Book Section:

The Presidentialization of Party Politics in the UK

Richard Hayton and Timothy Heppell

Abstract

This chapter explores party presidentialization in the United Kingdom, with a focus on party competition at Westminster. It provides an overview of the constitutional structures of the UK and relates these to the party system. The decline of the two-party system since the 1970s is highlighted. The genetic features of the Conservative and Labour parties are explored through a discussion of their historical origins and development. The chapter then considers the level of centralized leadership in these parties, and the leadership selection procedures they have employed. This reveals a gap between the rhetoric of decentralisation, participation and democratisation, and the reality of increasing centralisation and leadership autonomy.

Introduction

Although constitutional reforms undertaken since 1997 have created new sub-state legislative and executive bodies (most notably in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) the UK remains a unitary state, with ultimate political authority and sovereignty continuing to reside in the Parliament of the United Kingdom at Westminster. This chapter concentrates on the two main relevant parties of UK government in the post-war period, the Conservative Party and the Labour Party. Given that the Liberal Democrats are now a junior partner in the UK Coalition

government, brief coverage of this party is also offered. Between 1945 and 2010 the Conservatives governed alone for 35 years. Labour governed for the other 30 years, although for a short period (1977-78) they had the support of the small Liberal party in a parliamentary pact. Until the formation of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition in 2010, at Westminster this was 'the only formal deal done between parties' (Norton, 2011, p. 243). The chapter also concentrates on the period from 1990 onwards, and provides a useful starting point, namely the removal from office of Britain's longest-serving Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. The declining hold of the two-party system is highlighted. Through a (necessarily brief) historical overview of their origins and development, the second section outlines the genetic features of the Conservative and Labour parties.

Constitutional structures and the party system in the UK

The United Kingdom is perhaps the most famous example of a parliamentary democracy in the world. Its Westminster system of government has served as a model for a number of other countries, most notably many members of the Commonwealth. At the very heart of the British Constitution is the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty. This is the principle that Parliament is the ultimate authority in the land, and as such can make or repeal any law. Unusually, the British Constitution is uncodified, so Parliament's power in this regard also extends to the Constitution itself.[i]

The UK parliament is bicameral, with a democratically elected lower house, the House of Commons, and an unelected upper house, the House of Lords. To form a government, a party or

a coalition of parties needs to be able to command the support of a majority of members of parliament (MPs) in the House of Commons. The 650 MPs are elected to represent single-member constituencies using the first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system. A two-party system was established: on average at the eight general elections between 1945 and 1970, nine out of ten voters cast their ballot for either the Conservatives or Labour (Heffernan, 2003 p. 120). The electoral system further bolstered the dominance of these two main parties in the Commons, with the two largest parties typically holding 98-99 percent of the seats (Clark, 2012 p. 10).

However, this period as Vernon Bogdanor has argued, while often 'taken as the norm' actually represented 'just one phase in the evolution of the British party system in the twentieth century' (2004, p. 718). The first third of the twentieth century saw the party system in considerable flux, while since the 1970s it has fragmented to the extent that Britain is now in an era of 'multi-party politics' (Dunleavy, 2005, p. 530). This is most simply illustrated by the decline in the vote-share being captured by the two main parties, which averaged only 74.8 percent between 1974 and 1997 (Heffernan, 2003, p. 120), declined further in 2001 and 2005, and fell to just 65.1 percent at the 2010 general election (Clark, 2012 p. 10). While the two largest parties continued to benefit disproportionately from FPTP in terms of seats won, the 36.1 percent secured by the Conservatives gave them 307 seats, 19 short of the total required for an overall majority (in 2005, by contrast, Labour had secured 356 seats with 35.2 percent of the vote). In 2010 this hung parliament situation led to a coalition government being formed between the Conservatives and the third largest party in the Commons, the Liberal Democrats. This was the first peacetime coalition government in Britain since the 1930s. Prior to this, 'single party dominance' was 'the norm' in British politics.

