

# DEMOCRACY IN PARTY CONSTITUTIONS

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A party's constitution encompasses the written rules by which political parties form and organise their affairs. A well-crafted constitution incorporates democratic values and procedures which is an essential first step in party-building. So, political analysts often use party constitutions as a source of data to understand internal behaviour of parties with regards to the practice of democracy. There is a consensus on the issue that party constitution is a useful indicator of changing attitudes concerning the relationships between party leaders, individual members and party organs. Furthermore, rules by themselves can enhance democratic or autocratic tendencies. As a result, these are important aspects in analysing intra-party democracy. Therefore, an ideal or well crafted constitution is assumed to address particular issues, including mechanisms to ensure the rights of the general members including women and minorities, transparent provision on the leadership recruitment, clear mechanism of conflict management and inclusive and decentralised decision-making process.

From the party constitutions of the two major political parties in Bangladesh, AL and BNP, it is found that there are no provisions regarding general members' rights. In fact, none of the two constitutions even contains any such phrase as 'member rights'. In many countries where women and minorities lag behind, political party constitutions provide special provisions, including the quota system. For instance, the African National Congress includes a quota of at least one-third in all its structures, whereas the Indian National Congress ensures the reservation of no less than 33 percent for women in the election of the Executive Committee. Both the constitutions of AL and BNP, include some provisions – to a varying degree – of the 'rights' or 'quota' for women and minorities. In addition to having quotas in the upper stratum of the organisation, BNP has 10 percent quota for women in the National Executive Committee and states that the number of female members will have to be increased by 33 percent by 2020. On the other hand, neither of the party constitutions explicitly mentions any special quota system for the minorities.

According to the National Democratic Institute, the constitution of a political party should typically specify the frequency and procedures of holding its conferences.



Both AL and BNP have the provision of holding party conference in their constitutions. For instance, the AL clearly mentions that the council should be organised every three years. BNP, on the other hand, does not mention the frequency of organising their conferences, though in the provision of the election of party head, it states that the party head will be elected for three years by direct vote of the members of the National Council. The provisions in the two major parties of Bangladesh regarding party conference remain vague and leave scope for more centralised decision-making by the party leaders. In a political party, conflicts may be common among different members or interest groups on various issues; the party constitutions should have provisions regarding these matters. In the Labour Party rules of the UK, for

example, the Complaints Committee is responsible for any dispute resolution. Conversely, none of the constitutions of the two major parties of Bangladesh offer any dedicated, independent or representative dispute resolution body. None of the provisions explicitly mention that legal enforcement decisions are equally binding for everybody, including the party executive and party president. Transparent provisions on the democratic recruitment process including candidate nomination, selection and voting for parties' executive committees, is very important. The recruitment of both BNP and AL is a problematic issue and provisions for representativeness of leaders within the party and for public office are concentrated in the hands of the party head and few

influential leaders at the centre. Additionally, there are limited voting procedures to select the leaders, including the party head, in a democratic manner. A participatory election with credible voting procedure ensures that everybody has a chance to be elected. In the two constitutions, neither of the major parties of Bangladesh includes any provision regarding a secret ballot method for electing their leaders. At the same time, the constitutions are found to be less than conspicuous about the voting procedures. The provision of nominating members by the party head in the national executive level of both AL and BNP further undermines the democratic recruitment process. The accountability mechanism for the national executives of AL and BNP is also completely absent in their constitutions. None of the bodies are accountable to the party members or to the party conference. Additionally, the constitutions do not provide any explicit or independent mechanism to control the body of national executive, paving the way for the possibility of the national executives of both the parties to become autocratic in certain situations.

To ensure decentralisation and inclusiveness within the party, the rights of the party president should be limited, so that he/she cannot yield absolute power of the party. An ideal party constitution ensures the right to the party members to decide upon the party manifesto. So, party constitution needs to mention who is in charge of the manifesto and who has the right to vote. In the constitution of AL and BNP, there is no clear provision for the general members or sub-national units to vote upon the manifesto.

