

Getting Into the Zone

To help you achieve your reading potential, we have included throughout the book a number of short passages we call Reading Zones. The Reading Zones include a variety of writing styles and forms: short stories, textbook passages, magazine articles—even a couple of poems. Some of the passages will be hard, some will be boring, some will be fun; but all of them will help you improve your reading skills.

Reading Zone 1

Start by doing what you would do on any reading exam: Read the following passage and answer the questions. You can check your answers on page 234.

Although the conventional American view has been that parties would perform better if they were internally democratic, the question is by no means as simple as the standard view suggests. Our starting point must be the functions we want parties to perform, and to perform well. If one of these is to facilitate popular control over elected officials—as it surely is—then it does not follow that this result is to be obtained only, or even best, by internal party democracy.

An analogy may help to clarify the point. Political parties are sometimes likened to business firms competing for customers—the customers being in this case the voters. And just as business firms are driven by competition to satisfy consumers, even if they are internally not governed by consumers in the way that a consumers' cooperative is, so, it is sometimes argued, competitive parties will fulfill all of the essential functions of democratic control listed earlier, even though each party is internally controlled by its leaders. If the main function of competing parties is to ensure that the views of voters are translated into government policies, then it is less important that parties be internally democratic than they be responsive to the view of the voters.

Would greater internal democracy ensure that the parties would be more responsive to the voters? If we take presidential nominations as the most crucial test case, the answer is not as clear as one might hope. For one thing, changes in procedures intended to ensure greater internal democracy may only shift control from one set of political activists to another. Political activists are, roughly speaking, of two kinds. One is the familiar party “regular,” party leaders who over a considerable period of time occupy positions of influence in the party and regularly devote a large share of their time, energy, and resources to party activities. The others are the “irregulars,” insurgents and amateurs who become active in behalf of a particular cause or candidate. Having been drawn into a campaign, some of the irregulars may later become regulars, but many drop out after the campaign is over, or bide their time until another attractive cause or candidate comes along.

The difficulty is that the insurgents may be no more representative of the opinions of a majority of voters than the regulars—and quite possibly they may be less so. Both parties provide evidence on this point. In 1964, the most ideologically conservative activists in the Republican Party, a group of insurgents whose views probably represented only a minority among Republican voters and an even smaller minority in the electorate as a whole, seized control of the nominating convention from the Republican “establishment,” nominated Senator Barry Goldwater and suffered one of the three or four worst defeats in the entire history of the party.

The Goldwater insurgency in the Republican Party was duplicated in the Democratic Party by the nomination of George McGovern in 1972. McGovern was an insurgent candidate who gathered around him an enthusiastic core of activists, most of whom were irregulars without prior political experience, and his candidacy was probably aided somewhat—though not decisively—by a change in party rules intended to make the Democratic Convention more representative of previously underrepresented groups—specifically blacks, women, and youth. The McGovern forces won a majority of delegates elected in the primaries

and then went on to victory in the Democratic Convention. In the election, McGovern suffered the worst defeat of any Democratic candidate in fifty years.

The delegates to the Democratic Convention, it turned out, were highly unrepresentative of Democratic supporters. Of all the groups at the convention, the insurgent McGovern delegates deviated most from the views of rank-and-file Democrats. The women delegates chosen under the new rules were not at all representative of rank-and-file Democratic women, nor the youth of rank-and-file young people. Even the black delegates were rather unrepresentative of attitudes among the black population at large and among black Democratic supporters.

Ironically, in 1972, the delegates to the Republican Convention were much closer to the views of rank-and-file Democrats in the country at large than were the delegates to the Democratic Convention. In the face of experiences like these, some people concluded that the parties were still not democratic enough in their internal organization since in both cases the insurgents proved to be unrepresentative of broader opinion. It was thought necessary to bring about even more control by rank-and-file party followers, reducing even further the influence of party leaders and activists. From this perspective, the rapidly expanding participation in presidential primaries noted above is a sign of health in the political parties.

1. According to the passage, what does “internally democratic” mean?
 - (A) Only Democrats are members.
 - (B) Both Democrats and Republicans can be members.
 - (C) The organization obeys the wishes of all people.
 - (D) The election of delegates is done democratically.
 - (E) The organization was founded by Democrats.

2. The main point of the passage is to
 - (A) show the health and the internal voting process of the Republican Party in the 1960s and 1970s
 - (B) show the abundance of internal democracy in the two-party system
 - (C) illuminate the internal voting process
 - (D) show that internal democracy does not necessarily ensure accurate representation
 - (E) show the health of the Democratic Party

3. Barry Goldwater's defeat can be ascribed to
 - (A) a small but vocal minority within the Democratic Party
 - (B) competition from George McGovern
 - (C) excessive conservatism among mainstream Republicans
 - (D) the inexperience of his party's "regulars"
 - (E) the capture of the Republican platform by extremists

4. Which statement would the author most likely agree with?
 - (A) Political parties are run like businesses.
 - (B) Political parties should be run like businesses.
 - (C) Businesses should be run more democratically.
 - (D) Political parties can be likened to businesses in their organization.
 - (E) Business and politics don't mix.

5. According to the passage, a sign of health in the political parties is
 - (A) the expanding participation in presidential primaries
 - (B) the expanding membership of both major political parties
 - (C) the declining number of rule changes since 1974
 - (D) the declining number of party "irregulars" in both major political parties
 - (E) the expanding participation in the presidential elections