Until the formation of the Coalition in 2010, government and politics at Westminster had, also by virtue of the electoral system, been somewhat insulated from the changing dynamics of party competition across the country. In parliament, the two-party model was 'able to continue operating as if little had changed' (Clark, 2010, p. 15). As Norton observed, both 'the administration of government, and of parliament, proceeds essentially on the basis that a single party will be returned to office, usually with an absolute majority' (2011, p. 242). The institutional architecture and culture of parliament also reinforced the perception that the UK still had a two-party core. The layout of the Commons itself, with government benches to the right of the Speaker and the opposition benches to the left, is a physical manifestation of the adversarial nature of Westminster politics. As Nevil Johnson has noted, 'the notion of opposition as an inherent feature of the political system itself is more sharply defined in Britain than anywhere else' (1997, p. 487).

The government is formed by the largest party in the Commons, and the leader of that party becomes Prime Minister. The Prime Minister has the power of patronage and appoints a Cabinet and all other Ministerial posts. All government ministers are, by convention, bound by the notions of collective responsibility and individual ministerial responsibility, as laid out in the Ministerial Code (Cabinet Office, 2010). Cabinet ministers are thus answerable to Parliament for the actions of their departments, and it is the duty of Parliament to hold them to account. The government's survival is dependent on its capacity to command the support of the Commons, which in practice means that the Prime Minister must be able to control their party. Losing a vote

of no confidence triggers the dissolution of Parliament and a general election. Otherwise elections are held every five years.

Since 1997, devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has created a multi-level polity and brought more parties into the governance of the UK (Lynch, 2007). However, while multi-party politics is an undeniable feature of UK elections, Westminster itself has been shielded from this reality by the electoral system, and retains an institutional architecture more suited to two-party politics. This in turn underpins a form of political competition in which the foremost figures are the party leaders, and for several decades the question of whether Prime Ministerial officeholders have become increasingly presidential, at the expense of cabinet government, has been fiercely debated. As a style of government, presidentialization has been particularly associated with dominant Prime Ministerial figures such as Thatcher and Blair (Foley, 1993; 2000), although Dowding (2013, p. 31) has disputed the suitability of the term presidentialization, arguing instead that the growing power of the Prime Minister 'shows, on the contrary, a growing prime ministerialization'. Both sides of this debate nonetheless acknowledge the central importance of leadership figures.

The genetic features of parties and party presidentialization in the UK

The Conservative Party

When it comes to winning elections and holding on to power, the record of the British Conservative Party is unmatched by any democratically elected party in European history. So successful was it between 1886 and 1997, governing either alone or in Coalition for a total of 91 years across this period, that it was labeled the 'long Conservative century' (Seldon and Snowdon, 2001, p. 27). Utilizing Duverger's distinction between internally and externally created parties, Webb notes that 'the Conservatives and the old Liberals were historically cadre parties whose origins lay in parliamentary alliances, the provenance of which can be traced at least as far as the Whig-Tory conflicts of the eighteenth century' (2000, p. 192). Traditionally the Conservatives represented the upper class elite, particularly the aristocracy and landed gentry. This element of the party still remains today, one illustration being that prior to the 1999 reforms which removed all but 92 of them, the 'vast majority' of the more than 700 hereditary peers in the House of Lords 'largely by virtue of their social background, sat as Conservatives' (Dorey and Kelso, 2011, p. 2).

The Conservatives retained some key traits of an elite party whilst also successfully reinventing themselves for the era of universal franchise. In the post-war period, Conservative Party membership was on the scale of a mass party, exceeding 2.8 million in the early 1950s (Bale, 2012, p. 60). However, the party organization remained hierarchical and dominated by the leadership elite. Prior to 1964 the leader was not elected but 'emerged' following 'a shadowy process of consultation' (Denham, 2009, p. 217). The 'party in public office' has remained dominant throughout party history. To the extent that the 'party on the ground' (i.e. the voluntary party) has exercised influence, this has tended to be through informal channels rather than official procedures. The party's conferences have little formal power, but do act as a channel for

conveying 'the mood of the party grass-roots' to the leadership (Webb, 2000, p. 194). Individual constituency associations traditionally enjoyed significant local autonomy however, particularly in relation to candidate selection of prospective MPs. The party central office 'has generally been the creature of the leader' and the Party Chairman who heads it is appointed by the leader (Ibidem, 2000, p. 193).

