an increasing role for ordinary members, a finding suggesting that Michels’s iron law is corroding as parties seek to retain members by giving them a greater if still limited voice in party affairs (Cross and Katz, 2013).

**Candidates**

A range of options is available for selecting parliamentary candidates, from exclusive (selection by the leader) to inclusive (an open vote of the entire electorate) (Figure 10.1). Reflecting the complexity of party organization, the nomination process is generally decentralized. In Western Europe, certainly, a few parties do give control to the national leadership, though even here the leaders usually select from a list generated at lower levels. More often, local parties are the active force, either acting autonomously or putting forward nominations to be ratified at national level. Small and extreme parties, and those in Scandinavia, are the most decentralized in their selection procedures (Lundell, 2004).

The nomination task is constrained by three wider features of the political system:

- The electoral system: choosing candidates for individual constituencies in a plurality system is naturally a more decentralized task than preparing a single national list in a party list system (see Chapter 11).

- Incumbents: current members of parliament possess an advantage almost everywhere, usually achieving reselection without much ado. Often, candidates are only truly ‘chosen’ when the incumbent stands down.

- Rules: nearly all countries impose conditions such as citizenship on members of the legislature while many parties have adopted gender quotas for party candidates (see Chapter 8).

Consider how the electoral system affects the nomination process. Under the list form of proportional representation, parties must develop a ranked list of candidates to present to the electorate. This requirement forces central coordination, even if candidates are suggested locally. In the Netherlands, for example, each party needs to present a single list of candidates for the whole country. The major parties use a nominating committee to examine applications received either from local branches, or directly from individuals. A senior party board then produces the final ordering.

In the few countries using the plurality method, the nomination procedure is typically more decentralized. Candidates must win selection by a local party in a specific district, though often they must pre-qualify by gaining inclusion on a central master list of approved candidates. Local bodies are invariably keen to guard their autonomy against further encroachment from headquarters. In Canada, for instance, constituency parties show little concern for national needs; they seek candidates with an attractive local profile (Carty, 2002).

The USA has gone furthest in opening up the selection process. There, **primary elections** enable a party’s supporters to choose their candidates for a particular office. In the absence of a tradition of direct party membership, a ‘supporter’ is generously defined in most states as anyone who declares, in advance, an affiliation to that party.

**Figure 10.1 Who selects candidates for legislative elections?**

Methods for selecting parliamentary candidates vary widely, from narrow reliance on the party leader to an open vote of the entire electorate.

![Diagram showing the selection process for candidates in different systems](source)