

Constraints on Pluralistic Democracy in Bosnia-Herzegovina's Party System: A Study of Intra-Party Democracy

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Abstract: *The functionality of parliamentary democracy, a consolidated party system and political consensus are considered general prerequisites for the stability and development of every modern society and modern state. Since the re-establishment of multi-party pluralism in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1990, the profiling of political options, gathered above all through political parties, which would confirm the development of democratic of a pluralistic society based on European political tradition and practice is taking place slowly with numerous challenges. This study analyzes the development of political parties and intra-party democracy (IPD) in Bosnia and Herzegovina treating the content and quality of internal party policies, democratic culture and everyday political practice, as well as the fundamental legislative framework for the work of political parties in BiH. Using context analysis, combined with a structured survey of 10 leading parliamentary parties, the study assesses internal governance, decision-making practices, and member inclusiveness within BiH's party landscape. Findings reveal that political parties in BiH remain ethnically divided and ideologically fragmented, with internal democratic practices often limited by hierarchical control and a lack of transparency. The analysis indicates that the framework established by the Dayton Peace Agreement has institutionalized ethnic representation, further constraining democratic progress and IPD development. Recommendations for strengthening democratic practices include establishing a standardized legislative framework for party formation, increasing transparency in candidate selection, and expanding member engagement in decision-making. These insights contribute to the broader understanding of IPD in post-conflict, multi-ethnic societies, where historical legacies and political fragmentation present unique challenges to democratic consolidation. The study underscores the need for further research on the interplay between IPD and political stability in similar contexts, especially regarding the implications for democratic legitimacy and citizen trust in governance.*

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Introduction

The democratization of political parties and their internal structures is essential for establishing and sustaining a pluralistic democratic system, particularly in post-conflict and multi-ethnic contexts such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). This study investigates the state of intra-party democracy (IPD) within Bosnian political parties, exploring the extent to which these parties align with democratic principles of participation, transparency, and member inclusivity. Since the re-establishment of multi-party democracy in 1990, BiH has faced significant challenges in developing a coherent and ideologically diverse political party landscape, constrained by both ethnic divisions and a complex legislative framework established by the Dayton Peace Agreement.

BiH's political parties have historically struggled to define themselves along clear ideological lines, often prioritizing ethnic representation over democratic practices or policy-driven goals. As a result, Bosnian parties frequently lack mechanisms for direct member involvement in decision-making, transparency in leadership selection, and genuine accountability structures. This has led to a political culture marked by ethno-nationalist agendas, limited democratic pluralism, and a fragmented party landscape that hinders cohesive governance.

This study addresses these dynamics by examining IPD through a structured survey of leading Bosnian parties, combined with a contextual analysis of the legal and historical factors that shape party operations. By assessing the alignment of BiH's political parties with democratic norms, this research contributes valuable insights into the factors that either support or inhibit democratization within political organizations in post-conflict and multi-ethnic societies. Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of advancing IPD as a pathway toward political stability and democratic consolidation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Literature Review

Intraparty democracy (IPD) has been the subject of extensive scholarly debate, focusing on how democratic processes within political parties impact policy responsiveness, member engagement, and the overall democratic health of the political system. Research on IPD highlights its role in fostering inclusivity, transparency, and accountability within political organizations, though the effectiveness of these processes can vary widely depending on contextual factors such as country-specific governance frameworks and party structures.

IPD refers to mechanisms within political parties that allow for member participation in decision-making processes, including policy formation, leadership selection, and candidate nominations. Studies emphasize that IPD is critical to building transparency and accountability within parties, which, in turn, bolsters party legitimacy and public trust (von dem Berge & Obert, 2018). For instance, Caillaud and Tirole (2002) note that IPD can regulate internal competition and bolster a party's reputation by aligning internal governance with democratic values, particularly in highly competitive political environments (Caillaud & Tirole, 2002).

IPD influences a party's responsiveness to external policy shifts and interparty dynamics. Lehrer et al. (2017) found that democratic deliberations within parties lead to greater responsiveness to rival parties' policy adjustments. This responsiveness stems from inclusive deliberation processes, allowing a broader range of opinions that can drive policy adaptation in competitive political landscapes (Lehrer et al., 2017).

IPD's impact on member activism is not universally positive. Research on South Korea's political parties by Koo (2020) suggests that while IPD encourages engagement, it does not necessarily increase activism among party members. Instead, members positively rating their party's internal democracy often participate less actively, perhaps reflecting satisfaction with the current state of party governance rather than motivation for increased involvement (Koo, 2020). Moreover, authoritarian tendencies within party structures can inhibit meaningful participation, as observed in Turkey, where party leadership often limits member influence to maintain control (Musil, 2011).

In fragile or post-conflict societies, the implementation of IPD is complicated by pre-existing hierarchical structures. Sindre (2016) explored former rebel groups in Indonesia and East Timor that transitioned into political parties, highlighting how entrenched wartime command structures often resist democratic internal reforms, constraining the extent of IPD (Sindre, 2016). Such cases demonstrate the tension between stability and democratization in parties where hierarchical authority structures remain dominant post-transition.

Research into IPD in non-Western democracies, such as Kenya, reveals challenges in establishing internal accountability and member loyalty. Kyumwa (2017) identified low retention rates and limited financial transparency as significant obstacles to effective IPD, with frequent intra-party conflicts further destabilizing party structures (Kyumwa, 2017). Similarly, in Botswana, Kebonang and Wankie (2006) observed emerging participatory IPD practices, although these are sometimes viewed as destabilizing by traditional party elites (Kebonang & Wankie, 2006).

IPD's implementation influences public perceptions of party legitimacy and satisfaction with democracy. Ridge (2023) found that in institutionalized party systems, IPD can enhance citizens' satisfaction with democratic governance by ensuring parties are responsive and accountable to their members, potentially reducing affective polarization in the broader political environment (Ridge, 2023).

The above literature on intraparty democracy underscores its value in fostering transparency, accountability, and responsiveness within political parties. However, IPD's success is contingent on contextual factors, such as party structure, political culture, and historical legacy. In transition democracies and post-conflict settings, IPD often faces unique challenges, with entrenched power dynamics and resistance to reform. Future research might explore the long-term effects of IPD on party stability and public trust, particularly in emerging and non-Western democracies.

The above review highlights both the potential and the constraints of intraparty democracy in BH parties as a mechanism for enhancing democratic governance within political parties which justifies looking at the broader context within which IPD is discussed.