Following Labour's landslide victory in the 1997 general election, the new Conservative leader William Hague undertook a significant overhaul of the party organization, making 'arguably fundamental changes' (Bale, 2012, p. 1). The 'Fresh Future' reforms ostensibly sought to modernize and democratize the party, and Hague put the package of reforms, his own leadership, and his new policy on the European single currency, to ballots of the entire party membership. Unsurprisingly in each case he won easily, strengthening his own position with a democratic veneer (Hayton, 2012, p. 44). While party members locally gained new rights to select candidates for the European Parliament, Welsh Assembly and Mayor of London – 'an undeniable extension of democratic rights' (Webb, 2000, p. 197) – they still had no formal influence on policy. The overall impact of the reforms was to reinforce the already considerable power and autonomy of the leadership within the party (Heppell, 2013, p. 132).

After three successive general election defeats (1997, 2001 and 2005) the Conservatives elected a new leader on a modernising platform, promising to change the party much more radically than his predecessors. One of David Cameron's key initiatives in this respect was the use of a 'Priority List' of candidates who the leadership were keen to see selected as prospective MPs at the following general election. The Conservatives had very few female or ethnic minority MPs,

and Cameron hoped to change the public face of his party by increasing their numbers. Constituency associations in key target seats were lent on to draw a candidate from the priority list. The initiative was successful in that it ensured that more female and ethnic minority candidates were selected. However, it also drew the ire of party members concerned about this infringement on their freedom, and the policy was effectively dropped in 2007. From this we can conclude that while the party leadership is institutionally all-powerful, on some occasions the concerns of the wider membership can be reflected back to the top and result in change. Given that the total membership has declined to less than 200,000 (McGuiness, 2012) this potentially raises a key dilemma for the party leadership.

The Labour Party

The origins of the Labour Party are as an external mass party, founded by the trade union movement in 1900 in order to represent their interests in parliament (Fielding, 2003, p. 18). The trade unions have consequently been a key feature of Labour politics throughout the party's history, and they retain an important position both structurally and as a source of financial support. Since its birth as the Labour Representation Committee the party has retained a federal structure, which aims to 'guarantee representation for each affiliating body' (Webb, 2000, p. 199). As well as the trade unions, affiliated bodies include constituency associations and other socialist organizations such as the Fabian Society. The Annual Conference has historically played a central role in Labour politics and remains (in theory at least) where ultimate authority in the party lies. The chief governing body of the party is the National Executive Committee, not

the party leadership or the Parliamentary Party. Labour has consequently been traditionally characterized as a 'bottom-up plural democracy' (Heppell, 2013, p. 130).

In practice however, the balance of power in the Labour Party usually depended less on the formal structures of the party than on the relationship between the party leadership and the leaders of the trade unions. If the former retained the backing of the latter, they could (via the dominant trade union block vote) dominate conference. As such, a Labour Prime Minister could in practice enjoy a similar freedom of action to a Conservative one. Divergence between the two elites by contrast could lead to significant conflict, as occurred during the Labour government under James Callaghan (1976-9) (Heppell, 2013, p. 130).

Labour successfully captured a large chunk of the working class vote in the era of universal franchise and was able to dislodge the Liberal Party as the second party of British politics in the 1920s. However, the first minority Labour government (1923-4) was short-lived and the second (1929-31) ended in disaster for the party as the Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald joined with Conservative and Liberal opponents to form a National Government, and was consequently expelled from Labour. The subsequent general election in 1931 reduced Labour to just 52 seats. A partial recovery in 1935 (to 154 seats) provided a platform for Labour's landslide victory in 1945, following its participation in Churchill's wartime national government. While Clement Attlee's government is credited as being one of the most transformative in British history, Labour found themselves out of power again (1951-64). Labour secured office under Harold Wilson in 1964 (until 1970) and again in 1974.

Wilson's successor as leader James Callaghan was defeated following bitter disputes with the trade union movement culminating in the Winter of Discontent in 1979. The general election that year saw Thatcher lead the Conservatives back to power. In the aftermath of this defeat Labour turned in on itself, and power 'shifted to its active members who enjoyed unprecedented trade union support' (Fielding, 2003, p. 25). The leadership struggled to maintain control as the wider party pushed forward a left-wing policy program and various changes to the party constitution (including an electoral college for electing the leader). Unhappy with this direction, four leading former Cabinet Ministers from the moderate wing of the party broke away to form the Social Democratic Party (SDP), which fought the subsequent 1983 general election in alliance with the Liberal Party. This split in the anti-Conservative vote helped Thatcher secure a landslide victory, but the election also demonstrated that the social cleavage Labour had traditionally mobilized (the working class) was no longer sufficiently large or unified to deliver victory to the party.

