party had covered the country with territorial organisational structures, central office entrusted them with the selection of sub-national leaders.

Table 4:  
Decision-making process scores

Party	Statute	Candidate nomination	Candidate selection - parliament	Candidate selection - president	Role of sub-national units	Recruitment for national public office (average)	Election of the National Executive	Election of the Executive Committee	Election of the party president	Recruitment for national party office (average)	Voting procedure	Role of sub-national units (public office)	Role of sub-national units (party office)	Procedures (average)	Recruitment (average)	Programmatic issues	Decision-making (average)
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
						(1+2+3+4)				(6+7+8)				(10+11+12)	(5+9+13)		(14+15)
SdRP	1991	0.000	0.800	0.167	0.000	0.242	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.250	1.000	1.000	0.750	0.397	0.500	0.449 ↔
NL	2019	-0.333	0.200	0.667	-0.200	0.084	0.200	n/a	0.200	0.200	-0.750	1.000	1.000	0.417	0.233	0.167	0.200 ↓
PSL	1990	-0.500	0.000	0.167	0.000	-0.083	n/a	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.250	0.000	1.000	0.417	0.178	0.333	0.255 ↔
	2021	0.500	0.800	0.667	0.200	0.542	n/a	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.250	1.000	1.000	0.750	0.497	0.333	0.415 ↑
PiS	2001	0.167	0.200	0.167	0.200	0.184	0.000	-0.200	0.200	0.000	0.250	1.000	0.500	0.583	0.256	0.333	0.294 ↔
	2021	0.167	0.000	0.167	0.200	0.134	n/a	0.000	0.200	0.100	-0.750	1.000	0.500	0.250	0.161	0.333	0.247 ↓
PO	2002	0.167	0.400	0.167	0.000	0.184	n/a	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.250	0.000	0.250	0.167	0.117	0.167	0.142 ↔
	2021	0.167	0.400	0.167	0.200	0.234	0.200	0.000	0.400	0.200	0.250	1.000	1.000	0.750	0.395	0.333	0.364 ↑
Greens	2004	-0.167	0.800	0.167	0.200	0.250	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.250	1.000	1.000	0.750	0.400	0.333	0.367 ↔
	2022	0.333	0.200	0.167	0.200	0.225	0.200	-0.400	0.200	0.000	0.750	0.500	1.000	0.750	0.325	0.333	0.329 ↓
.N	2015	-0.333	0.000	0.167	-0.200	-0.092	n/a	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.250	0.000	-0.500	-0.083	0.008	0.500	0.254 ↔
	2021	-0.333	0.000	0.167	-0.200	-0.092	n/a	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.250	0.000	1.000	0.417	0.175	0.167	0.171 ↓
Poland	2022	0.167	0.200	0.167	0.200	0.184	0.000	-0.200	0.400	0.067	-0.750	0.500	1.000	0.250	0.167	0.000	0.083 ↔
	2023	0.167	0.200	0.167	0.200	0.184	0.000	-0.200	0.400	0.067	-0.750	0.500	1.000	0.250	0.167	0.000	0.083 ↔
iPL	2019	0.000	0.600	0.167	0.200	0.242	n/a	0.200	0.200	0.200	0.250	0.500	1.000	0.583	0.342	0.333	0.337 ↔
	2019	-0.333	0.000	0.000	-0.200	-0.133	-0.200	0.200	n/a	0.000	0.000	-0.250	1.000	0.250	0.039	0.000	0.019 ↔

Source: the authors

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

Although we found intra-party democracy (IPD) in Polish parties (to some extent determined by legislation), its level was not high, being close to the middle of the scale. As already mentioned, it was between 0 and 0.5 on a scale from -1 (undemocratic) to +1 (democratic), with two exceptions – the Greens and the SdRP/NL, which scored above 0.5. At the start of our research, we expected to find that IPD at the beginning of Poland's post-communist transformation would be underdeveloped but that it would increase both in the old parties of the first generation and, to a greater extent, in those second- and third-generation parties that entered parliament within an established political system. This assumption was informed by both the development of legislation on party structures and general trends in the growth of direct democracy in candidate selection, party leadership election and adopting party manifestos. Similar expectations related to the inclusiveness of Polish parties are found in the literature, e.g., in Radecki (2018) and Hartliński (2014).

The picture arising from our research is much less clear than expected. There is no discernible trend of increasing IPD over time. When we compare the first and last statutes of each party, we observe an increase in most (PSL, PO, Greens, the Modern Party, Poland 2050) and a decrease in two (SdRP/NL, PiS); Initiative Poland and the Confederation have published only one set of statutes, so comparisons over time cannot be made. In summary, our first hypothesis was only partially confirmed – while the level of IPD is increasing in most parties, it is decreasing in some, and this applies to parties from different generations. None of the second- and third-generation parties had a prominent level of IPD when they entered parliament for the first time, nor did they develop intra-party direct democracy or empower their rank-and-file members, so our second and third hypotheses were falsified. The only exception is the Green party that belongs to the third generation and was found to have one of the highest levels of IPD, including empowering their rank-and-file. Legal regulations have shaped the functions of party congresses, which make the most important decisions in parties, so that now representative democracy or assembly-based IPD (AIPD) seems to be the standard in parties of all generations. There are only a few exceptions of parties that use some form of complementary plebiscitary IPD (PIPD), PO and Poland 2050 among them.