The Evolution, Challenges, and Dynamics of the Party System in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The historical foundations of BiH's political party system are deeply entwined with the region's complex socio-political legacy. Political pluralism in BiH has roots in the Austro-Hungarian period, where incomplete institutionalization limited democratic progression (Fejzić, 2023). The Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) of 1995 marked a significant shift, establishing an ethnic power-sharing arrangement designed to stabilize post-war BiH but also cementing divisions along ethnic lines. According to Manning (2004), this framework, while essential for peace, entrenched an ethnocratic system by institutionalizing ethnicity as the basis of political representation, an arrangement that remains a considerable obstacle for genuine democratic reform (Manning, 2004). The historical trajectory

demonstrates how efforts to stabilize BiH through ethnic quotas and autonomy agreements have fundamentally shaped its contemporary political structures (Lovrenović, 2016).

Ethnic fragmentation remains a defining feature of BiH's party politics, often superseding traditional political ideology. Ethnic identities in BiH have shaped political preferences since the first democratic elections in 1990, where nationalist parties triumphed, each representing one of the three major ethnic groups: Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs (Brljavac, 2012). According to Hulsey and Stjepanović (2017), this "ethnocracy" divides the electorate along ethnic lines, reinforcing identity-based voting patterns and limiting cross-ethnic coalitions (Hulsey & Stjepanović, 2017). Additionally, ethnic-based parties face limited incentives to moderate their agendas, as demonstrated in the analysis of party dynamics in the post-Dayton period (Eremin, 2021). This polarization obstructs ideological coherence and perpetuates a political culture where ethnic loyalty overrides policy-based party competition.

Studies assessing intra-party democracy in BiH reveal shortcomings in internal governance, transparency, and democratic norms. A comparison of BiH's intra-party mechanisms with those of established democracies shows that party leadership often holds disproportionate influence, with minimal participation from rank-and-file members (Hulsey, 2019). According to Lajh and Krašovec (2007), this lack of democratic procedure within parties undermines the institutional credibility of the political system, further inhibiting democratic consolidation in the country (Lajh & Krašovec, 2007). Such intra-party dynamics are often reflected in the difficulty non-nationalist parties face in promoting alternative ideologies that bridge ethnic divides, as these efforts are frequently undercut by entrenched party leadership structures.

BiH's constitutional and electoral frameworks shape its party operations significantly. The Dayton-imposed structure, with its provisions for ethnic representation, has led to legislative gridlock and has often stalled governance reforms aimed at greater inclusivity (Ahmetović, 2021). Electoral laws and the constitution require ethnic quotas in political representation, reinforcing the primacy of ethnic parties and limiting cross-ethnic political coalitions (Čuković, 2014). In theory, these regulations aim to prevent domination by any single ethnic group, but they simultaneously hinder the development of a cohesive, nationalized party system, instead fragmenting the political landscape along ethnic lines.

The influence of international organizations on BiH's political party system is pervasive. The European Union (EU), OSCE, and Venice Commission actively promote democratic reforms and support for moderate parties. However, efforts by international bodies to foster a multi-ethnic political environment have achieved limited success, as nationalist rhetoric and ethnic competition remain prevalent (Hulsey, 2010). Despite significant investment, international interventions have not yet succeeded in transforming the fundamental structure of BiH's party system, which remains resistant to the pressures of Europeanization and democratization (Kandel, 2022). Scholars argue that these efforts may need more tailored approaches that consider the deep-seated ethnic divisions unique to BiH.

The political party system in Bosnia and Herzegovina reflects a complex interplay between historical legacies, ethnic cleavages, limited intra-party democracy, restrictive constitutional frameworks, and international pressures. Each factor plays a role in reinforcing a political environment where ethnicity outweighs ideology, creating a fragmented system with limited prospects for genuine democratic consolidation. The literature underscores the need for further research on how intra-party reform and innovative electoral strategies could potentially mitigate the entrenched ethnic divisions that continue to shape BiH's political landscape. Addressing these gaps may provide insights critical to BiH's aspirations for stability and European integration.

Measuring Internal Party Democracy (IPD)

Rahat and Shapira (2017) provide a foundational approach for systematically measuring IPD, introducing a multidimensional index that assesses participation, representation, competition, responsiveness, and transparency within parties. This index builds upon democratic theory and comparative state-level frameworks, allowing for a structured and quantifiable analysis of IPD across political systems (Rahat & Shapira, 2017).

The relationship between internal democracy, competition, and inclusiveness is complex. Rahat, Hazan, and Katz (2008) discuss how high levels of inclusiveness in party selectorates can inversely impact representativeness and candidate competition, highlighting the non-linear relationships between IPD values (Rahat et al., 2008). Mersel (2006) further argues that IPD should be mandatory to uphold democratic norms within parties, suggesting the necessity of enforceable internal structures (Mersel, 2006).

Studies on IPD in diverse contexts offer insights into challenges and adaptations in different political systems. For instance, Amundsen (2016) examines IPD in Bangladesh, identifying challenges such as centralized authority and dynastic leadership, which hinder meaningful internal democracy. This highlights the importance of local political culture in shaping IPD's functionality (Amundsen, 2016). Reidy (2022) focuses on IPD within Irish parties, finding that formal selection conventions are influenced by elite-driven criteria, showing that IPD's effectiveness may be constrained even in nominally democratic systems (Reidy, 2022).

Close, Gherghina, and Sierens (2019) study IPD's effects on legislative agreement, finding that higher levels of IPD may lead to greater intra-party disagreements, as legislators in more democratic parties feel freer to express dissent. This research emphasizes the potential trade-off between IPD and party unity (Close et al., 2019). In contrast, Teorell (1999) advocates for IPD as a mechanism to align party agenda-setting with public accountability, suggesting that participatory processes strengthen member engagement and public trust (Teorell, 1999).

Young and Cross (2002) explore the rise of plebiscitary democracy within Canadian parties, where grassroots member participation has increased support for internally democratic practices, reflecting a trend toward member-driven reforms (Young & Cross, 2002). Kamenova (2021) examines IPD in the Alternative for Germany (AfD), finding that participatory mechanisms within the party structure strengthen connections between members and representatives (Kamenova, 2021).