Following this defeat, the new leader Neil Kinnock sought to reassert the power of the central leadership of the party at large, and to purge the Militant tendency from Labour's ranks. After another general election defeat in 1987, Kinnock was able to push this further with a more far-reaching policy review. This revisionist strategy aimed to broaden Labour's appeal beyond the industrial working class (Fielding, 2003, p. 26), but could not deliver victory at the 1992 general election. Further modernization took the form of the introduction of 'one member, one vote' (OMOV) which diluted trade union power and signaled 'a shift away from the principle of delegate-based democracy towards representative democracy' (Heppell, 2013, p. 131). Deploying the tactic that would later be copied by Hague, Blair was able to gain popular endorsement for his New Labour project via plebiscites on his symbolic reform of Clause IV of

the party's constitution (which committed it to nationalization), and of the draft manifesto in 1996 (Ibidem). As Webb argues, while these ballots were 'ostensibly democratic' they 'clearly served to bypass CLP conference delegates that Labour's modernizers regarded as too likely to offer resistance' (2000, p. 205).

New Labour won a landslide victory in 1997 and subsequently held power for 13 years, in electoral terms by far the most successful period in the party's history. Blair transformed Labour from a mass party to an 'electoral-professional organization' resembling Panebianco's model (Webb, 2000, p. 208-9). The Blair era was one of considerable leadership autonomy to the extent that it is often cited is confirming the presidentialization thesis (Dowding, 2013).

The Liberal Democrats

The third party of British politics, the Liberal Democrats, was formed in 1988 by a merger of the old Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party. The two had previously co-operated at the 1983 and 1987 general elections, where they fielded joint candidates under the 'Alliance' banner. Although the Alliance secured a quarter of the popular vote at the 1983 election, the electoral system ensured they struggled to make a significant breakthrough in terms of seats, winning just 23.

In 1997, while the party's share of the popular vote fell below 17 percent, the number of seats won jumped to 46, as the Liberal Democrats benefited from anti-Conservative tactical voting. The party's leader Paddy Ashdown had hoped for progressive coalition with New Labour, but

the size of the latter's majority effectively removed that option, even though Tony Blair was reportedly sympathetic to it. A hung parliament following the 2010 general election finally presented the Liberal Democrats with the circumstances they had yearned, namely holding the balance of power and being able to negotiate their place in office. However, the parliamentary arithmetic ensured that it was the Conservatives, not Labour, with whom the Liberal Democrats would form a government: an 'unholy alliance' with which many in the party were 'deeply uncomfortable' (Evans, 2012, p. 79). The decision to enter government with the Conservatives, whom many Liberal Democrat activists had dedicated their political lives to opposing, demonstrated the capacity of the party's leadership for autonomous strategic decision making. This reflected a 'professionalization process' that had been in train since 1997, and which had transformed the party away from the 'bottom-up' highly democratized model it had been founded upon (Evans and Sanderson-Nash, 2011, p. 459).

The Conservatives, Labour, and the Liberal Democrats consequently all currently exhibit some of the key attributes of electoral-professional parties, particularly a significant degree of professionalization and centralization of power by the elite leadership.

The level of centralized party leadership and its changes

Since the early 1990s the two main political parties have reformed leadership election and ejection procedures, and justified these changes as exercises in democratization which would strengthen the mandate of the leaders elected. Labour reformed its electoral college in 1993 by removing the trade union and constituency party block votes and replacing them with OMOV,

while the Conservatives overhauled their parliamentary ballot-based rules in 1998, to allow party members to choose from two candidates selected after eliminative ballots by the Parliamentary Conservative Party (PCP). These processes of democratization had a clear impact for both parties. Back in 1976, only 313 Labour parliamentarians were involved as the leadership passed from Wilson to Callaghan. In 2010, Ed Miliband succeeded Gordon Brown in a process involving 262 members of the PLP and European elected representatives; 122,806 Labour Party members, and 199,671 Trade Union affiliates. Equally, John Major succeeded Thatcher as Conservative Party leader in 1990 through the democratic participation of 372 Conservative parliamentarians. David Cameron succeeded Michael Howard in 2005 in a membership ballot involving 198,844 party members (Heppell 2008; 2010). Quinn argues procedural change designed to remove leaders has made the 'costs' – financial, decision (or time) and unity - of challenging incumbents higher, particularly for a governing party if the transition period is protracted which is the case under the rules now used by the Conservatives and Labour (Quinn, 2005, pp. 795-6).

