Leadership Elections: What is at Stake for Parties? A Comparison of the British Labour Party and the Parti Socialiste¹

Florence Faucher*

Centre d'études européennes, Sciences Po, 27 rue Saint Guillaume, 75337 cedex 07 Paris, France

*Correspondence: florence.faucher@sciencespo.fr

In recent decades many European political parties have broadened the selectorate for the party leadership, often clashing in so doing with their own tradition of decision-making. The article argues that in order to understand what is at stake in the staging of these contests we need to go beyond the classic literature on party change and party organisation and recast such reform through an anthropological lens. We can then explore how rules, practices and narratives constrain internal competition whilst retaining a focus on their strategic use by actors. Rather than see such reform as inspired by a search for organisational efficacy, this approach suggests that we consider leadership selection as a ritual. The conjecture is explored further and developed by comparing the 2010 Labour leadership election and the 2011 Socialist presidential primary.

Keywords: Party leadership election, Party change, Anthropology of politics

1. Introduction

From the 1990s, a number of European parties responded to declining membership, demobilisation of their members and the success of alternative modes of engagement with organisational reforms. Information and communication technologies allowed them to compile national membership databases and thereby to provide new services to members (Faucher, 2014). Many parties now claim a commitment to internal democracy: they ballot their membership on policies and for the selection of candidates (Scarrow and Kittilson, 2003). One of the most striking changes pertains to the possibility for members of some parties to elect the party leader.

¹The author thanks the three anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions.

As organisations parties are conservative and change averse. Policy reviews are fairly easy to implement and existing practices can be bent but procedural changes for leadership selection require the formal approval of the party congress (or a ballot of members). The evolution is all the more striking as leaders used to be selected by a small group (the party caucus or the party executive) but the selectorate now includes the party congress or fee-paying members. As a consequence, party elites have lost control over the selection of their leader. Moreover, the leader now has to answer to and maintain the support of a much wider party constituency. So, why have these changes been introduced? This is all the more paradoxical as it takes place at a time noted for the growing professionalisation of political parties.

I argue in this article that we need to go beyond classic analyses of party organisation and party change in order to make sense of these developments and their diffusion (Cross and Blais, 2012). I contend that the 'selectorate' is not merely widened because the resulting procedure is more democratic or because it provides the party with a perceived competitive advantage, but because it is easier to adopt such rules when others are doing likewise. Moreover, I suggest that, by taking an anthropological approach to these questions, we can see how procedures for the selection of leaders bring more to parties than a popular or a media-savvy leader. Indeed, leadership elections confer legitimacy to the chosen leader as well as to the organisation that has selected him/her. As our liberal representative regimes are experiencing a systemic crisis characterised by a decline of trust in political actors, direct elections are becoming organisational myths. The importance of voting, considered as a social practice, resides not (solely) in its outcome (the selection of a leader) but also in the grand narrative of democracy and empowerment entailed by the process. The leadership election takes its significance for participants and outsiders if one considers it as a ritual of legitimacy for contemporary political parties.

The widening of the selectorate is not limited to the Left,² but the evolution is there particularly interesting because its parties hold strong beliefs about collective membership and responsibility. Many did not formally recognise the position of 'party leader' and a number have historically maintained a strict division of roles between political and administrative leadership, which were reflected in position titles such as 'party secretary' and 'parliamentary leader'. Until recently, most party leaders on the Left were chosen by a group of officials whether elected or not (national executive council or the party caucus for the parliamentary leader).

² Competition on the Right is equally interesting—as shown by the recent battles within the Union pour la Majorité Présidentielle (UMP) in the absence of indisputable historic leader. However, the primacy of the leader is often taken-for-granted in Conservative and mainstream right parties.

Their legitimacy came from a complex process, involving a ‘cascade of delegations’³ within the traditional mass party organisation. Both to illustrate and further to develop my argument, I compare the French *Parti socialiste* (PS) and the British Labour Party (LP). I draw on 20 years of research on political parties in France and in the UK, including interviews and extensive observations of meetings and campaigns.

Both parties’ constitutions were originally designed to insulate the party from the risk of the individualisation of leadership; yet, both have recently moved in the direction of primaries for the selection of the party leader.⁴ As a consequence, the growing pre-eminence of the party leader appears to clash with socialist/social democratic traditions of collective executives (NEC, *Conseil National*) and the long-standing sovereignty of the conference/*congrès*. However, attitudes to the leadership have always been complex and have typically combined suspicion with (occasional and limited) devotion, as shown by Drucker in the case of Labour (Drucker, 1979). For the LP, the position of Party Leader was introduced only in 1978, clarifying a role largely determined by the Westminster system (McKenzie, 1964). In the case of the PS, a duality remains with a distinction between the *de facto* and the *de jure* leader (the former, the presidential candidate and if successful the President, the latter, the First National Secretary). This is the source of the ambivalence of the socialists to their leader.

The article focuses on the adoption of new leadership election procedures by political parties in the last 30 years. Its argument unfolds over five sections. Section 2 discusses recent political science literature on leadership selection and highlights how our understanding of why and how parties change is limited by existing theoretical frameworks. Section 3 introduces alternative approaches drawn from political anthropology and from neo-institutionalism, bringing as they do an emphasis on rules as well as narratives and rituals. Section 4 provides an overview of the successive reforms on leadership selection rules in the two parties. In Sections 5 and 6, I use the framework thereby developed to contrast the most recent leadership elections (2010 in the UK and the 2011 socialist primaries).

2. Party leadership selection in political science literature

Given the central role played by party leaders in liberal democracies, it is paradoxical that the political science literature on the topic has been so underdeveloped.

³The membership, organised in local/regional groups, chose delegates to a national party congress that elected national councils, among which an executive was formed, led by a party First or General Secretary. The political leader was usually selected by the parliamentary group.

⁴If primaries are old news in the US, they are recent imports to European parties where they have been experimented for local elections.

The paucity of references is all the more surprising as leadership selection sits at the boundaries of several subfields (Punnett, 1992; Marsh, 1993). Indeed, seven subsets of the political science literature are potentially interested in the question: party organisation, intra-party democracy, organisational change, political participation, elections, public regulations of elections and theories of representation (Pilet and Cross, 2013, p. 4). However, recent changes in the procedures adopted by political parties have contributed to a renewal of interest. One now finds both theoretical discussions and empirical analyses of intra-party democracy (Teorell, 1999; Scarrow, 2010; Loxbo, 2011; Cross and Katz, 2013). A number of monographs focus on Westminster countries (Carty and Blake, 1999; Denham, 2013) and a few comparative studies use a quantitative analysis of party constitutions to evaluate the impact of the new rules on the competition and on intra-party democracy (LeDuc, 2001; Kenig, 2009a,b). If the easiest way to approach the question of a convergence of rules for the appointment of leaders involves considering party constitutions, comparing such documents raises a number of questions. Although parties may be moving towards more legal and standardised rules, many have been characterised by disregard for formal rules and by a preference for vague constitutions and accepted routines.⁵ This renders potentially problematic comparative work that would be grounded exclusively on a statistical analysis of written rules.⁶ Since all data in ‘human studies’, whether qualitative or quantitative, ‘are constructs of the process by which we acquired them’ (Robert Bellah in Rabinow (2007, p. xxxi)), it is worth combining a diversity of approaches if one wants both to understand and explain social processes and phenomena.

Literature on party change has been concerned to identify the stimuli that might serve as catalysts for change, and the type of reform to which such change might lead (Strom, 1990; Harmel and Janda, 1994). Authors focus on factors driving change at three levels: the political system, the party system and intra-party dynamic. Changes in the polity (such as social structure, variations in the modes of political participation and changes in the media system) all point to the significance of shifts in levels and forms of political participation (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2002). The role of the environment, and particularly of political institutions, is noted: parties are seen as adapting to electoral processes that tend to be increasingly leader-centred (Poguntke and Webb, 2007). Here, the direct election of the party leader is seen to reflect the belief that political parties need to respond to institutional and

⁵Most famously, the Conservative party did not have a constitution until 1998.