To the untrained eye, the party constitutions of both AL and BNP may seem to contain reasonable elements of democratic ethos. However, when the constitutions are compared to international standards and good practices, they both fall short. The weaknesses that are particularly relevant include candidate recruitment for public and party offices, inclusion of party members in the decision-making process, lack of specificities of voting procedures and ambiguity regarding the scope of power and functions of the party heads.

The party constitutions of the two major political parties of Bangladesh must thus include the provisions that ensure democratic governance within the parties.

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## Can China's economic woes derail world recovery?

DR. ABDULLAH SHIBLI

SINCE August 11, when China announced that it is devaluating the Yuan, world attention has been trained on China's economy in an effort to understand what is happening in the world's second largest economy. In the wake of recent stock market and currency fluctuations, even old China hands who were sitting on the sidelines have joined the conversation. Financial markets have been abuzz with speculations, and rumours are circulating in the media regarding the true state of China's GDP and other macroeconomic indicators as well as the effect of measures it was undertaking to right the ship. From the flurry of informed discussions in recent weeks, there are indications that China is in more trouble than its officials were willing to admit, and its travails are affecting the economies of its trading partners, including some of its neighbours, and the global financial markets and economic growth in other countries. Even the US Federal Reserve postponed its much anticipated interest rate hike this week, and one of the reasons cited by the Fed Chairman for its decision is the uncertain prospects of China and the Eurozone countries. A larger concern now is whether China's economic condition could worsen and eventually drag down the rest of the world (ROW) or cause major damage to some of its trading partners like Brazil, South Korea, and Australia, among others.

Undoubtedly, the world economy was going through a rough patch even before the recent round of trouble. While the recent decline in oil prices

and the concerted efforts by governments and central banks to nudge their respective economies to move forward have had some impact, the results have been somewhat disappointing. Since 2007, when the last major global financial crisis started, the average key interest rate has decline by 4 percent in developed countries and 2 percent in the emerging markets, but the growth rate of GDP has fallen consistently short of expectations. In April 2010, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicted that the world economy would grow by 4.5 percent for four years, starting at 2011. The actual growth rate was 3.6 percent. While the shortfall spread across the globe and affected every single country and region, it is stark for India, Brazil, Russia, China, and the Eurozone. Even the US economy, which performed better than ROW and came closest to the expected rate, recently downgraded its forecast for the current year from 3.8 percent to 3.3 percent of growth in GDP.

How did this come to pass? In these times of interconnected economies, China's recent economic troubles seem to be the last straw that broke the camel's back. First of all, less growth in China spells trouble for its trading partners. But there is another worrisome development for ROW. China, after years of goading from IMF and US economists, is undertaking a policy shift in an attempt to change its economic growth paradigm. This was prompted by earlier signs of structural weaknesses in China's economy, stemming from its reliance on world market to drive its engine of growth. Chinese

economy was faltering even before its condition became acute, which led to the recent devaluations, and has sapped its energy for a much longer time. A comparison of China's imports in July from a year earlier shows that its imports from Germany and Japan were down almost 14 percent from a year ago (see Table 1). China's manufacturing sector has been on a slight downward slide since last year, according to Zhoo Qinghe, an economist with the National Bureau of Statistics. Many economists also doubt whether China,

**TABLE 1: COUNTRIES AFFECTED BY DECLINING EXPORTS TO CHINA (in percent)**

Country	Reduction in Exports
Germany	13.8
Japan	13.6
India	9.9
EU	8.9
South Korea	8.8
Malaysia	8.6
US	4.8
Australia	4.5

Source: Wall Street Journal

in spite of its pronouncement to keep GDP growth rate at 7 percent, is capable of doing so given that it can no longer count on exports as an engine of growth. In a recent article in UK's Financial Times titled, Doubts Rise Over China's GDP Growth Rate, it was reported that China's economy is really not growing at the level its leaders proclaimed, and its economic statistics seem to operate in a make-believe world. And on top of that, China has announced that it will move away from

its export-oriented and credit-driven growth model to one with greater emphasis on domestic consumption. There is no doubt that if successful, this would bring about other policy changes, leading to lower imports, a cause for concern for countries with linkages to the Chinese economy.