The current literature on intra-party democracy (IPD) offers extensive insights into the dynamics of IPD across various political contexts, examining how factors like inclusiveness, competition, responsiveness, and transparency shape internal democratic processes within parties. However, a critical gap remains in the literature when it comes to assessing IPD role in overall democratization in society, specifically within Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Thus, this study seeks to address this gap by systematically examining IPD within Bosnian political parties, focusing on mechanisms for member participation, leadership selection, and decision-making processes. By contextualizing IPD within BiH's legislative and constitutional framework, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how IPD could strengthen democratic governance and accountability in BiH's distinctive political landscape. More precisely study hypothesizes that political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina lack sufficient mechanisms for direct member involvement in leadership selection and policy decision-making, relying heavily on hierarchical structures, which limits the democratization and ideological differentiation within party practices.

Methodology

This study contributes to the assessment of the general premise that slow and limited ideological profiling and democratization of political parties, on the one hand, and the complex constitutional-legal and electoral system, on the other hand, decisively determine the slow development of parliamentary democracy in BH, and thus pluralistic democratic culture and practice by operationalizing hypothesis that political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina lack sufficient mechanisms for direct member involvement in leadership selection and policy decision-making, relying heavily on hierarchical structures, which limits the democratization and ideological differentiation within party practices. Study employs context analysis methods, as well as survey method, to provide precise and comprehensive overview of the internal party democracy in the party system of BH.

This investigation of the internal party democracy (IPD) within Bosnia and Herzegovina, is performed employing a survey of 10 leading parliamentary parties alongside a detailed contextual analysis which is built in this section. The survey evaluates democratic standards across leadership selection, organizational structure, member participation, and decision-making processes within each party. Complementing the survey, the contextual analysis focuses on BiH's unique political, ethnic, and historical factors that shape IPD practices and party accountability. Specifically, the analysis considers the influence of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), ethnic fragmentation, and legislative frameworks, as these elements intersect to either challenge or support the development of democratic processes within political parties.

The contextual analysis provides essential background for understanding the democratic challenges within BH's party system. As a post-conflict, ethnically divided society, BH's political landscape has been significantly shaped by the DPA, ongoing ethnic fragmentation, and a complex legal framework that both facilitates and constrains democratic practices within political parties. Each of these elements affects IPD by influencing internal governance structures, leadership selection, and member inclusiveness.

Context Analysis

To comprehensively understand intra-party democracy (IPD) within Bosnian political parties, this study employs context analysis as a foundational method. Context analysis is particularly suitable for studies in post-conflict and multi-ethnic environments, as it allows for a nuanced examination of how historical, institutional, and structural factors shape political behavior and governance within political parties. This approach is essential in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the political landscape remains deeply influenced by the legacy of the Dayton Peace Agreement, institutionalized ethnic power-sharing, and the country's unique constitutional and legislative frameworks.

Context analysis provides a structured framework to interpret how the specific historical and socio-political environment of BiH influences party dynamics. According to Skocpol (1979) and Tilly (1989), historical contextualization is crucial in political research, as the effects of past events—such as BiH's post-conflict transition—continue to shape the structure and functions of political institutions. In the case of BiH, understanding the Dayton-imposed constitutional structure helps clarify why party dynamics remain rooted in ethnic divides and hierarchical governance structures.

Institutional theory also reinforces the need for context analysis. Scholars like North (1990) and March and Olsen (1984) argue that institutional rules and frameworks define the behavior of social and political actors, often constraining or shaping intra-party democratic practices. By examining the constitutional and legislative arrangements specific to BiH, context analysis allows this study to assess how these

structures impact party governance, specifically how they influence mechanisms of leadership selection and member participation.

In addition, context analysis is widely used in comparative political studies, where it helps elucidate how local dynamics affect political phenomena differently across nations (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). This is particularly pertinent to IPD studies, as it enables comparisons between BiH and other post-conflict or multi-ethnic societies with similar challenges. Finally, scholars like Brubaker (1996) and Horowitz (2000) have demonstrated that context analysis is indispensable in ethnically divided societies, where ethnicity and power-sharing arrangements directly influence political organization and behavior. For BiH, these dynamics are central to understanding how intra-party democracy is constrained by ethnic segmentation and power-sharing requirements.

This context analysis provides the foundational understanding necessary to interpret survey findings on IPD in BiH, offering insights into the extent to which historical and institutional factors either support or inhibit democratization within political parties enabling us to inform steps that could lead to achieving higher level of IPD.

Influence of the Dayton Peace Agreement

The Dayton Peace Agreement, signed in 1995, ended the Bosnian War and established a power-sharing framework that has deeply impacted political party dynamics in BiH. Scholars note that the DPA's primary objective was to ensure peace by creating a highly decentralized state structure divided into two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the Republika Srpska (RS), each with its own political institutions and administrative autonomy (Bieber, 2006). However, while the DPA achieved peace, it institutionalized ethnic divisions, leading to an "ethnicization" of politics where parties are structured primarily along ethnic lines to ensure representation of the three main ethnic groups—Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs (Belloni, 2004). This structure has, in turn, impacted IPD, as parties prioritize ethnic representation over democratic internal processes such as transparent decision-making or member participation.

The ethnic quotas established by the DPA influence IPD by limiting the flexibility of parties in leadership and candidate selection. For example, each major ethnic group is constitutionally guaranteed representation, which restricts parties' freedom to select leaders based on internal democratic elections. This has led to the dominance of ethnically-based parties, such as the Bosniak SDA, the Croatian HDZ BiH, and the Serbian SNSD, which tend to prioritize ethnic loyalty over intra-party democracy and decision-making inclusivity (Bose, 2002). The DPA's ethnic-based framework therefore often conflicts with democratic principles within party structures, as evidenced by the limited opportunities for member participation and critique within these parties.

Ethnic Fragmentation and Political Party Functioning

Ethnic fragmentation is a persistent and influential factor in BH's political dynamics. Scholars argue that the ethnic alignment within BiH's parties has perpetuated a system of political polarization, where parties operate as ethnic representatives rather than national entities advocating cohesive policies (Manning, 2004). This fragmentation complicates IPD by reinforcing intra-party hierarchies focused on maintaining ethnic unity, which stifles debate and limits member engagement in decision-making. According to Hulsey (2010), the entrenched ethnic divide makes it difficult for political parties to adopt democratic practices such as member-led policy input or internal referenda, as party leaders often suppress dissent to ensure ethnic cohesion.

For instance, parties are less likely to encourage open debate or dissenting opinions, as loyalty to ethnic identity often supersedes internal democratic dialogue. This culture, driven by ethnic allegiances, leads to weak mechanisms for reform within party ranks and minimizes transparency in leadership selection. Consequently, ethnically aligned parties typically exhibit lower levels of IPD, as they emphasize loyalty to ethnic interests over inclusive governance, which is essential for democratic accountability within party structures (Sindre, 2016). The ethnic fragmentation within parties not only inhibits IPD but also contributes to the public's general distrust in party responsiveness and democratic functioning (Belloni, 2009).