⁶Parties of the Right are especially problematic on this account: until 1965, the leader of the Conservative party ‘emerged’ through a wholly informal process. More recently and despite the existence of a party constitution, the UMP regularly suspends its formal rules, as it did during the five years Nicolas Sarkozy was President of the Republic.

popular demands for media-savvy, election-winning leaders (Karvonen, 2010). Competition within the party system is another important contextual factor: parties in opposition appear most likely to adopt such reforms and there appears to be strong contagion effects within a given polity. Finally, the rise of a new dominant coalition is often identified as leading to organisational reforms to consolidate their recent success and make a mark (Cross and Blais, 2012; Gauja, 2012). Yet, however useful it might be to identify causal effects, this mode of analysis typically generates a proliferation of overlapping factors, the direct and precise impacts of which are often difficult to ascertain (Rihoux, 2001). Analysis of exogenous and endogenous stimuli often merely highlights the obvious point that circumstances create opportunities that are seized upon, to varying degrees, by internal actors seeking to improve their own or their party's competitive advantage.

Organisational reforms have gone hand in hand with efforts to recruit members through the promotion of selective incentives (Faucher, 2014). Both moves are sometimes presented as responses to demands for increased membership and participation. Thus, the organisation of ballots and elections has been of interest to scholars working on intra-party democracy (Bille, 2001; Pennings and Hazan, 2001; Rahat and Hazan, 2001; Scarrow and Kittilson, 2003) and the implications for party members and supporters (Sandri, 2011; Scarrow, 2013; Wauters, 2014). Selective incentives have been offered to new recruits in the form of information (newsletters, Twitter feeds, etc.), privileged access to party leadership and the right to be consulted. These reforms have been assumed to contribute to their mobilisation, yet, it is far from clear that they have either effectively attracted members or facilitated their integration within the party and the development of collective identity and loyalty. Turnout in internal elections has tended to be much more disappointing than the discourse of empowerment and democratisation would suggest (Gauja, 2013).

Investigating these questions requires extensive work on individual parties at a time when mainstream comparative politics, and in particular the study of political parties, has tended to drift away from approaches paying attention to the cultural, social and historical dimensions of political parties.⁷ We need to (re-)introduce these insights as we reflect on how and why parties change their formal rules for the selection of their leader. Rules, however, are only part of the story, only one of the ways in which institutions empower and constrain the individuals that make them. Practices and narratives should also be explored (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013, chap. 3).

⁷There are of course exceptions, particularly in France (Aït-Aoudia *et al.*, 2010). The volume edited by Pilet and Cross represents a landmark in the field of leadership election studies. It juxtaposes 13 countries' cases that explores such evolution over the last 40 years (Pilet and Cross, 2013).

3. Widening the lens: narratives, rules and practices

Although political behaviours are sometimes subjected to ethnographic enquiry (Schatz, 2009), anthropological frameworks are far less frequently applied to contemporary political regimes or are limited to the margins of the system (Kertzer, 1996). In line with the British tradition of social anthropology, I endeavour to make general claims about structures, social change and political parties as organisations beyond any description (however ‘thick’) of practices and social representations. So, whilst I have used ethnographic methods for data collection, I am more interested here in what we can learn about general political processes than by the idiosyncrasies of local practices.

Beyond party constitutions, a host of rules structure leadership contests. It is fruitful to take into account how actors interpret and play with formal and informal rules. As institutions ‘do the classifying’, they frame the categories in which we think, and therefore the solutions that are proposed. As Mary Douglas puts it: ‘if the institution is one that depends on participation, it will reply to our frantic question: “more participation!”’ (Douglas, 1986, p. 92). The mobilisation of party members (and supporters in the case of primaries) and gains in terms democratic legitimacy figured prominently among the arguments used to advocate the adoption of individual ballots for the election of party leaders. The implicit normative assumption is that individual participation is the end goal of democracy, even though the socialist/social democratic tradition has warned against the illusions of personalisation and focused on collective action. In fact, one can consider that over the last 30 years, parties of the left have incorporated the idealised view of individualised participation—a valence issue and therefore difficult for detractors of the reforms to oppose effectively. Reforms have been presented as proof of party ‘modernisation’ and democratisation.

Debates about leadership election bring up arguments that often compel faith more than reason. These narratives come from within the party tradition as well as from outside but frame actors’ understanding and actions. They are resources for actors who use them as ‘rationalised myths’ about how organisations should operate: quite apart from their possible efficiency, they establish what an ‘appropriate, rational and modern’ organisation ought to be (Meyer and Rowan, 1991, p. 44). Organisations ‘are driven to incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalised concepts of organisational work and institutionalised in society’ (Meyer and Rowan, 1991, p. 41). The taken-for-granted nature of these norms means that incorporating them helps organisations escape being seen as illegitimate. Moreover, such practices are diffused through relational networks (including, for instance, networks of professionalised political consultants) on the basis that they are rationally effective, rather than on any proof that they are more efficient for the organisation that imports it. However, the ‘incorporation

of externally legitimated formal structures increases the commitment of internal participants and external constituents' (Meyer and Rowan, 1991, p. 49). In effect, following public opinion pressure to adopt rules aligned with societal norms brings legitimacy and relieves parties of the need to justify their idiosyncratic practices, be it for the selection of candidates, or the selection of leaders. Interestingly, Meyer and Rowan also consider that the rules incorporated can be inconsistent or even incompatible with existing structural elements but that organisations need to strive to maintain the appearance that the myths actually work (p. 57). Organisations that incorporate institutionalised myths are seen as 'more legitimate, successful, and likely to survive' (p. 61).

The social anthropologist F.G. Bailey suggests that it is useful to contrast the public face of politics and its private wisdom (in other words the normative rules such as the taken-for-granted goal of further democratisation with pragmatic rules through which competition is fought, and won) (Bailey, 2001, p. 5).⁸ For instance, the introduction of new formal rules creates resources and uncertainties that players learn to manoeuvre, in part through the elaboration of pragmatic rules. With respect to political parties, new procedures of national recruitment or ballots for the selection of candidates or for the selection of the leader change the parameters of intra-party competition. Even when they do not believe in the normative rules, they need to be seen to comply. Beyond the idealised norm of mass individual participation, the practical details of the nomination, the campaign and, finally, the vote itself are intensely negotiated. On the other hand, routines and informal practices can be enforced outside any official channel, and they can be changed with a degree of flexibility. They may contribute, for instance, to a historical leader being able to claim that she is the 'natural' candidate for the presidential candidate to the effect that her rivals decide to step out of the competition without attempting to enforce existing written rules about the organisation of a ballot. Such norms are stable and can be used strategically by actors as constraints on the behaviours of others as well as resources for themselves.

Analysing solely party constitution rules can obfuscate how actors endeavoured to shape them to their advantage, whilst creating obstacles to their rivals. The political competition is a game, implying the existence of rules giving a degree of strategic latitude to the participants, of roles to endorse, and of teams to build and maintain. The relationships between actors can be analysed in terms of the (often implicit) contractual links which exist between leaders and supporters: which symbols are recognised by the political community and sub-teams (Bailey, 2001)? What kind of performance is required of the leader to maintain loyalty

⁸Bailey argues that contemporary political systems are not so different from traditional ones if one considers how leaders are chosen and how they work, a point also developed by Mary Douglas or David Kertzer (Douglas, 1986; Kertzer, 1989; Bailey, 2001).

within her team? Faithful supporters may demand nothing else than that their leaders live up to their ideals, but others may require transactional agreements and selective incentives. Leadership is a matter of manipulating resources and symbols (Bailey, 2001, p. 83).