The Labour Party: The Protective Shield of the electoral college

Up until 1981 the Labour Party had selected their leader through easily organized, speedy and cheap Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) ballots (Drucker, 1981, p. 379). However, after their removal from office in 1979 parts of the socialist left campaigned to change their leadership selection rules as part of a wider debate about the distribution of power within the party. They sought democratization and a widening of the franchise for leadership selection beyond the socially democratic right dominated confines of the PLP. They argued that as the party consisted

of three centers of influence – the PLP, the constituency Labour Parties (CLPs), and the trade unions – they should all contribute to the process of leadership selection. By January 1981, an electoral college was established with the following percentage weightings: PLP (30); CLP (30); and trade unions (40). As the CLPs and trade unions would unanimously cast their bodies vote for a candidate on behalf of their members – via the block vote – it was assumed that this would help candidates on the socialist left (Stark, 1996, p. 56).

After 1983 the Labour Party would engage in an incremental modernization project that would culminate in New Labour (Russell, 2005). Underpinning modernization was a perception that the dispersal of power and the empowering of activists had undermined the leadership and contributed to an image of chronic factionalism and perceived extremism. The electoral college was reweighted in 1993 to give each section one third each, while OMOV balloting for the CLP and trade union sections was made compulsory (Seyd, 1999, p. 385). The post-1993 electoral college was thus more hospitable terrain for a modernising and moderate candidate like Blair, who was the leading candidate in all three sections. He had a clear mandate to lead, having overcome the marginalized parliamentary left, and having bypassed the extra parliamentary left in the CLPs and the trade union leaders (Heppell, 2010, p. 170).

Blair had little time for traditional Labour party structures. The annual conference was downgraded, the ruling National Executive Committee was neutered, and trade union influence was weakened. New Labour therefore confirmed the shift away from delegatory democracy and towards representative democracy (Heffernan and Webb, 2005, p. 47). Blair wanted to communicate directly to individual party members and bypass delegates. The rationale for this

was that individual party members were assumed to be moderate and inactive, whereas delegates were more likely to create difficulties for the leadership (Russell, 2005, p. 191-8). Timing and context mattered. Blair was hugely popular in the 1994 to 1997 period. His use of plebiscites was central as he exploited his popularity. Party membership ballots were used to legitimize his reform to Clause IV in 1995 and to endorse the draft election manifesto in 1996. These moves not only enhanced the leadership's 'freedom of manoeuvre', but they were also designed to 'avoid the party constraints' that had 'dogged' previous Labour leaders' once in office (Bennister, 2012, p. 65). As a consequence, the policy making process was reorganized after the 1997 general election via the Partnership in Power reforms. Although the new processes allowed for 'input' from members, local branches and their representatives, they enshrined a 'powerful role of the leadership'. The leadership could 'set the agenda' and could guide 'the flow of debate by hindering the articulation of public opposition, interpreting the outcome of consultation, and framing the proposals' which Conference considered (Heffernan and Webb, 2005, p. 47-8). Once in government, Blair continued to offer a strong, centralized form of leadership, but by the second term it was apparent centralization led to increased parliamentary rebellion (Heppell, 2013, p. 131-5). However, with the benefit of large (179 in 1997 and 167 in 2001) or comfortable (66 in 2005) parliamentary majorities, Blair was able to treat the PLP with 'disdain', and he felt 'little direct accountability' to them (Bennister, 2007, p. 339).

