

WORKSHOP 21

21. Promoting Internal Party Democracy: A Selling Point, A Serious Danger, Or A Redundant Exercise?

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Political parties have been in decline for at least four decades and it seems reasonable to conclude that the 'golden age' of mass parties is now part of history. An important consequence of the decline in party membership has been the loss of representativeness. Moreover, such changes have come with falling rates of partisanship and electoral participation. In short, the decline in the strength and status of political parties has coincided with what some have defined as a 'democratic malady' that affects both 'old' and 'new' liberal democratic states. However, political parties have not simply accepted their fate. They have tried to enhance their reputation among citizens by increasing the role and power of the grass-roots members within parties. The nature and extent of such programmes of renewal have varied considerably across country and over time. A central goal of this workshop is to evaluate whether such policies have been advantageous to parties in terms of increasing their membership and competitiveness in elections. At present there is no consensus on what has been the impact of promoting internal party democracy.