Many of these issues revolve around the question of legitimacy and the efforts and resources leaders need to base their authority on consent. As anthropologists suggest, it is interesting to reflect on the construction of legitimacy, rather than to consider it as given or automatically derived from charisma, tradition or legal processes. Leaders need legitimacy, but the means through which they might obtain it, are context dependent, that is they are linked to accepted practices and myths and to the definition of the community and the construction of collective identities (Douglas, 1986). To achieve its objectives in terms of legitimisation, the leadership needs to mobilise successfully its potential electorate (and perhaps more importantly to be seen to do so). This is no small endeavour and it requires, at minimum, the identification of eligible voters. The task was nearly impossible before the generalisation of national membership databases. Most parties have developed centralised membership datasets since the 1980s, but there remain problems of maintenance, increased by the outsourcing of the function. Such problems are exposed when lapsed members receive ballot papers or when fraudulent ballots are challenged and they undermine the party's claim to be professional.

The crucial questions thus become who is eligible to vote and who is eligible to stand? Here, we touch upon the symbolic dimension of politics, a domain that is often acknowledged, sometimes touched upon, but rarely addressed in depth by political scientists. The widening of the franchise for the selection of the leader is only loosely connected to the technical explanations that are sometimes provided to justify changes. I argue that, although it was not articulated by the protagonists of the reform debates, a powerful argument in favour of organising such elections lies in the symbolic practice of voting rather than in it being the most effective process (Faucher and Hay, 2014). Social practices involve meaning-making activities, which foster feelings of identification and belonging. Can we analyse the leadership election, as it is now organised in LP and the PS, as a political ritual contributing to legitimise the party and the winner of the competition (Kertzer, 1989, chap. 9)?

We find in the new process the six dimensions which Bell sees as characteristic of all ritualised practices (Bell, 1998). These elections are formal and rule-governed. They borrow from tradition and aspire to set precedence for (future) invariance. They are performed by candidates and voters and the performance helps individuals participate in the construction of the imagined community of the party (or of the Left in the case of the primaries). They draw from a variety of symbolic repertoires of their respective polities to invent a new tradition and demonstrate how they live up to the highest ideals of democracy. In this sense, ritualisation should not be taken as referring to a sacred dimension and political ritual as a

testament to the sacredness of power. Rather, we need to think about how the authority of ritual confers to a practice the legitimacy of tradition (Bell, 1998, p. 128).

As a legitimating ritual, the primary election serves to impress, not only the supporters and the winning candidate but also adversaries (Barker, 2001, p. 83). Eligibility is one step in the construction of the leader. The second is the internal campaign, which can be read as a test that the contenders have ‘the stuff of heroes’. Some of this work of evaluation is undertaken through the publication of polls and through pundits’ discussions of their quality of ‘*présidentiable*’ (Abélès, 1989). ‘For legitimization to work it has to be more than a device to fool the masses’ (Barker, 2001, p. 44). As such, the competition has to be real—with the risk of unexpected outcome. This tension between predicted outcome and uncertainty is one of the traits of ritual, what makes it ‘a tremendously important arena for the cultural construction of authority and the dramatic display of the social lineaments of power’ (Dirks, 1992, p. 220). Although the seeming immutability is often emphasised, it is the flexibility of the invention of a tradition by the ritual masters that is fascinating, along with the ability of performers to use it politically.

Rituals mobilise cognitive, affective and physical dimensions that contribute to the internalisation of practices as self-evident or natural. The leadership selection process provides a great opportunity to give (at least) the appearance of consensus and to put forward the image of a united party through the staging of the values and the practices with which party members want to be identified. Thus, the performance of the entire leadership contest defines the boundaries of the community. It is not necessary for participants to agree to the content of the consensus: they only need to believe (even if only temporarily) in its existence. More than speeches, rituals contribute to create a sense of solidarity, a sense of the existence of the community and its identity. The impact of ritual on participants is emotional as well as cognitive, even if there is no lasting effect. So long as no one shouts that the emperor has no clothes, the ritual suspends disbelief and creates a world ‘as if’ (Seligman *et al.*, 2008). The election then invests the winner with an aura of authority derived from the popular support garnered from the ways in which she is looked at by others, and even looks at herself (Kertzer, 1989, p. 24).

4. A brief history of reforms in LP and the PS

Parties typically draw from national repertoires and little innovation can thus be expected (Gauja, 2012, p. 648). Even when radical change is claimed, procedural imagination is restricted by national institutions, party history and the existing rules governing amendments to the constitution. In order to compare the performance of leadership election in LP and the PS, we need to be briefly reminded of the respective contexts and the incremental changes in leadership selection procedures.

Table 1 Key dates, overview of rules and outcome

	LP	PS
1978	Position of 'party leader' is created (formerly 'leader of the parliamentary party'), elected by the parliamentary party	The principle of an internal ballot of all members for the selection of the presidential candidate is adopted in 'règlement intérieur'
1981	An electoral college (40% Trade unions–30% Parliamentary party–30% Constituency parties) will elect the party leader	Francois Mitterrand is the first secretary and chosen as the 'natural' candidate without competition
1988	The number of endorsements to challenge the sitting leader is raised to prevent unnecessary competitions	Mitterrand announces he will stand as presidential candidate again and is the self-evident socialist candidate
1990		The socialist congress in Rennes ends without a synthesis and exposes factional divisions over Mitterrand's succession
1992	Fourth consecutive defeat in a general election, resignation of Kinnock and election of John Smith by the electoral college	
1993	Party conference adopts 'one member one vote' for the selection of candidates and the college (each section weighs a third of the total vote). End of the block vote at conference, where the weight of trade unions is reduced to 70%	Legislative defeat. Second cohabitation. Introduction of 'one member one vote' for the election of congress delegates. First Secretary elected by Congress rather than Conseil National
1994	First leadership election with OMOV under a single round majority system. Blair is elected against two candidates	
1995	The party claims 300,000 individual members. Constituency parties' delegates hold 50% of conference votes	When Delors decides not to stand for the presidential election, Jospin steps forward as would be candidate and wins the closed primary against the First Secretary. In the following months, he is elected as First Secretary in the first OMOV election
1997	Electoral landslide for the LP and membership figures reaches 400,000	The Left coalition wins the legislative election after the dissolution of the National Assembly. Jospin becomes Prime minister of a Cohabitation government. Hollande is elected First Secretary by secret ballot of members at their local party meeting, two rounds two weeks apart
1998	Party reforms (Partnership in power)	
2002		Jospin fails to qualify for the second round of the presidential election and withdraws from politics

Continued

Table 1 Continued

LP	PS
2006	Closed primaries for the election of the presidential candidate. New members (reduced rate of 20 euros) are allowed to vote. For the first time, the campaign is run in the media. Royal wins in the first round with 60% of votes by building on her legitimacy from outside the party. She is the only candidate without an organised faction within the party
2007	Royal fails at presidential election
Brown becomes party leader and Prime minister without election (no candidate stands against him). Deputy leadership election (Harman wins)	
2008	Aubry is elected First Secretary after fraught elections (the results are very close and contested)
2010 Brown resigns following general election defeat. Five candidates stand in the leadership election, which is run as under single transferable vote and with OMOV. Four TV debates. Ed Miliband wins over his brother, in the fourth round, by a narrow margin in the trade union section	A ballot of members adopts the principle of open primaries. Another ballot adopts the electoral system as two rounds majority
2011 Ed Miliband announces widening of membership/supporters status. Party conference adopts Refounding Labour	Preselection process dominated by the possible candidacy of Strauss-Kahn. Five candidates. Short campaign largely run in the media (four TV debates over the two rounds) and popular success (high turnout). Hollande (former First Secretary) wins against First Secretary

Table 1 provides a summary of the main changes and a comparative timeline since 1978.