Legislative and Constitutional Frameworks

BH's complex legal framework further influences IPD by setting inconsistent standards for party formation, electoral competition, and political financing. The constitutionally decentralized governance model allows each entity, FBiH and RS, to implement its own political regulations. This structure results in variation in how parties operate and limits the development of national political agendas that emphasize cohesive party governance (Bieber, 2005). Additionally, the absence of a unified national law governing political party operations has resulted in discrepancies in party formation, leadership selection, and electoral practices across entities. For instance, RS-based laws focus on Serbian representation, while FBiH laws address Bosniak and Croat interests, hindering IPD's consistency across BiH (Keil, 2013).

The Election Law in BiH does not mandate specific democratic processes within parties, allowing individual parties discretion over internal governance structures. This lack of enforced IPD standards has led to considerable variation in how parties conduct internal elections and select candidates, with some parties adopting more democratic processes than others. For example, while the HDZ BiH operates with limited transparency in leadership selection, the SDP BiH has periodically used internal elections for leadership positions, demonstrating a greater commitment to IPD principles. Scholars such as Bieber (2010) argue that such legal disparities create inconsistent democratic practices within political parties, undermining democratic consolidation in BiH's political system.

Additionally, weak enforcement of party financing laws by the Central Election Commission (CEC) limits party accountability to members and the public. Party financing remains opaque, with limited oversight on how parties allocate resources. Scholars argue that this opacity further weakens IPD by enabling elite control over financial decisions, which marginalizes member influence and constrains participatory governance (Mujkić, 2007). The limited transparency in financial practices thus consolidates power within party leadership, reducing opportunities for member-led governance and accountability within party structures.

Data Collection and Analysis – Survey Method

Data for the study were collected through structured interviews with party officials and an analysis of party statutes. The survey examines formal structures such as leadership selection processes, decision-making practices, and member participation as described in party statutes, comparing them with observed practices. This approach enables cross-party evaluation of IPD and highlights gaps between stated democratic principles and actual practices within parties. By combining survey data with contextual analysis including the above identified factors, this study illuminates the ways in which BiH's political environment constrains or enhances democratic practices within political parties.

This methodology aligns with international research on IPD, which frequently examines dimensions such as leadership inclusiveness, accountability mechanisms, and decision-making transparency.

Comparative studies on IPD, such as those by Rahat and Shapira (2017) and Close, Gherghina, and Sierens (2019), support the use of these indicators to capture the level of democratic governance within party structures. By contextualizing IPD within BiH's unique political and historical environment, this study provides an understanding of the barriers and opportunities for strengthening IPD in ethnically divided, post-conflict societies.

Through this combined approach, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the specific factors that shape party democracy in BiH, offering insights relevant to broader discussions on democratic consolidation in multi-ethnic political systems. Each contextual factor—the DPA's structural legacy, ethnic fragmentation, and legal inconsistencies—interacts to form a complex landscape that influences IPD and party accountability.

Survey Design and Indicators

This study evaluates the level of internal party democracy (IPD) within political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), utilizing a structured survey approach. The survey, conducted in 2022, assessed the democratic standards upheld by 10 leading parliamentary political parties across both BH entities. This methodology section outlines the survey design, key indicators, data collection methods, and theoretical backing for each dimension of IPD measured, comparing these indicators to established approaches in the field.

The methodology employs a matrix of indicators to evaluate multiple aspects of IPD, capturing how each party structures internal governance, promotes member participation, and implements transparent decision-making. These indicators are grouped into four primary dimensions:

- 1. Leadership Selection and Dismissal:**

This dimension assesses processes for selecting and dismissing key party officials, including the president, executive board, and main board members. This factor is grounded in the view that democratic selection mechanisms within parties foster accountability, as highlighted by Rahat and Shapira (2017), who argue that inclusive selection empowers members and keeps leaders responsive. Similarly, Amundsen (2016) notes that lack of democratic procedures, such as centralized or dynastic leadership, undermines IPD by concentrating power within a narrow elite (Rahat & Shapira, 2017); (Amundsen, 2016).

- 2. Organizational Structure:**

The survey examines the composition and function of central bodies like executive committees and main boards, as well as criteria for electing vice presidents and forming candidate lists. According to Reidy (2022), a structured and representative framework within party organizations is essential for ensuring inclusivity and cohesion. Additionally, the use of quotas for youth, gender, and minorities aligns with international democratic norms, enhancing diversity and the representativeness of leadership, as supported by Kamenova (2021) (Reidy, 2022); (Kamenova, 2021).

- 3. Policy-Making and Representation:**

This dimension evaluates member involvement in policy formation and the extent to which party decisions reflect diverse social groups. Teorell (1999) advocates for IPD as a means to enhance accountability through deliberation, providing a wider range of voices in policy-making and strengthening public trust in party decisions. Close, Gherghina, and Sierens (2019) add that IPD mechanisms, such as internal referenda and consultations, increase a

party's responsiveness to its members, reducing the risk of top-down decision-making (Teorell, 1999); (Close et al., 2019).

4. Decision-Making Processes:

Transparency in decision-making processes is a core element of IPD and was assessed by examining how parties handle critical decisions, such as coalition-building or entering executive positions. Rahat, Hazan, and Katz (2008) argue that transparency within parties helps to prevent elite domination and supports democratic integrity, while Young and Cross (2002) emphasize that consultative processes, such as membership polls or referenda, foster alignment with members' expectations and encourage a participatory culture (Rahat et al., 2008); (Young & Cross, 2002).

This survey's approach aligns with international research on IPD, which frequently evaluates parties on dimensions such as leadership inclusiveness, accountability mechanisms, and transparency in decision-making. Comparative studies, like those by Rahat and Shapira (2017) and Close et al. (2019), underscore that robust IPD is often characterized by participatory practices, clear selection criteria, and diverse representation, all of which ensure alignment with democratic principles and member interests. This methodological framework enables the study to contribute not only to the understanding of IPD in BiH but also to broader discussions on democratic consolidation in post-conflict and multi-ethnic political landscapes.

By employing these theoretically backed indicators and rigorous data collection methods from political parties, the study provides a comprehensive view of IPD within BiH's political parties, identifying areas for reform and offering comparative insights with broader democratic practices. This methodology reveals both the formal structures of IPD and the practical challenges that these parties face in aligning their internal governance with democratic ideals.

