

Lipset S M, Trow M A & Coleman J S. *Union democracy: the internal politics of the International Typographical Union*. New York: Free Press, 1956. 455 p.
[Columbia University, New York, NY]

Union Democracy is a study of the conditions affecting democracy and oligarchy in private organizations. It is based on the situation in the International Typographical Union, the most democratic labor organization in North America at the time of the research in the early 1950s. Survey results showed that the behavior of individuals could be related to the characteristics of groups and their leaders. [The SSC® indicates that this book has been cited in over 380 publications since 1966.]

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My interest in this subject developed out of my experience with and interest in socialist politics as a student. The experience of the left and labor movements in various countries had indicated that the building of a large socialist or labor movement, or even its coming to power, was not sufficient to democratize a society. It seemed that most movements that were dedicated to social reform, a reduction of class exploitation, and an increase in democracy did not act to further these objectives but, in fact, often furthered the opposite, once they held any significant share of power.

The question was why, and the best explanation I found was in Robert Michels's *Political Parties*.¹ Michels, though writing before World War I and the Russian Revolution, argued that inherent in any large-scale social organization are the motivation and means to make the leaders of the bureaucratic apparatus of the organization place the retention of their superior position ahead of any commitment to democracy. Michels specifically applied his analysis of self-perpetuating oligarchies to the behavior of socialist parties and trade unions.

The record of the International Typographical Union (ITU), however, seemingly contradicted Michels. Here was a large trade union that governed itself through an elaborate democratic political system. If there was an answer to the "iron law of oligarchy," it might lie in that union. The very existence of the union's political system demonstrated that the "iron law" was not made of iron.

In my first year at Columbia in the fall of 1943, I wrote a paper for Robert Merton's course on social organization dealing with the ITU as an exception to Michels's law. The paper described the system and indicated why various efforts in the literature to explain ITU democracy did not seem valid. Merton

thought well of this paper, and it served as the main basis of support for a fellowship that enabled me to finish at Columbia without outside employment. Later, Merton was to give strong support to my efforts to turn these interests into a major study on my return to Columbia as a faculty member in 1950.

Martin A. Trow, then a graduate student at Columbia and now a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, had been working with me and took over responsibility for administering the gathering of survey data. The main task of the survey was to convert the hypotheses that had been developed earlier into questions for an interview schedule that could be administered to a sample of union members in New York.

In designing the research, we decided to take three samples: (1) ordinary members, (2) shop chairmen, and (3) the formal leaders of both political parties in the New York local. We selected a "stratified sample of shops," rather than individuals. Since many of the propositions concerned diverse attributes of various shops, it would be necessary to be able to talk about the attributes of shop environments and to compare the behavior and attitudes of men with similar personal background features who were in widely differing social environments, for example, large versus small shops. In so planning I think that we were the first to design a sample survey seeking data on structures as well as individuals.

After the survey data came in, Trow and I were joined in the enterprise by James S. Coleman, then also a graduate student in sociology and now a professor at the University of Chicago, who was to write a dissertation based on data from the study.

Perhaps the most surprising and rewarding aspect of the survey analysis was finding the extent to which large and consistent differences appeared even though our basic sample only included 434 men. It suggested that, when social factors are really strong as causal agents and one controls for a variety of factors by dealing with a homogeneous group, the level of prediction can be quite high—much higher than has usually been obtained in studies of voting in a community or in the nation as a whole.

The survey demonstrated that the behavior of individuals could be related to the characteristics of groups and even of their formal leaders. By specifying the social environment of the unit, it was possible to show how individuals with comparable personal traits behave differently in varying environments.

The study has had considerable influence in organizational, occupational, and political sociology, as is evidenced by its citation record. While the three of us did not continue to work on the internal politics of trade unions, we have continued to deal with subjects bearing on the democratization of society. Another book of mine that was selected as a *Citation Classic*, *Political Man*, deals with the conditions of the democratic order.^{2,3} Most recently, I have been involved in a collaborative comparative analysis of the conditions for democracy in Third World countries.⁴

1. Michels R. *Political parties: a sociological study of the oligarchical tendencies of modern democracy*. New York: Dover, (1915) 1959. 416 p.
2. Lipset S M. *Political man: the social bases of politics*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960. 432 p. (Cited 1,440 times.) [See also: Lipset S M. Citation Classic. *Current Contents/Social & Behavioral Sciences* 18(26):14, 30 June 1986.]
3. ———. *Political man: the social bases of politics*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981. 586 p. (Cited 50 times.)
4. Diamond L, Linz J & Lipset S M. Building and sustaining democratic government in developing countries: some tentative findings. *World Aff.* 150:5-19, 1987.