Both mentioned parties include all party members in the process of selecting their party leaders. This solution was initially also used by SLD, then treated as optional and finally abandoned (NL). Putting leader selection in the hands of the rank-and-file makes the process more inclusive, but it does not mean that the leadership contest is more competitive; on the contrary, empirical research conducted by Jacuński, Brodzińska-Mirowska, Paczeński and Winclawska (2021) shows that competitiveness is greater when the leader is elected by con-



gress. For example, in PO, which holds primaries, the leadership election is not very competitive, while in parties that select their leaders during congresses (e.g., PSL, the Modern Party and SLD – except in 2012 when primaries were held), it is much more strongly contested. The Law and Justice party (PiS) seems to be an exception here; its chairman, Jarosław Kaczyński, has been the only candidate since 2003 and has been elected by congress almost unanimously on each occasion (Jacuński et al., 2021, pp. 133–144). However, according to research conducted by Hartliński (2021), candidate selection process in Poland is ‘more focused on legitimising candidates than actually choosing anyone’ (p. 172), more important is an informal process of party’s preliminary filtering and encouraging or discouraging potential candidates, a process controlled by party leaders that was considered harmful to intra-party democracy.

In 2011 gender quotas were mandated by law, following which political parties could register their lists only if they met the 35% quota rule. Several parties had pre-empted this rule in their statutes, for example, SdRP/SLD, and others, such as the Freedom Union (UW), the Labour Union (UP) and Social Democracy of Poland (SdPi) applied it though it was not included in their statutes (Gwiazda, 2025 forthcoming). Gender quotas are stipulated in the statutes of the Green Party (2022). The statutes of the other analysed parties do not contain rules on gender representation in the candidate selection process, even though they are included in the Electoral Code of 2011. It is perhaps the case that most parties see the law itself as sufficient in this matter; to repeat the rule in statutes would be superfluous.

The highest levels of IPD we measured were in the left-wing SdRP in 1991 and in the Green Party both in 2004 and 2022. The far-right Confederation (K WiN) returned the lowest level of IPD, surely because of the coalition character of this party. It was created as a confederation that brought together several parties which decided to run from the common list in the EP and then the 2019 parliamentary elections (Michalczyk-Wlizło, 2023; Kosowska-Gąstoł & Sobolewska-Myślik, 2023).<sup>5</sup> The composition of the coalition changed over time; in 2019 it was formally registered as a party, but still constitutes a kind of umbrella organisation. For this reason, its structures differ from those of other parties; for example, there is not one leader, but a council of leaders. Many decisions (e.g., candidate selection) require agreement between the member parties (their leaders), so cannot be transferred to rank-and-file members or sub-national structures. This affects the level of inclusiveness and therefore the Confederation’s IPD score as measured by our analytical framework.

Because of changes occurring in the distribution of power within political parties, the issue of IPD seems to be of growing importance (Kaczorowska, 2021), so further in-depth analyses are needed. Firstly, the issues addressed by von dem Berge et al. analytical framework should be complemented by several others – for example, in Polish parties there are decision-making bodies (usually called

councils) that meet between party congresses (cf. Borowiec, Sobolewska-Myślik & Kosowska-Gąstoł, 2016, p. 320) which should be included. They play a quite different role from the national executives distinguished in the analytical framework. Secondly, in assessing IPD, issue scores could be weighted to recognise that some are more important than others. In the analytical framework used, members' rights, organisational structures and decision-making process are calculated as equal despite the fact that each of these dimensions is scored as the average of a different number of sub-category scores. Thirdly, formal analysis based on party statutes should be combined with data from empirical research (e.g., interviews with party politicians, press information). Statutory regulations are sometimes very general, especially regarding the selection of candidates. Parties often have their own pre-selection standards even if there are no formal rules, or make ad hoc decisions on selection at each election – e.g., they may use closed primaries to select a candidate for presidential elections, even though their statutes do not mandate this (PO, Confederation). Finally, taking into account that in our analysis leftist parties (SdRP, Greens) scored the highest levels of IPD and the far-right scored lowest (Confederation), it is worth considering whether IPD is correlated with party ideology. This requires research on more parties, spatially more widely positioned – for example, on the basis of data from CHES or MARPOR – so is a candidate for further academic study.

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## Endnote:

- 1 For the concept of the three generations of parties see the example of the Czech parties by Kopeček and Svačinová (2016, pp. 134–135).
- 2 However, according to Hazan and Rahat (2010, p. 59) decentralisation does not always mean the inclusion of more members into the decision-making process as the selectorate at the national level can be more inclusive (e.g., all citizens or party members) than at the local level (e.g., local leader or elites).
- 3 The Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SdRP) was created in 1990. Since 1991 it has been a part of the broader coalition the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) which in 1999 transformed into a single party under the same name. In 2021 it merged with a smaller centre-left party the Spring by Robert Biedroń and since then has been known as the New Left (NL). All three labels are treated as the same entity, therefore the New Left is classified as a first-generation grouping. It can be confusing as the party has been through a lot of mergers, splits, transformations and both structural and personnel changes, however, we consider that we are dealing with the same party. During an online expert survey we conducted in 2022 as part of a research project on new parties in Poland, 60 out of 62 experts responded that they perceived the New Left as the continuation of SLD (two did not know; none perceived the party as new), and 46 out of 62 perceived SLD as the continuation of SdRP (two as the continuation of PZPR, five as new, eight did not answer). Our research carried out on party structures, programmes, party elites and candidates also confirmed a meaningful level of continuity between the analysed entities.
- 4 There are many definitions of new parties; some scholars emphasise new origin (Krouwel & Lucardi, 2008), new political leadership or personnel (Sikk, 2005) or competing on new issues (Lucardi, 2000; Zons 2015), others competing in elections for the first time (Hug, 2001; Tavits, 2006, 2008). In this article the latter definition has been adopted.
- 5 The party was composed of the Coalition for the Renewal of the Republic - Liberty and Hope (KORWIN), the National Movement, the Confederation of the Polish Crown and a few smaller groups: the Union of Christian Families (ZChR), the National League (LN) and the Drivers' Party.