Results and Analysis

Political Parties in BH – Influence of the Legal Framework

By analyzing the relevant legal framework in BiH, it can be stated that there are no major obstacles to the free organization of citizens into political organizations, except in justified cases when the political goals expressed in the statute, program or some other act, are aimed at endangering the generally accepted principles of democratic rule and the of the Constitution. There is no legally prescribed obligation towards potential political organizations regarding the way they are organized, the structure of management, staffing and decision-making. Political organizations determine this with their internal acts. The legal framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina is basically designed to encourage pluralism, democracy and freedom of association as a basic human and political right. It is a matter of political programs, political platforms or goals of individual political organizations whether they will use this concept in full capacity, for a correct and socially useful purpose.

Constitutional framework

Annex 3 (Agreement on Elections) of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Dayton Agreement), "the parties guarantee the conduct of fair and democratic elections aimed at laying the foundation for representative power and ensuring the progressive achievement of democratic goals and standards in Bosnia and Herzegovina". This document stipulates that one of the

conditions for democratic elections is to allow and encourage freedom of association (including political parties). Also, the parties undertake to fully comply with paragraphs 7 and 8 of the OSCE Copenhagen Document, which specifically guarantee pluralism and freedom in organizing and membership in political parties.

In the preamble of Annex 4, i.e. in the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, democracy is established as a guarantor of peace in a pluralistic society, and it is said that the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina is inspired, among other things, by the Universal Convention on Human Rights, where the right to assembly and association (including political parties) one of the fundamental human rights. The Constitution guarantees the functioning of Bosnia and Herzegovina in accordance with democratic principles, and all rights and freedoms specified in the European Convention place the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms as a priority above any law, which includes the freedom of peaceful assembly and association with others.

Also, in Annex 6 (Agreement on Human Rights), the signatory parties undertake to ensure to all citizens, among other things, the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association with others. For the implementation of all the above-mentioned provisions, Annex 10 of the Dayton Agreement designates the High Representative.

Legal regulations

In BiH today, there is no single law on political organizations at the state level that would regulate the procedure of registration and operation of political entities. In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Law on Political Organizations from 1991 ("Official Gazette of the SR BiH", number 27/91) is in force, in the Republic of Srpska the Law on Political Organizations from 1996 ("Official Gazette of the RS", number 15/96), and the Law on Political Organizations from 2002 is in force in Brčko District of BiH. According to these laws, the process of establishing political entities is carried out by the competent courts according to the headquarters of the political entity, so political entities can be registered in 16 different locations, i.e. 16 basic/municipal courts in BiH.

Each of the aforementioned laws prescribes special conditions for the organization of a political entity, whether it is about certain deadlines, the minimum number of required signatures or other special conditions. According to the current law, a political organization can be founded in the Republic of Srpska by 500 persons of legal age who sign a statement on the establishment of a political party, in the Brčko District of BiH by 300 persons of legal age, while in the Federation of BiH a political party can be established by 50 citizens of legal age, so this disparity is already evident in the different treatment depending on the administrative affiliation. In order to establish a political entity in the RS, in addition to the required 500 signatures, a statute, program, founding decision and a founding assembly are also required. In the mentioned laws, the obligation of a group of citizens that wants to create a political organization, whose political goals are expressed in a statute, program or some other act, is to accept the principles of democratic rule and the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Electoral legislation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, more specifically the Law on Financing Political Parties, provides for financial supervision over the work of political entities. The Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina (CEC) has established the Service for the Audit and Financing of Political Parties in accordance with the Law on Financing of Political Parties, while the legality of the work of political entities is monitored by administrative bodies within the scope of competences provided by law, because political organizations have the status of a legal entity. The Election Law of

BiH determines the details of the election process, from the announcement of elections to the implementation of the election results, and essentially does not deal with the internal characteristics or internal rules by which political parties function.

Role of the Office of the High Representative (OHR)

The High Representative, in accordance with Annex 10 of the Dayton Peace Agreement (Agreement on the Civilian Implementation of the Peace Settlement), in the past twenty-five years has issued dozens of decisions prohibiting individuals from holding positions, elected or appointed, due to activities that the High Representative recognized as a threat to security and a call to violence or as a violation of the Dayton Peace Agreement. The vast majority of the decisions made were repealed, but, as an external intervention, they certainly left their mark on the internal party dynamics and the overall process of democratization and consolidation of parliamentary democracy.

Development of the Ideological Polarisation

The meta-ideology or quasi-ideology of ethno-nationalism has filled the evolutionary-political void of the modern, delayed and partial political maturation of BH society, and unresolved ethnic and national issues, in interference with post-conflict and transitional patterns, and the unfinished legal-political architecture of the state, are slowing down the expected process of pluralization and democratization of BiH, including its party field. The absence of ideological profiling and strategic cooperation between parties perpetuates the dominance of polycentric partiocracy as a continuum of the totalitarianism of earlier political orders. (Arapovic, 2019)

The absence of classic ideological cleavages on the political market, both among voters and parties, determines populism on an ethnic basis as the dominant political doctrine, and partiocracy as an informal model of government, and prevents and slows down the ideological profiling of political parties into parties of the left, center or right.

The final outcome is the absence of ideological, political and social consensus when determining strategic state interests and social goals, so the socio-political space is filled with temporary, short-term, particular and mutually opposing goals of social and political groups. Opposing goals and actions of political and social groups encourage them to find consensus on a short-term pragmatic basis, so that the so-called social cleavages do not appear dominantly on an ideological basis, but on ethnic, territorial, religious, and other meta-identity levels. (Arapovic, 2019)

Such delegitimization makes parties vulnerable, causes anti-party and anti-democratic effects, and resistance in the form of abstention and protest or "voting against" instead of "voting for", which results in regularly high voter abstention of around 50%. On the other hand, parties also suffer from clientelist syndrome. "Voters without value orientations always align themselves with the winners, acting as clients of the winning parties. The fundamental goal of parties is to win power and fill public services with their members, so there is talk of the patronage role of parties, which we call the colonization of the existential space. The consequence of the colonization of the existential space according to the model of party patronage leads to the exclusion of non-party voters from the competition for public services. This can produce anti-party and anti-system populist, protest behavior" (Milardović, 2006:69).