The impact of China's economic downturn on other developing and Asian countries as well as in the USA and EU is felt in other ways. Notwithstanding IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde's recent pronouncement that "Asia as a region is still expected to lead global growth", China's economic decline is causing headaches for many Asian countries. One reason is that China's recent devaluations have made Chinese goods cheaper, leading to greater competition for Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam. These countries announced that production of manufacturing goods declined last August. Malaysia's factory index, known as PMI, dropped to a 34-month low in August, falling from 47.8 in July to 47.2 in August. New orders received by Vietnam's manufacturers continued to fall in August, extending the current run of contraction to four months. Brazil and Australia, two countries that are far away from China, have also witnessed major slowdowns. Brazil, a BRIC country, has seen its currency Real decline by 32 percent against the US dollar in the first nine months of this year.

So, what can we expect in the coming months? Much depends on China's ability to bounce back and how

its key economic indicators perform: factory production, new orders, hiring, employment, consumer demand, stock market, and exchange rate. Can we say with certainty whether China will drag down the world economy if its recovery falters? The simple answer is a no. With so many factors at play, particularly growth of the Eurozone economy and continued turbulence in Japan and Brazil, one can only keep a close eye on the major indicators and continue reading the tea leaves.

There is a very helpful parable that might help those who like to keep track of gathering storms on the economic horizon. In earlier times, miners would carry caged canaries while at work to give them early warnings of danger in the coal mines. If there was any toxic gas such as carbon monoxide in the mine, the birds would die before the levels of gas reached a level hazardous to humans. What are the "canaries in the coal mine" that could provide similar warnings for investors or economic policymakers? Exchange rates of the Euro and Yuan, price of crude oil, GDP growth in EU, the Fed's policy, and tightening exchange controls in China are clearly early bellwethers of choppy waters ahead. Most importantly, in the coming months, China's ability to put its economy on an even keel would have some impact on the economic outlook for the world as well as for the financial markets.

The writer is an economist and educator who writes frequently on policy issues.

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**QUOTABLE Quote**

**Seth Godin, American author and entrepreneur**

Change almost never fails because it's too early. It almost always fails because it's too late.

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- In the center of
- Sports period
- Cruise vessel
- Critic, at times
- Classic song
- Lead-in
- Quarter-back Manning
- Pooch's tail movement
- Surrendering to gravity
- Guitar pioneer Paul
- Juvenile
- Saloon
- Find darling
- Flock father
- Tadpole, e.g.
- Junior, to senior
- Checkout chore
- Like some doubts
- Pigeon sound
- Lazy fellow
- Dodge
- Despicable sort
- Casual eatery
- Yard divisions
- Bidding option

**DOWN**

- African lilies
- "Second April poet
- Blue hue
- Agonus-
- Put on the wall
- Hun leader
- "Camelot" lyricist
- Tadpoles, eventually
- VCR button
- Diana of "The Avengers"
- Luanda native
- Largest of the Mariana islands
- Ice Chunk
- In tatters
- Band aide
- "Life of Pi" director
- Liam's cousin
- Battery ends
- Check for odors
- Robin or wren
- Attendees
- Nice fellow
- Gloss target

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

R	A	P	P	E	L	E	M	I	T	
I	G	U	A	N	A	R	I	L	E	
D	O	N	P	A	S	Q	U	A	L	E
F	A	C	T	E	T	C	H	E	D	
N	O	S	Y	M	E	S	H	E	D	
A	R	T	R	A	N	A	D	O		
T	U	R	B	A	N	D	I	G	S	
M	O	O	D	L	O	N	E			
N	I	L	E	S						
D	O	N	G	I	O	V	A	N	N	
O	H	I	O	S	E	G	U	A	N	
T	O	P	S	S	E	E	N	T	O	

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

THIS ISN'T WHAT I DICTATED

I PUT IT IN TEXTSPEAK SO THEY COULD UNDERSTAND IT BETTER

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott

CAN I PLAY?

NO! YOU'RE ALWAYS STICKY AND GROSS!

I AM NOT ALWAYS STICKY AND GROSS!

SOMETIMES I'M JUST STICKY. ?SIGH!?

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

U R NTFD 2 B PRZNT @ 0900 HRS...

HUH?

GREG! NOT WALKER!

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott

SOMETIMES I'M JUST STICKY. ?SIGH!?