4.1 The PS

The French case is interesting because the party continues to face the need to select leader(s) for two distinct roles: a presidential candidate and a First National Secretary. The complexity of the French differentiation between a *de facto* and a *de jure* leader (presidential candidate/president and the First National Secretary) sets it apart from other parliamentary European systems.⁹ Since 1965, the presidential election has dominated French politics and has deeply affected political parties.

⁹Italy is an exception since the prime minister is the leader of a coalition, selected by a primary.

Francois Mitterrand, who recognised the central role of the presidential election, founded the PS in 1971 in order to provide the Left with a party machine deemed necessary for a victory in a presidential election (Bergounioux and Grunberg, 2007). The party constitution included a procedure for the selection of the presidential candidate. In 1981, Mitterrand, then First National Secretary, was un-opposed as presidential candidate: potential contenders feared that a competition would damage the party (and was unlikely to succeed). The situation was repeated in 1988 when Mitterrand was the outgoing President. Such exemplary discipline disappeared after he retired from politics in 1995.

One of the constraints, and a paradox, of the election of the Head of State by universal suffrage is the fiction that the President is above party politics, and as such should not be the leader of her party. Upon entering the *Elysée* palace in 1981, Mitterrand resigned from his partisan role and over time, a succession of loyal supporters was elected as First Secretary by the *Conseil National*.¹⁰ As the 1995 presidential election neared, the party entertained the possibility that Jacques Delors would run. As Delors eventually gave up on the idea, Lionel Jospin volunteered, thereby triggering the use of the existing rule, which had been shunned so long as Mitterrand remained the President.¹¹ Jospin and the left leaning First Secretary (Henri Emmanuelli) competed in internal ballot. The large victory for the former demonstrated the lack of automatic link between ‘presidentiability’ and *de jure* leadership of the party organisation. In 1988, 1995, 2002, 2006 and 2011, the First National Secretary was not the candidate. As a presidential candidate, Jospin was *de facto* leader of his party. In the aftermath of his unsuccessful presidential campaign, he made an organisational reform the condition for his taking over the *de jure* leadership. In a double ballot, party members approved a new constitution (that included the selection of the First Secretary by party members rather than by the *Conseil National*) and elected Jospin First Secretary. Two years later, Jospin became Chirac’s Cohabitation Prime Minister as leader of the largest party of the winning coalition. Upon taking the position, he stood down from the party’s First Secretariat (but remained the leader *de facto* as Prime Minister). In 2002, he appeared as the self-evident presidential candidate. He withdrew from politics in the aftermath of his defeat in the first round of the presidential election.

¹⁰ A First National Secretary (*de jure* leader) can use his/her position to build internal support for future contests whilst his/her loyalty is important for the President. Two former First secretaries later became *de facto* party leader: Jospin was First Secretary during Mitterrand’s first term (1981–1988), presidential candidate in 1995 and First Secretary again (1995–1997), then Prime Minister (1997–2002) and presidential candidate a second time. Hollande was elected First Secretary in 1997 (when Jospin became Cohabitation Prime Minister) and remained in post until 2008.

¹¹ Semi-open (party members only) primary elections were organised in 1995 and 2006; the first open primary election was held in 2011.

Factional divisions are endemic to the PS and are, in no small part, a product of the use of proportional representation for all internal elections since 1971. Attempts to reduce their influence have had limited impact: the introduction of individual—and secret—ballots in the 1990s merely weakened them. In 2006, in the absence of a *de facto* leader, the Socialists organised a competitive closed primary. The opening up of the selection process showed that the support of a faction (*courant*) was insufficient to ensure a credible candidature in the selection process for the presidential candidate. The party seized the opportunity to recruit members for the occasion: membership dues were temporarily reduced and new recruits were immediately granted the right to vote.¹² In a context where party factions were unpopular, Ségolène Royal benefited from the influx of members because she was able to present herself as an outsider—she was not a member of the party elites nor did she lead her own faction. Her victory in the membership ballot was overwhelming (60% in the first round, defeating both Laurent Fabius and Dominique Strauss-Kahn) but she went on to lose against Nicolas Sarkozy. Her defeat was seized upon by her rivals to deny her the status of *de facto* leader. They mobilised their factions to ensure her bid to become First Secretary failed in 2008. This was the best way to preserve their chance to be selected in the forthcoming 2011 contest for the presidential candidate.

The debate over selection procedures started early and, unsurprisingly, pitted *courants'* figureheads determined to maintain their power (Aubry, Hollande or Strauss-Kahn) against parliamentarians without (or with limited) factional backing (Royal, Lang or the younger generations such as Montebourg and Valls). For the latter, the new system would create opportunities. The former favoured procedures grounded in party traditions and structures of power whilst the latter advocated innovative solutions. The adoption of new rules thus owes much to internal party balance and to the ability of contenders to mobilise myths of democracy and external support.¹³ Narrowly elected First Secretary in 2008,¹⁴ Aubry needed to establish her legitimacy as a unifying party figure. She long resisted endorsing a reform, which was promoted by disgruntled supporters of Royal in the hope that their leader would benefit from her popularity in the electorate at large. The left of the party (Montebourg, Hamon) considered that an open campaign would increase its visibility and it used its networks in the intellectual left leaning societal elites to push the issue on the public agenda (Lefebvre, 2011). The principle of a

¹²In the past, a member needed to have joined over a year prior to the ballot to be eligible to vote. The first year of membership was brought down to 20 euros (rather than a percentage of income). Fees to the PS are variables.

¹³The campaign was largely led and orchestrated from outside by the think tank Terra Nova.

¹⁴The Reims congress was marked by division as Royal contested the results and the rallying of factions against her name. Aubry won in the second round by a very narrow margin.

primary was adopted in 2009 through an internal referendum. Rules were approved in 2010 through another ballot. The first election was held in 2011.

4.2 *The LP*

In the UK, Westminster institutions have largely shaped the role of parliamentary party leaders (McKenzie, 1964).¹⁵ Until 1978, Labour did not have a formal 'party leader' position but a 'leader of the parliamentary party' [elected by Members of Parliaments (MPs)], and a General Secretary of the National Executive Committee.¹⁶ Suspicion towards leadership, enhanced by the painful memory of MacDonald's national governments in the 1920s (Drucker, 1979), has led to a party constitution creating a plurality of competing centres of authority (Shaw, 1996). After the 1979 defeat of the Callaghan government, factional divisions led to the adoption of a package of reforms including the election of the party leader by an electoral college. The weight of the three sections reflected the historical role of the trade unions (40%), constituency parties (30%) and the Parliamentary party (30%). Rules were tightened after Tony Benn's unsuccessful leadership challenge in 1988 in order to prevent contests in the absence of a leadership vacancy (Quinn, 2004). This development was consistent with the tightening of party control that we see in the professionalisation of party organisations.

Following the unexpected (and fourth consecutive) defeat against an unpopular Conservative government in 1992, the party was more open than at any previous time to adopt reforms that would improve its chances of winning. Interpretations of the party's troubles converged on the negative image of the trade unions' influence and the consequent electoral implications. Weakened by Margaret Thatcher's reforms, and held partly responsible for the defeat, the unions accepted a substantial reduction of their electoral influence at conference (from 90% to 70%),¹⁷ the end of the block vote and the reduction of the weight of their college for the leadership election to one-third of the total ballots (Russell, 2005, p. 195). The introduction of individual ballots—from then on compulsory through all sections of the party—curtailed not only the power of trade unions leaders, but also the influence that party activists could exert in their constituencies in the absence of such balloting.¹⁸

¹⁵This has played on all parties, including the Conservatives, who formalised the selection procedure for the parliamentary group in 1965. They eventually created the position of party leader in 1998.

¹⁶He is the organisational leader and the equivalent to the Socialists' First Secretary. However, he is not a parliamentarian and thus could never pretend to be party leader.

¹⁷A further reduction to 50% was implemented once individual membership rose beyond 300,000 in 1995.

¹⁸This is a problem well known to the French socialists, who introduced OMOV at the same time, despite the resistance of activists.