The party system is determined by legal norms, the number and character of political parties that win significant percentages of votes in elections. In this context, we are talking about one-party (democratic and non-democratic systems), two-party, three-party and multi-party systems. The party system is conditioned by the type of electoral system. A majoritarian electoral system, for example, encourages

the clustering of votes around the two leading parties and produces a two-party system. In contrast, the proportional electoral system encourages the creation of a multiparty system.

The BH electoral system, as a combination of majority and proportional, produced a very fragmented, almost atomized party system, with a very large number of political subjects (primarily parties), in relation to the number of voters¹.

Precisely because of the determinations arising from the complicated constitutional and electoral framework, the proportional electoral system in BiH defined a multi-party system in which the formation of government after the election is impossible without the formation of (broad and asymmetric) coalitions - which is one of Lijphart's proofs of "consociative democracy". In the elections in BH, the parties are practically not fighting for power, but for the largest possible share in power.

Party political life in BH still reflects several classic cleavages: state-religion; center-periphery; rural-urban; labor-capital; while the multi-ethnic demographic composition produces additional splits not only along ethnic lines, but also along the demos-ethnos line. The post-communist context conditions not only the inherited behaviors on one side and the inherited expectations on the other side of the political process, but also the still current communist - anti-communist cleavage, as well as the traditionalist-reformist cleavage. Such an extensive and often radical segmentation along some of these cleavage lines does not contribute to the stabilization of the democratic system and consensus in BiH, so a full understanding requires a broader elaboration of intra-party dynamics, political practice, election strategies that cumulatively result in a certain election outcome or position in parliaments, but also with a lasting influence on social dynamics.

Internal Party Policies vs. International Standards

The Venice Commission, as a body of the Council of Europe in charge of constitutional issues, electoral issues and the general operation of democratic institutions, considers various aspects of the law on political parties and electoral laws in numerous guidelines, reports, opinions and comments. The aim of the guidelines adopted by the Venice Commission is to establish common principles for all member states of the Council of Europe and other countries that share the common values established and reflected in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR).

These documents highlighted the essential role of political parties in the electoral process and emphasized the existence of some issues of great importance in the practical application of the right to free and fair elections. Electoral legislation and laws on political parties differ from country to country. It is usually accepted that electoral and party systems depend to a great extent on specific - historical, cultural, political, social and other factors.

The Venice Commission (Guidelines on Political Party Regulation by OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission, 2010) has repeatedly emphasized the importance of the principles of representativeness and acceptability, responsibility, as well as the principle of transparency with regard to the internal organization of political parties. These principles naturally have some consequences for the design of rules governing membership in political parties, particularly the participation and representation of

¹ One political party for every 30,000 citizens, which places BH at the top of the list of countries with the largest number of parties per capita in Europe. Source: Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2020)

women and minorities in political parties, as well as rules imposing restrictions on the membership of foreign nationals or stateless persons.

General principles for political parties are:

The principle of non-discrimination. Political parties should not act against the values of the ECHR and the principle of equality. Parties may not discriminate against individuals on any basis prohibited by the ECHR. The Venice Commission considers that in addition to national legislation and the statutes of the parties should expressly prohibit any restrictions on membership based on race, skin, color, language, sex, religion, national, ethnic or social origin, property or place of residence, introducing open conditions for membership.

The principle of the rule of law. Political parties must adhere to the values expressed in international rules on the exercise of civil and political rights (UN Charter and ECHR).

The principle of democracy. Parties are an integral part of democracy, and their activities should ensure its good functioning. Therefore, commitment to the internal democratic functioning of the party underpins this general function.

The principle of transparency and openness. Parties should provide access to their programmatic and ideological documents and discussions, decision-making procedures and party accounts in order to increase transparency and be consistent with sound principles of good governance.

The principle of political pluralism. Legislation relating to political parties should aim to facilitate a pluralistic political environment.

The Venice Commission's guidelines on the regulation of political parties view political parties as private associations that play a key role as political actors in the public sphere. Some regulation of internal party activities is necessary, but such legislation must be carefully tailored so as not to interfere with freedom of association.

The guidelines clearly state that political parties contribute to the expression of political opinion and are instruments for the presentation of candidates for elections, but the internal regulation of party activities is considered necessary in order to enable the proper functioning of a democratic society. The general principles concerning the organization of a political party are:

Representativeness and acceptability. Applied within the party, these principles mean that the party structure and its procedures should represent the opinion of the members and be subject to their consent.

Responsibility. Authorities (both collective and individual) should be accountable to party members. Procedures should ensure internal (and external) accountability.

Transparency. Parties should publish their statutes and programs. Publishing financial reports improves transparency and public trust in political parties.

Below is an overview of some of the indicators that can be used to make an elementary assessment of the level of achieved democratic standards in political parties. For this analysis, 10 leading parliamentary parties in BiH were treated. This kind of matrix of indicators for evaluating internal policies in relation to democratic standards allows us to compare individual political parties with each other, but also to draw conclusions about the dominant or most frequently used internal policies.

Table 1: Leadership Selection and Removal

Party Name	Selection Process for President	Removal Process	Main Governing Bodies	Notes
SDA	Congress	Congress	Presidency (30), Main Board (114)	President and key members chosen by congress
HDZ	Congress	Congress	Presidency (24), Central Committee	Regional selection criteria specified
SDP	Direct Member Vote	Congress	Presidency (28), Main Board (151)	All key leaders chosen through direct member vote
HDZ'90	Congress	Congress	Presidency (22), Central Committee	Incorporates regional representation
DF	Congress	Congress	Presidency (35), Main Board (79)	Selection includes regional and demographic criteria
PDP	Congress	Main Board	Executive Committee, Party Council	Decentralized selection, broad member influence
SNSD	Main Board	Main Board	Presidency (15), Main Board	Limited member involvement in selection
SP	Congress	Congress	Presidency, Main Committee	High centralization, direct influence of leadership
SDS	Congress	Congress	Presidency, Party Assembly	Regional representation, with central decision power
Naša Stranka	Direct Member Vote	Congress	Presidency, Main Board	Emphasis on democratic selection

Notes: Centralization of leadership selection varies by party, with some adopting direct member voting, while others rely on congress-based selections.

