Section 9 – Elezioni e comportamento di voto

Panel 2. Intra-party democracy is (still) the new black? Understanding the consequences of intra-party democracy at party organization level.

Chairs: Antonella Seddone, Marco Valbruzzi

Intra-party democracy is among the most relevant novelties in the field of party organizations. Recently, political parties have showed a renewed interest in adopting procedures aimed to involve party members or sympathizers in intra-party decision making. In this sense, primary elections are the method that has become more frequent for candidate selection and leadership election. The literature has explored this topic, trying to clarify or find out the main rationales behind the diffusion of such inclusive mechanisms for promoting internal democracy (Blais and Cross 2015; Scarrow 2015; Cross and Katz 2013; Hazan and Rahat 2010). This trend towards intra-party democratization should be considered as a reaction to the growth of antiparty feelings in Western democracies.

By promoting new opportunities of individual participation, political parties have tried to cope with a general sentiment of political distrust. Richard Katz and Peter Mair (1995) underlined the potential risks underpinning primaries and other similar procedures – the involvement of larger bodies in intra-party decision processes may produce a closer relationship with the leader and the elites at the expenses of the party organization itself. In other words, it could be that rather than being simply mobilizing factors, these procedures may endanger party cohesion and clear the way for other forms of personalized politics or populist claims.

The downsizing of the party on the ground combined with a lower relevance of the party in public office corresponds to a lower capacity of parties to mobilize people at the grass-roots level. Intra-party democracy has thus become a surrogate of partisan participation, but it is not clear if this new kind mobilization has a real and effective long-term perspective. In times of high electoral volatility and populist success, also these procedures become less effective and, eventually, they may contribute to a further weakening of party organizations.

Are intra-party democracy procedures a solution? Literature is inconclusive in this regard. So far, few scholars have addressed these issues by adopting a fully comparative approach, and single-case studies are still limited, or simply not entirely focused on this specific phenomenon. Recently, Piero Ignazi (2018) offered an interesting analysis of the impact that these procedures may have on political parties as organizations. This panel aims to follow this research path and, in particular, looks for papers focused on the changing organizational dynamics driven by intra-party democracy procedures. In particular, this panel welcomes papers that – based on a solid theoretical framework and robust empirical evidences – investigate in-depth the impact of intra-party democracy on: (a) the role of party leadership; (b) the role of party membership; (c) the role of middle-level elites; (d) the party organization as a whole.