The LP was founded by trade unions and socialist societies in 1900 and based on collective membership. Individual membership was eventually granted in 1918 but retained a minor role, particularly at the sovereign Annual Conference. Debates had gone on for years before John Smith was able to finalise reforms in 1993.¹⁹ By early 1990s, Modernisers (such as the Labour Coordinating Committee, the moderate Left and later New Labour) vehemently argued that the institutional link with the trade unions was used by the press to portray the party as undemocratic, archaic and a political vehicle of the organised working class. Party modernisers constructed 'Old Labour' as a scapegoat, reinterpreting the party's recent electoral history (Shaw, 2007). They presented modernisation as inevitable in the face of processes of globalisation and individualisation (Faucher-King and Le Galès, 2010); they focused on the need for the party to be associated with 'aspiring middle classes' rather than society's 'losers' and pleaded that one member one vote (OMOV) would improve the party's image (Ludlam, 2001, p. 115); they appealed to demands expressed in the wider new social movements (Russell, 2005) and they promised to save the party from the risk of permanent opposition through a process of policy-making that would reengage the grassroots through direct ballots, deliberation and consultation. Less acceptable arguments also played a role in internal discussion though they were rarely publicised. The idea that activists were more radical than elites and voters²⁰ was taken as self-evident by the 1980s and implied that relying on activists to take decisions would lead to unpopular policies,²¹ whilst passive members were more representative of the electorate. On the other hand, their opponents feared that individual members' ballots would contribute to promote a more centralised leadership (Seyd and Whiteley, 2002).

Although we tend to associate the organisational reforms of the Labour Party with New Labour, it is important to note how the 'OMOV' reform was adopted before Tony Blair's election in 1994. Interestingly, the college system was introduced as a stabilising influence against the potential radicalism of activists. It remains in place to date (Faucher-King, 2005). The outcome of the 2010 leadership election challenges such an interpretation and raises new questions about the party's internal balance of power (Jobson and Wickham-Jones, 2011; Pemberton and Wickham-Jones, 2013). The new party leader Ed Miliband needs to demonstrate that he is

¹⁹Kinnock had failed to obtain OMOV in a 1984 Conference vote, although ballots were progressively made compulsory for internal elections such as the selection of parliamentary candidates and constituency representatives on the NEC (Faucher-King, 2005, pp. 204–205; Russell, 2005, pp. 39–47), playing a part in the weakening of the left.

²⁰It is inspired largely by May's 'law of curvilinear disparity', which has not been empirically verified. See, for instance Norris, (1995).

²¹In Labour, the 1983 electoral manifesto—dubbed the 'longest suicide note in history'—was seen as a demonstration of the counterproductive influence of activists on policy-making.

neither tainted by his association with, nor unduly influenced by, the trade unions' ultimately decisive role in his election (Gaffney and Lahel, 2013). The 2011 conference adopted the principle of opening the ballot for the leadership election to registered 'supporters', once their numbers exceed 50,000. The question of the affiliation of the trade unions has yet to be resolved. The scandal caused in 2013 by the alleged involvement of some trade unions in the manipulation of procedures for the selection of prospective parliamentary candidates in Scotland have renewed the debate about the severing of the party's formal link with the trade unions.

5. Inventing rules and incorporating social practices

How do teams of players use normative rules? How do they impose pragmatic ones that are favourable to them? How can we read the play on formal/informal rules in the case of party reforms?

As Michels' study of the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands at the turn of the twentieth century reminds us, internal democracy has been the holy grail of many parties of the left. Unsurprisingly, recent reforms have been advocated in the name of 'democratisation' and the new rules reflect the wider societal conceptions of 'proper, adequate, rational and necessary' ways to behave.²² As discussed above, it is not surprising that parties adopt the social practices of their polity.²³ By incorporating familiar practices, they can tap into the symbolism of electoral rituals and transfer to themselves some of the reverence/legitimacy associated with such practices. British parties have opted for postal ballots.²⁴ This is an expensive but easily administered process. In contrast, the PS has continued to prefer voting in person, either during and/or in conjunction with local party meetings,²⁵ or at polling stations during the 2011 primaries. The decision to follow the French republican electoral ritual may appear cumbersome, but it has the advantage of providing clear guidelines for the organisation and conduct of voting and counting (Faucher and Hay, 2014).

²² Advocates also pointed to the use of such procedures in sister parties abroad or in rival organisations. Beyond the obvious dynamic created by the American 2008 primaries that contributed to the victory of Obama, experiments at the local level, or by sister parties abroad such as the Italian left have been powerful examples. The first Italian national primary was held in October 2005.

²³ The UMP will hold a primary in 2016. In the UK, the Conservatives adopted a constitution including the election of the leader by members in 1998.

²⁴ Absentees can vote by post in UK elections so there is a tradition of postal ballots.

²⁵ It marks a move away from a conception of the vote as a collective practice (one voted with one's faction). Voting in person is supposed to enable checks against fraud and fake memberships. A number of elections have been contested in France. The troubled 2013 parliamentary selection process in Falkirk CLP demonstrates that the French Socialists are not the only ones to have concerns about organised factions bending membership rules to increase their support.

The empowerment of individual members has been taken-for-granted, contrasting with a previous focus on delegatory democracy and collective decision-making. Advocates argued that it would respond to participatory demands (mostly carried by the alternative left and new social movements). There is, however, little evidence that grassroots led the debates—although they responded when consulted. PS members, who voted twice on the question, showed moderate enthusiasm: the reform was largely adopted (68% in 2009 and 76% in 2010) but turnout was low (46% in 2009 and 34% in July 2010). This is hardly surprising argues Gauja (2012), who points to the determining role of elites and their efforts to enrol outside supports in the media, in think tanks, polling institutes or in intellectual circles.

The organisation of an election poses a number of challenges to party organisers. Practical details of the vote and the count tend to be overlooked by observers but are no small feat for parties as their very invisibility contributes to a successful process. For a start, the organisation of a ballot creates uncertainties about the process as well as the outcome²⁶ (it notably deprives elites of control over the choice of the leader). Second, the costs involved are important and only worth considering if they bring other benefits than the mere selection of a leader. Indeed, the 2011 primary cost the PS about 3 million euros.²⁷ The nature of the exercise (postal ballot or at polling station) requires different expertise and raises organisational issues. Primaries posed a practical challenge because the number of voters was unknown: any registered voter who would sign a pledge to the ‘values of the Left’ and contribute a minimum of one euro could vote.

A great deal of attention is devoted to the rules of engagement by would-be leaders and their teams. Access to membership files in closed primaries, the timing and length of the campaign, rules for endorsement and candidates’ expenses, the organisation of public debates can all change the outcome of the competition. Indeed, nomination procedures impact on the number, the quality and, indeed, the qualities of the candidates, while timing can be decisive for individuals.²⁸ As a consequence, negotiations take place over organisational details likely to restrict or open individual opportunities. The interpretation and usage

²⁶ British Labour uses preferential voting so that successive rounds of election can be conducted without repeating the whole process a second time or more. In 2010, for instance, it allowed four rounds of preferences to be counted. The operation proved both complex and surprising. Ed Miliband won on the fourth round of counts and by a margin of 1.3 points over his brother, who was the favourite (Pemberton and Wickham-Jones, 2013).

²⁷ *Le Figaro* (6 September 2011). The deputy leadership election of 2007 cost Labour about 2 million pounds according to *The Independent* (21 June 2007).

²⁸ Blair, Jospin, Royal, Hollande and Ed Milliband seized an opportunity when they were not the frontrunner or an expected contender.

of rules is as important as the rules themselves. Both parties considered here provide examples of rules that were designed and subsequently interpreted to reach effects that were not initially anticipated at the point of their introduction. In recent years, competition has been avoided whenever possible (in 1981, 1988 and 2002 in the PS;²⁹ in 1988, 1992, 1994 and 2007 in the LP). Electoral contests were staged to include only one serious contender alongside candidates with marginal chance of success (Denham, 2013, p. 172). Parties feared that an open competition would expose divisions and thus undermine their claim to be a credible alternative government. Concerns have shifted and parties are now keener to demonstrate internal pluralism.