Table 2: Internal Representation Standards

Party Name	Gender Quota	Youth Quota	Regional Representation	Expert Representation	Additional Notes
SDA	Not Specified	Not Specified	Regional	None	Composition set by Congress
HDZ	20% Women	15% Youth	Regional	None	Quotas apply within main governing body
SDP	40% Women	30% Youth	Regional & National	Expert-Based	Detailed quotas for gender and age
HDZ'90	30% Women	15% Youth	Regional	None	Gender representation in central bodies
DF	30% Women	30% Youth	Regional & Expert	Age & Skill Specific	Broad inclusion of demographic criteria
PDP	25% Women	20% Youth	Regional & National	Expert-Based	Gender and youth quotas in central bodies
SNSD	20% Women	10% Youth	Regional	None	Limited specification in quotas
SP	15% Women	10% Youth	None	None	Limited demographic inclusion

Party Name	Gender Quota	Youth Quota	Regional Representation	Expert Representation	Additional Notes
SDS	25% Women	20% Youth	Regional	Expert-Based	Applies to both executive and main boards
Naša Stranka	40% Women	35% Youth	Regional	Skill-Based	Most inclusive, detailed quotas

Notes: Quotas vary, with higher gender and youth representation in more progressive parties, while others adopt minimal or no quotas.

Table 3: Decision-Making Processes in Candidate List Creation

Party Name	Process for Candidate List Creation	Decision-Makers on Executive Positions	Transparency in Candidate Lists
SDA	Main Board Approval	President, Presidency	Public
HDZ	Central Committee Endorsement	Presidency	Internal Use Only
SDP	Full Membership Participation	Presidency, Main Board	Public
HDZ'90	Main Board Review	Presidency	Internal Use Only
DF	Main Board & Presidency	Main Board Approval	Public
PDP	Member Participation	Executive Committee, President	Internal Use Only
SNSD	Presidency Approval	Main Board	Public
SP	Executive Board Review	Central Committee	Internal Use Only
SDS	Congress	Presidency	Public
Naša Stranka	Direct Member Input	Presidency, Main Board	Public

Notes: Most parties limit transparency in candidate lists, with few openly sharing lists with the public. Decision-making practices range from member-inclusive to highly centralized.

Table 4: Member Involvement in Decision-Making

Party Name	Referendums on Key Issues	Member Surveys Conducted	Decision-Making on Policy Issues	Member Notes
SDA	No	Not Specified	Main Board, Presidency	Limited member participation rate
HDZ	No	Not Specified	Central Committee	Authority centralized
SDP	Yes	Occasionally	Broad Member Participation	Highest level of member involvement
HDZ'90	No	Not Specified	Presidency	Policy decisions mainly top-down
DF	No	Limited	Presidency, Main Board	Member views occasionally included
PDP	Yes	Regularly	Council and Membership Participation	Greater member participation
SNSD	No	Occasionally	Main Board	Limited member input on policies
SP	No	Not Specified	Executive Board	Minimal involvement of general members
SDS	Yes	Occasionally	Presidency, Main Board	Moderate level of member input

Party Name	Referendums on Key Issues	Member Surveys Conducted	Decision-Making on Policy Issues	Member Notes
Naša Stranka	Yes	Regularly	Full Membership Involvement	Strong emphasis on democratic input

Notes: Referendums are rare across most parties, though member surveys and input on policy issues vary widely, with only a few parties actively engaging members.

Our findings suggest that the dysfunctionality of the political system, the slow and ineffective consolidation of parliamentary democracy in BiH, the absence of real political pluralism and adequate representation and rights of minority groups (women, youth, ethnic and other minorities, etc.) could actually be conditioned by the absence of adequate intra-party democratization, real pluralism, freedom of speech, and the ultimate promotion of the rule of law instead of the rule of parties, groups or individuals.

The majority of parliamentary parties in BiH still cultivate a strict hierarchical and leaderocratic style of organization and governance, with an overemphasized role of the party leader or a narrow, often informal, circle of functionaries, while formal and modern internal party policies and authority authorities are not in accordance with authoritarian or undemocratic political practice within political parties, but also in political life. Such practice contaminates public space, complicates decision-making at the level of legislative and executive power because political responsibility towards citizens is lost, generates political crises due to broken trust among leaders, and ultimately politicizes the entire public space. The low level of intra-party democracy encourages loyalty to the narrow leadership, and as a result there is an absence of relevant criteria and meritorious evaluation during political nominations, the formation of governments, the appointment of executive power and management structures in the public sector. The final outcome is potential contribution of low level of IPD towards the derogation of the rule of law, nepotism, clientelism, malpractices in employment in public administration, public procurement, granting of concessions, business start-up permits, etc.

Every democratic society based on the postulates of parliamentary democracy implies party and political pluralism, as well as freedom of speech, opinion and association. Fundamental and principled constitutional provisions on human rights and freedoms, democratic and free elections, as a rule, will remain only in principle, if democratic standards in intra-party life remain insufficiently democratic or are superficially and flatly resolved by bad statutory provisions, both internal relations and decision-making methods, relations between party bodies, etc.

If we follow social, social and political relations in a certain society, the prerequisite for the development of a democratic political system is a developed and healthy intra-party democracy. Why is it important in BH context? Because free elections, guaranteed by the constitution and law, are only a prerequisite for the development of democratic life and society. Free elections are only the first and basic assumption, and the entire further development of the institutions of the democratic system depends exclusively on the political entities to which the will of the people has been transferred. That is why it is important that both political parties and their leaders have a developed awareness of the importance of intra-party democracy.

We should not forget the fact that political parties are organizations that still gather the largest number of people in any democratic society. Nevertheless, when it is borne in mind that over two-thirds of the citizens and about half of the voters in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not interested in democratic processes, it can be concluded that the least interest is in intra-party life. For these reasons, it is important to strengthen intra-party dynamics so that parties become more accessible, open, and places of

gathering, articulation, aggregation and representation of the interests of broad social strata, not just interest groups. The state of society in general is usually a direct reflection of the state of the party system and vice versa. That is why raising democratic standards in political parties is a crucial prerequisite for completing the process of democratization of society.

To achieve the higher level of IPD in BH context passing a framework law on political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina is particularly important, in order to regulate the market of political subjects in a unique way and to establish unique rules of the game. In addition to the general provisions on the conditions and criteria for the formation and operation of a political party, this law could also prescribe statutory material, in order to additionally encourage intra-party democracy in a unique way through public policies, especially in terms of democratic principles, adequate representation of populations and groups, etc. .

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the vast majority of parties at regular or extraordinary sessions of the assembly/congress/parliament, as the largest and most important "legislative" body of each party, elects the president of the party, and the presidency as the most important "executive political-political" organ, usually confirmed by the assembly/ congress/parliament. In their statutes, some parties have also prescribed the possibility of direct election of the president and the presidency in intra-party elections based on the principle of "one man, one vote". This is certainly the most democratic way of electing the party leadership, although it brings the risk of "dictatorship of the majority" or, on the other hand, "dictatorship of segments", if any part of the active membership can make the most important decisions (eg if 10% of the members can elect the president). On the other hand, there is the delegate-convention model, which implies the organization of electoral assemblies while ensuring the regional representativeness of the membership, which is the most commonly used model.

The formation of main committees of parties is usually also the responsibility of the Congress/Parliament/Assembly, with the possibility that part of the membership of the main committee, as well as the presidency, may be co-opted by the decision of the presidency or party president, taking into account the structure of membership (women, youth, profession, etc.).

The majority of party statutes do not clearly prescribe who replaces party officials, although some statutes contain such provisions, so it can be concluded that the issue of the removal of the president and other executive party bodies is within the competence of the regular or extraordinary assembly.

The number and composition of the presidency, main board and congress (i.e. equivalent bodies) of parties is different from party to party, and from statute to statute, so the scope and composition of these bodies is the discretionary freedom of each party. The authority to adopt and change the party statute is the exclusive domain of the assembly of all parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The powers of the president and executive bodies of the party in a large number of political parties are exhaustively enumerated in the party's statute. If we take into account the fact that the president of the party is the first person of the party, with several tens of thousands of members, it is clear that he must also possess executive powers, which also include responsibility for leading the party in terms of the unconditional implementation of the party and political program on the basis of which they won the trust of the voters. . Party statutes most often give the president the opportunity to be the leader, and less often the first among equals within the party presidency as the most important executive-political body of the party.

The criteria for choosing vice-presidents and their number is also different from party to party and from statute to statute, probably because the different conditions of party activity determined these facts (from the size of the party, the number of members, the space in which they operate, etc.).

Statutory provisions on the method of formation of electoral lists, and the method of making the final decision in most party statutes are not explained in detail or at all. The statutes state that the proposed decision on electoral lists and compensatory lists is made by the main committee and the president, in some parties by the presidency, while the final decision is made by the main committee with the confirmation and signature of the party president.

The nomination of candidates for executive power is also in principle left to the competence of the main committee or the presidency with the final confirmation of the party president, and the criteria are not specifically specified, as are the quotas on the representation of certain categories. The decision to enter the executive power is also left for consideration by these three most important executive-political bodies of the party, it is described in different ways in different party statutes.

In the work of the party and party bodies, as a rule, the territorial principle and the way of organizing party bodies and bodies are maintained, there are very superficial provisions on the criteria of expertise and other criteria on the possibility of subsequent filling of party bodies in order to satisfy the issues of expertise, age, gender, etc. Quotas regarding "gender, age, region or ethnic group" in some parties are very clearly emphasized and exist, and some parties do not have special statutory provisions on these issues, although they mention the possibility of representation of young people, women, professions and age in party bodies .

Co-opting in a larger number of party statutes is left to the presidency or the president, and sporadically to the main committee for consideration, whereby the number of officials who are co-opted into party bodies is limited by percentages.

In most parties, the statutes mention the possibility of an internal interest-based form of organization, most often of young people and women. Factions in the terminological sense are not recognized in most of the statutes, as well as separate opinions, but this does not mean that individuals and groups do not appear within the parties with different views in relation to the party leadership.

The issue of revoking decisions from basic to supreme party bodies is not dealt with in the statutes, but from a broader interpretation of the provisions of the statute, it can be concluded that the main board and the presidency can make decisions on this issue. Internal referendums and polls are not prescribed in a large number of party statutes, while the statute of only one political party contains provisions on these issues.

The above analysis enables us to identify crucial factors which could lead to higher levels of IPD within BH context which are presented in the next section.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study presents an in-depth assessment of intra-party democracy (IPD) within Bosnian political parties, revealing significant limitations in the ideological and democratic development of these parties. The sample however includes only ten political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina and future studies should include all parliamentary political parties at all levels of the government. The present study findings suggest that the interplay of weak internal democratic practices and BiH's complex

constitutional and electoral frameworks slows the advancement of parliamentary democracy and pluralistic culture. To address these issues, several recommendations are proposed to optimize intra-party dynamics, enhance democratization, and align party structures with democratic standards.

First, improving the legislative framework through state-level regulations or harmonizing existing laws at lower levels would establish uniform criteria for political party registration, oversight, and operational requirements. Additionally, creating a centralized, publicly accessible register of political parties with updated information on their organizational characteristics could increase transparency and public accountability. Enhancing IPD could further benefit from statutory provisions for direct elections of party leadership positions, such as the president and main executive bodies, through a “one member, one vote” model, while maintaining a delegate-convention format to ensure representative selection.

Increasing member involvement in decision-making is crucial, and this could be facilitated through party referendums or polls, allowing broader engagement on key issues like electoral lists, coalition decisions, and executive appointments. To uphold democratic standards, parties should consider internal elections based on the “one member, one vote” principle for leadership positions, coupled with clear statutory guidelines on leadership removal through a transparent impeachment process if necessary.

Furthermore, refining the powers of executive party bodies, such as limiting unilateral decisions by the president or presidency, and clarifying decision-making criteria on issues of party interest (e.g., electoral lists, coalition choices), would support broader representation within the decision-making process. To this end, statutes should specify selection criteria for vice-presidents and ensure territorial, age, and professional diversity.

The composition of electoral lists, as central to party identity, should involve all organizational levels and specialized groups (e.g., youth, women’s wings). Candidate nominations for executive positions should reflect regional strengths, with proposals from the president but final approval by the Main Committee, ensuring broad representation and legitimacy. Compensation lists and the formation process should also be transparent and publicly accessible.

Inclusion of quotas within party bodies is recommended to reflect the diversity of party membership, and co-opting into these bodies should follow specific statutory criteria. Autonomous interest groups within parties should have clearly defined roles, with financing aligned to their membership’s representation within the party. Lastly, the right to fractional activity, or separate opinions within parties, should be formalized, and statutory mechanisms for appeals of decisions across all party levels should be established to ensure transparency and accountability.

Implementing these measures could significantly strengthen IPD in BiH’s political parties, promoting greater inclusiveness, transparency, and alignment with democratic norms. Future research should explore the effects of these recommendations, especially in post-conflict and multi-ethnic societies, to understand how targeted reforms in party structures contribute to democratic consolidation and political stability. The link between effective management of diversity in post-conflict society and IPD might also be of special interest in future research as it could offer deeper insights for democratization in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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