In the LP, three elections have now been held under the same rules—although the contest was, each time, unique. In 1994 Tony Blair won with over 50% of the vote in all three sections against two opponents. In 2007, Gordon Brown was declared the winner unopposed and without a ballot: two other candidates had announced their intention to stand but failed to secure sufficient nominations from MPs following Brown's effective canvassing of the Parliamentary party. In 2010, five candidates received sufficient nominations to run. Analysis of the nomination process shows that Diane Abbot, the candidate of the left, was only able to stand because she received the decisive support of the pundits' favourite, David Miliband (Pemberton and Wickham-Jones, 2013). On the other hand, the winner (Ed Miliband) used the long summer campaign to build support as an underdog, mostly through the trade unions.

The nomination process has also played a crucial role in the PS. In 2011, efforts were mounted by a number of faction leaders to defeat Royal's attempt to run again by exerting pressure on those likely to nominate her.³⁰ Furthermore, the cut-off point for declaring oneself candidate was delayed so that Strauss-Kahn could finish his mandate as Director of the IMF before stepping into the race. That he would stand was seen as unquestionable until his arrest in New York. Five candidates competed: the First Secretary (Aubry, who would not have stood against Strauss-Kahn), Hollande, the leader of the *Parti radical de gauche* Baylet and Valls and Montebourg, who used the opportunity to raise their profile.

The prospect of a public competition raised a number of objections and concerns relating to the danger of turning the contest into a beauty pageant (focused on personalities rather than policy nuances) and of creating unnecessary divisions. However, both parties also anticipated that the mediatisation of the campaign would offer opportunities to present themselves as organisations driven by

²⁹ Competition is also limited whenever possible for the position of First Secretary (it could not be avoided in either 1997 or 2008).

³⁰ A candidate needs the support of either 5% of MPs or 5% of the national council or 5% of party elected councillors.

sound, articulate and informed political debates. They consciously staged deliberation. A condition of success for all candidates, as well as for the party, lies in the agreement on strict rules of self-constraint (notably in terms of norms of appropriate conduct, specifically forgoing personal attacks on competitors). The risk was seen as particularly high with televised debates—a novelty in both the UK (2010) and in France (2011). An array of party positions were represented and despite an inevitable toughening of the campaigns in the latter stages, the tone remained positive. Overall, party unity rather than division prevailed.

6. The leadership election as a ritual of legitimisation

How have Labour and the Socialist party used the recent leadership elections as means to legitimise themselves and their leader/presidential candidate? Rituals contribute to establish a consensus on what constitutes legitimacy. Two dimensions will focus our attention in this section: the importance of numbers in contemporary politics and the smooth performance of ritual. Political parties have faced a double crisis of mobilisation, concerning both membership (van Biezen *et al.*, 2012) and participation (Whiteley and Seyd, 2002). Such trends are all the more worrying as an organisation aspiring to lead government in a democratic regime necessarily draws some of its legitimacy from its electoral and political popularity (Scarrow, 2002).

An economic approach to membership states that the right to be balloted could be an incentive to join, as the experience of Canadian parties shows (Carty and Blake, 1999). The need to be seen as popular has increased parties' interest in recruitment. In the past, the stand-off between *courants* and the reluctance of activists to upset internal balance meant that there has often been suspicion and some degree of Malthusianism in some local groups about recruiting members who could potentially support rival groups. Neither the 1994 (Labour) nor the 1995 (Socialist) leadership selections were linked to a recruitment drive. At the time, party rules also deferred by a year the right to vote within the party and in both cases, the ballot was an unexpected (and unsought for) first experience. In the UK, the sudden death of John Smith left little time to organise. In France, the competition was only opened when Delors eventually declared that he would not stand after months of prevarication. A membership boost effect is of course limited to ballots for which membership is required (i.e. closed primaries). This was the case in France in 2006: the socialist presidential candidate selection was preceded by a recruitment campaign that successfully attracted 90,000 new members. Moreover, 83% of the new members declared that they were motivated by the ballot. Unfortunately, many found it difficult to be accepted in their local groups, and most lapsed after a year (Lefebvre, 2011, pp. 44–45). However fleeting the impact on recruitment, it was not repeated in 2011 (there was no condition of membership to take part in

the primaries). At this time, any effect on the party membership would be indirect since it was not necessary to join. Even if there had been such an effect, it would probably have been short-lived, given Hollande's capacity to break records of unpopularity after taking office. Similarly, there is no clear or direct relationship in Labour between membership rise and opportunities to take part in internal ballots. The success of the recruitment drive launched after the election of Blair in 1994 was primarily linked to the anticipation of the 1997 general election even if it benefited from the publicity received by the party during the campaign for the leadership contest. Indeed, individual membership peaked in 1997, and recent efforts to attract member have been far less successful.³¹ The efficiency of leadership selection as a means to recruit more members remains in question, even if it is likely to have increased the mobilisation of potential voters in the run up to the general or presidential elections.

A fully successful ritual of legitimisation would probably involve no procedural drama or dispute over electoral irregularities at any stage of the performance. Avoiding organisational blunders is a priority for any professional organisation but the party staging the election also needs to demonstrate its ability to mobilise a large body of participants. Ridicule awaits any party unable to establish a reliable electoral register, that is a reliable list of its current members.³² The press is attentive to news about mistakes related to the mailing of information material and postal ballots. Of equal interest to the media are indications of possible misconduct. The 2010 Labour leadership campaign has been criticised for the alleged violations of fair play rules by trade unions who granted access to their datasets to Ed Miliband's team (Dorey and Denham, 2011; Jobson and Wickham-Jones, 2011). Moreover, 10% of ballots cast had to be counted as spoilt because the voter had forgotten to tick a box to confirm that s/he was a party member. More worrying are outright accusations of cheating and contestation of the results, as happened for the election of the PS First National Secretary in 2008.³³ To prevent the repetition of such embarrassment, an independent adjudicator was set up.³⁴

Since legitimacy is in part derived from the ability to demonstrate the mobilisation of large swathes of supporters, turn out is a sign of success. Moreover, if members considered the election as important, one could expect them to make

³¹ *Refounding Labour* (2011) explores the possibility of generalising discount membership rates. Youths can join for £1.

³² The complex structure of the Labour party meant that some people voted twice in the 2007 Deputy Leadership election. Labour Democratic Network, '2007 Renewal Commission Report', p. 19. labourdemocraticnetwork.org.

³³ See also the 2012 election of the President of the UMP turned sour.

³⁴ See for instance 'Une haute autorité pour une primaire socialiste "irréprochable"', *Le Monde*, 2 February 2011. The Haute Autorité has supervised all the local primaries organised since.

the effort to participate. In 2011, expectations about turnout at the PS primary election were set at a low level for a number of reasons: the primary was the first of its kind; it was organised in a context of low levels of trust in political parties and of declining levels of participation in general. Despite the hype and the promise of its advocates, there was no guarantee that it would work in conferring legitimacy and momentum to the socialist candidate. To organise the event, the party drew heavily from the repertoire of national rituals: it obtained the use of official voting registrars and the authorisation to use public buildings as polling stations. Scrupulous verification of identity and of voting cards was enforced. Volunteers staffed the operations, which was experienced as a civic endeavour and a great success, appropriated by party activists. The performance was almost indistinguishable from the one staged for any official election run by the French state. To the delight of the socialists, 2.6 million voters took part in the first round and another 2 million for the second round, making the exercise the largest national consultation outside of elections. It demonstrated the existence of socialist identifiers and contributed to draw the boundaries of the French centre Left. Moreover, it helped to 'liven up and mobilise local party groups' in preparation for the official campaign.³⁵

If leaders might be seen to claim legitimacy based on their ability to mobilise a large electorate and to win the selection process by a large margin (Kenig, 2009a), it is clear that the Labour 2010 leadership contest fell short on both accounts. Before we turn to the public relations dimension, it is interesting to look at levels of participation. There were important variations in turnout levels between the three sections of the electoral college. Although 98.5% of MPs and Members of the European Parliament and 71.7% of party members voted, only about 9% of union members did so (Dorey and Denham, 2011). These results underline the low priority union members typically give to the party to which their union is affiliated and reflect varying degrees of identification and closeness to the party. Another issue for Labour was the narrow victory enjoyed by Ed Miliband over his brother and the shock caused by the defeat of New Labour's heir apparent. Trade union support was essential to Ed's success but this has had three implications. First, it left him with the reputation of being a 'leftie' that he continues to struggle to shake off (Gaffney and Lahel, 2013). Second, it fuelled renewed discussions about the trade union link (Jobson and Wickham-Jones, 2011; Denham, 2013). Third, it has been a constant source of negative publicity from an unsympathetic media. Potential troubles have only partially been spared by David Miliband's decision to pursue his political interests in other arenas.

The leadership elections have become major public relation exercises and the media play no small part in the ritualisation of the procedure. Their coverage of

³⁵ Alain Bergounioux, Conference 'Les militants socialistes et les autres...', Sciences Po, 18 October 2013.

the campaign naturalises the process and is a resource for candidates and parties. The relentless publication of voting intention surveys creates suspense and generates expectations. International and national stature and the ability to make a credible alternative Prime Minister/President are assessed through television performances in interviews and debates or in tailored photo opportunities. Candidates are given a chance to acquire the necessary celebrity status (Gaffney and Lahel, 2013). On this matter both the party and the candidates share the benefits: losers gain exposure and boost their career opportunities; parties show off the professionalisation of their organisation and publicise their policies and the pluralism of their internal debates.

The French 'citizens primary' conferred to the socialist candidate the legitimacy and the aura of popular suffrage. The inclusion of another party of the left, however small, and the intense media coverage helped transform an internal process for the selection of a candidate into a collective event appealing to citizens rather than partisans. The well-disputed campaign meant that the Socialists dominated the news long before the beginning of the official campaign.³⁶ The considerable coverage of the recent contests (1994 and 2010 in the UK, 2006 and 2011 in France) explains in part contamination effects.³⁷

In contrast, one needs to reflect on what happens when the ritual is not performed—a situation that is no more surprising in today's France or Britain than it is in rural India (Dirks, 1992). One can speculate on the implications of skipping the process by considering leaders who spared themselves the gruelling campaign process (and saved considerable funds for their party). Is the legitimacy of the leader eroded if selected unopposed? It is of course impossible to test such a hypothesis but in recent history two party leaders eschewed the selection process as their prior positions made them 'natural' contenders: Jospin was the outgoing Prime Minister in 2002 and Brown had been waiting for Blair's resignation for ten years. They may have spared themselves and their party unnecessary efforts but they also deprived themselves of the opportunity to be legitimised by an electoral ritual. Would Gordon Brown have been able to claim more popular legitimacy if he had succeeded Tony Blair with a strong endorsement from the electoral college? Would Jospin have avoided taking for granted the support of socialist sympathisers if he had gone through a selection process in 2002? Could both of them have

³⁶Only the 1994 Labour campaign provided similar benefits and served to rally mobilisation in preparation for the 1997 General Election.

³⁷The Conservatives' adoption of membership ballot in 1998 was inspired by the positive impact of Blair's leadership election in 1994. Although debates about primaries have taken place in the French Right since the 1990s, the 2011 Socialist ballot marks a turning point. The UMP has announced a primary in 2016. It is noteworthy that the reform is usually adopted when in opposition (Cross and Blais, 2012).

improved their personal image if they had submitted themselves to the ritual? What is clear is that in retrospect, they could both have benefited from the unction of the popular vote.

7. Conclusion

Over the last 20 years, many European political parties have opened the election of the party leader to party members. The broadening of the selection process to members and supporters clashes with most parties' traditions and needs to be placed in the broader context of a convergence of party rules (Scarrow and Kittlison, 2003). It coincides with a dynamics of change towards the individualisation of party membership and the creation of more opportunities to vote. The introduction of OMOV was a slow and staged process in the parties of the Left. It has been presented as a proof of democratisation. It was also expected—though rarely explicitly so—to contribute to a re-centralisation of power in the hands of a personalised leadership.

Conventional political science approaches have been limited in their extent as well as their scope. Beyond monographs or country cases, the comparative literature has privileged a few aspects of the question, such as a search for generalisable causal factors, the position of the leader or descriptive analysis of the inclusiveness of the selectorate. In contrast, the article has argued that we need to consider leadership contests through an anthropological lens and consider not only rules but also practices and narratives and how all three are strategically used by actors. Moreover, if one takes these elections as social practices, thereby reintroducing the symbolic dimension of politics in our framework, we can read such reform as political parties incorporating organisational myths in attempts to construct their legitimacy at a time of crisis. Despite the rhetoric of its advocates, the reform does not seem to have been introduced because it improves organisational efficacy.

This article has discussed how primaries have come to be taken as self-evidently synonymous with democracy and participation in LP and the PS. I show that the reforms were the contingent by-product of intra-party competition in a context in which such procedures could be presented as providing a competitive advantage in terms of democratic legitimacy, irrespective of the existence of a demand for such participation. An analysis of the most recent leadership elections (2010 in the UK and 2011 in France) illuminates the role of symbolic practices in contemporary political life. I have sought to analyse the leadership contest as a ritual of legitimation, which serves both the future leader and her party. Through the performance of elections by the parties and its membership, parties not only select a leader, whom they hope will prove to be a vote-winner, but they also work on the construction and promotion of their collective identity. The benefits of such reforms lie not so much in the adoption of a more effective mode of selection but on the parties' claims to

legitimacy in a political system in which elections connect the (sovereign) people and its governing elites.

References

- Abélès, M. (1989) *Jours tranquilles en 89: ethnologie politique d'un département français*, Paris, Odile Jacob.
- Aït-Aoudia, M., Bachelot, C. and Bargel, L. (2010) 'Enquêter Dans Les Partis Politiques. Perspectives Comparées', *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée*, **17**, 7.
- Bailey, F. G. (2001) *Stratagems and Spoils: A Social Anthropology of Politics*, Boulder, CO, Westview Press.
- Barker, R. (2001) *Legitimizing Identities: The Self-Presentations of Rulers and Subjects*, Cambridge University Press.
- Bell, C. (1998) *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, USA, Oxford University Press.
- Bergounioux, A. and Grunberg, G. (2007) *Les Socialistes Français et Le Pouvoir: L'ambition et Le Remords*, édition revue et augmentée. Paris, Hachette Littératures.
- Bille, L. (2001) 'Democratizing a Democratic Procedure: Myth or Reality? Candidate Selection in Western European Parties, 1960–1990', *Party Politics*, **7**, 363–380.
- Carty, R. K. and Blake, D. E. (1999) 'The Adoption of Membership Votes for Choosing Party Leaders The Experience of Canadian Parties', *Party Politics*, **5**, 211–224.
- Cross, W. P. and Blais, A. (2012) 'Who Selects the Party Leader?', *Party Politics*, **18**, 127–150.
- Cross, W. P. and Katz, R. S. (2013) *The Challenges of Intra-Party Democracy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Dalton, R. J. and Wattenberg, M. P. (2002) *Parties Without Partisans*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Denham, A. (2013) 'From Coronations to Close Encounters: Party Leadership Selection in British Politics', *British Politics*, **8**, 164–180.
- Dirks, N. B. (1992) 'Ritual and Resistance: Subversion as a Social Fact'. In Haynes, D. E. and Prakash, G. (eds) *Contesting Power. Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, Oakland, University of California Press, pp. 213–238.
- Dorey, P. and Denham, A. (2011) "'O, Brother, Where Art Thou?" The Labour Party Leadership Election of 2010', *British Politics*, **6**, 286–316.
- Douglas, M. (1986) *How Institutions Think*, Syracuse, NY, Syracuse University Press.
- Drucker, H. M. (1979) *Doctrine and Ethos in the Labour Party*, 1st edn. London, Allen & Unwin.
- Faucher, F. (2014) 'New Forms of Political Participation. Changing Demands or Changing Opportunities to Participate in Political Parties?', *Comparative European Politics*, January. doi:10.1057/cep.2013.31.

- Faucher, F. and Hay, C. (2014) 'Voting Rituals in France and Britain', *Presented at the International Sociology Association World Congress, Yokohama, July*.
- Faucher-King, F. (2005) *Changing Parties: An Anthropology of British Political Party Conferences*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Faucher-King, F. and Le Galès, P. (2010) *The New Labour Experiment: Change and Reform Under Blair and Brown*, Redwood City, CA, Stanford University Press.
- Gaffney, J. and Lahel, A. (2013) 'Political Performance and Leadership Persona: The UK Labour Party Conference of 2012', *Government and Opposition*, **48**, 1–25.
- Gauja, A. (2012) 'The "Push" for Primaries: What Drives Party Organisational Reform in Australia and the United Kingdom?', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, **47**, 641–658.
- Gauja, A. (2013) *The Politics of Party Policy: From Members to Legislators*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Harmel, R. and Janda, K. (1994) 'An Integrated Theory of Party Goals and Party Change', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, **6**, 259–287.
- Jobson, R. and Wickham-Jones, M. (2011) 'Reinventing the Block Vote? Trade Unions and the 2010 Labour Party Leadership Election', *British Politics*, **6**, 317–344.
- Karvonen, L. (2010) *The Personalisation of Politics: A Study of Parliamentary Democracies*, Colchester, ECPR Press.
- Kenig, O. (2009a) 'Classifying Party Leaders' Selection Methods in Parliamentary Democracies', *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties*, **19**, 433–447.
- Kenig, O. (2009b) 'Democratization of Party Leadership Selection: Do Wider Selectorates Produce More Competitive Contests?', *Electoral Studies*, **28**, 240–247.
- Kertzer, D. I. (1989) *Ritual, Politics and Power*, new edition. New Haven, CT, Yale University Press.
- Kertzer, D. I. (1996) *Politics and Symbols: Italian Communist Party and the Fall of Communism*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press.
- LeDuc, L. (2001) 'Democratizing Party Leadership Selection', *Party Politics*, **7**, 323–341.
- Lefebvre, R. (2011) *Les Primaires Socialistes?: La Fin Du Parti Militant*, Montreal, Liber.
- Lowndes, V. and Roberts, M. (2013) *Why Institutions Matter: The New Institutionalism in Political Science*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Loxbo, K. (2011) 'The Fate of Intra-Party Democracy: Leadership Autonomy and Activist Influence in the Mass Party and the Cartel Party', *Party Politics*, **19**, 537–554.
- Ludlam, S. (2001) 'New Labour and the Unions. The End of the Contentious Alliance'. In Ludlam, S. and Smith, M. J. (eds) *New Labour in Government*, Houndsmille, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 111–129.
- Marsh, M. ed (1993) 'Special Issue Selecting the Party Leader', *European Journal of Political Research*, **24**, 229–231.
- McKenzie, R. (1964) *British Political Parties: The Distribution of Power Within the Conservative and Labour Parties*, 2nd edn. London, Mercury Books.

- Meyer, J. W. and Rowan, B. (1991) 'Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony'. In Powell, W. W. and DiMaggio, P. (eds) *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, pp. 41–62.
- Norris, P. (1995) 'May's Law of Curvilinear Disparity Revisited Leaders, Officers, Members and Voters in British Political Parties', *Party Politics*, 1, 29–47.
- Pemberton, H. and Wickham-Jones, M. (2013) 'Brothers All? The Operation of the Electoral College in the 2010 Labour Leadership Contest', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 66, 708–731.
- Pennings, P. and Hazan, R. Y. (2001) 'Democratizing Candidate Selection Causes and Consequences', *Party Politics*, 7, 267–275. doi:10.1177/1354068801007003001.
- Pilet, J-B. and Cross, W. P. (2013) *The Selection of Political Party Leaders in Contemporary Parliamentary Democracies: A Comparative Study*, London, New York, Routledge.
- Poguntke, T. and Webb, P. (2007) *The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Punnett, R. M. (1992) *Selecting the Party Leader: Britain in Comparative Perspective*, New York, NY, Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Quinn, T. (2004, August) 'Electing the Leader: The British Labour Party's Electoral College', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 6, 333–352.
- Rabinow, P. (2007) *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco: Thirtieth Anniversary Edition, with a New Preface by the Author*, Oakland, CA, University of California Press.
- Rahat, G. and Hazan, R. Y. (2001) 'Candidate Selection Methods: An Analytical Framework', *Party Politics*, 7, 297–322.
- Rihoux, B. (2001) *Les Partis Politiques?: Organisations en Changement: le Test des écologistes*, Paris, L'Harmattan.
- Russell, M. (2005) *Building New Labour: The Politics of Party Organisation*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sandri, G. (2011) 'Membership Role, Leadership Selection Methods and Their Consequences on Internal Mobilization in Italy: A Case Study', *Presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions, Saint Gallent*.
- Scarrow, S. E. (2002) 'Parties without Members?: Party Organization in a Changing Electoral Environment'. In Dalton, R. J. and Wattenberg, M. P. (eds) *Oxford*, Oxford University Press, pp. 79–101.
- Scarrow, S. E. (2010) 'Political Parties and Democracy in Theoretical and Practical Perspectives. Implementing Intra-Party Democracy'. Washington DC, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. www.ndi.org/files/1951_polpart_scarrow_110105.pdf.
- Scarrow, S. E. (2013) 'Beyond Party Membership: Expanding Views of Partisan Participation'. *Towards More Multifaceted Understandings of Party Membership*, Copenhagen.
- Scarrow, S. E. and Kittilson, M. C. (2003) 'Political Parties and Democratization'. In Cain, B. E., Dalton, R. and Scarrow, S. E. (eds) *Democracy Transformed? Expanding Political Opportunities in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 59–80.

- Schatz, E. (2009) *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Politics*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press.
- Seligman, A. B., Weller, R. P., Puett, M. J. and Simon, B. (2008) *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*, USA, Oxford University Press.
- Seyd, P. and Whiteley, P. (2002) *New Labour's Grassroots: The Transformation of the Labour Party Membership*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Shaw, E. (1996) *The Labour Party Since 1945: Old Labour—New Labour*, Oxford, Blackwell.
- Shaw, E. (2007) *Losing Labour's Soul?: New Labour and the Blair Government 1997–2007*, 1st edn, Routledge.
- Strom, K. (1990) 'A Behavioral Theory of Competitive Political Parties', *American Journal of Political Science*, **34**, 565–598.
- Teorell, J. (1999) 'A Deliberative Defence of Intra-Party Democracy', *Party Politics*, **5**, 363–382.
- van Biezen, I., Mair, P. and Poguntke, T. (2012) 'Going, Going, ...Gone? The Decline of Party Membership in Contemporary Europe', *European Journal of Political Research*, **51**, 24–56.
- Wauters, B. (2014) 'Turnout Rates in Closed Party Leadership Primaries: Flash and Fade Out?', *Government and Opposition*, 1–22. doi:10.1017/gov.2013.45.
- Whiteley, P. and Seyd, P. (2002) *High-Intensity Participation: The Dynamics of Party Activism in Britain*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press.