The issue of accountability is important. When arguing for the establishment of the electoral college, the socialist left had been motivated by their perception that the Callaghan government had betrayed the wider Labour movement in the late 1970s. Reform would supposedly ensure that a future Labour Prime Minister would have a mandate to lead from the wider Labour

movement. However, it did not provide the means to hold the leader to account, if accountability implies that they can be evicted. In practice, the electoral college created a protective shield for incumbents by creating disincentives for challengers. Moreover, any challenge to the incumbent stems from the PLP alone, and not from the Labour movement (Quinn, 2005, pp. 799-801). Incumbent security is enhanced because of the following factors. First, the nomination threshold to initiate a challenge (20 percent backing within the PLP) is high and deters potential challengers (Dorey and Denham, 2011, p. 289). This threshold may be harder to reach when one considers the powers of patronage that the incumbent controls. Approximately one hundred Labour parliamentarians will have frontbench roles, many of which have been acquired under the incumbent, and many of these may fear jeopardizing their future careers by disloyally nominating a challenger. This means the political hurdle is higher than the mathematical hurdle (Quinn, 2004, p. 338). Furthermore, the fact that the nominations (and subsequent votes in the electoral college) MPs make are publicly known increases entry costs for challengers, making it harder for would-be challenges to mobilize support (Quinn, 2005, p. 800). Second, challengers who have serious aspirations to lead the party cannot acquire the leadership without challenging directly themselves. They have to be in from the start, which increases their risks. There is no provision for a compromise candidate to emerge after a challenge has been made, in the way that Major emerged after Michael Heseltine forced Thatcher to resign in November 1990. Third, even if a candidate is willing to take that risk and can secure the backing of 20 percent of the PLP, they have to be willing to withstand the costs to the party – decision, financial and unity - that their challenge will impose. In addition, initiating a challenge when in power has an additional procedural hurdle as compared to opposition as they need the approval of conference for the principle of initiating a contest (Dorey and Denham, 2011, p. 289).

As a consequence, Weller has concluded that when in government would-be Labour Prime Ministers are left to 'fulminate' as they have 'no opportunity to wield the knife' (2012, p. 154 and p. 157). His comment that challengers had to wait 'grumbling, complaining [and] agonising at the unwarranted delay' would resonate with Brown in the 2003 to 2007 period, and with David Miliband between 2008 and early 2010 (Weller, 2012, p. 154).

The Conservative Party: The Protective Shield of the Unwieldy Confidence Motion

After the Conservatives lost power in 1997 they engaged in a wholesale reappraisal of their internal structures. This would involve rationalizing their tripartite organizational structure into a single entity under a new unified and codified constitution. Their reforming zeal would extend to leadership selection and ejection as well. As was the case with Labour, the rhetoric that would underpin the Fresh Future reform agenda was about decentralization through participation and democratization (Heffernan and Webb, 2005, p. 45), but the reality would be about enhancing the security of tenure of the incumbent party leader and increasing centralization of power around them (Dorey, et al., 2011, pp.137-9). Consider the following illustrations of centralization. First, Constituency Associations lost their legal autonomy and became subject to the authority of the party centrally (Heffernan and Webb, 2005, p. 45). Second, the Annual Conference was 'downgraded' with the power to arrange the conference moved away from the National Convention (the replacement for the aforementioned National Union), and given to a subcommittee of the office of the leader (Dorey, et al., 2011, pp. 139-41). Finally, the leadership

used rhetoric of promoting membership participation (which would demonstrate democratization) as a means to legitimate decisions already taken (Seyd, 1999, p. 385). The cumulative effect was that the 'strategic autonomy' of the leader, which had always been strong, was not undermined by democratization (Heffernan and Webb, 2005, p. 46).

The most interesting aspect of the Fresh Future reforms would relate to the selection and ejection of the leader. The stimulus for reform was the removal of Thatcher in November 1990. While the rules allowed for a challenge to the leadership each year, Thatcher did not face a contest between 1975 (when she acquired the leadership from Edward Heath) until 1989, when she was challenged by Anthony Meyer. Although she easily defeated him (314 votes to 33), the precedent had been set that an incumbent Conservative Prime Minister could be challenged. Given her longevity in office and the weakening positioning of the Conservatives in the opinion polls it made another contest in 1990 likely. Significantly, it also showed how easily one could be brought about. All that was needed was a proposer and a seconder (Quinn, 2005, p. 801). The other aspect that made Thatcher vulnerable was the provision that allowed for candidates to enter at the second ballot stage. This meant rivals had the opportunity to put themselves forward as a compromise candidate after a challenge had been made and produced an inconclusive outcome, or had forced the incumbent to resign.

In November 1990 when Heseltine challenged Thatcher it produced no arithmetic winner. Thatcher won more votes (204-152) but was four short of the majority plus 15 percent rule that was built into the procedure at that time. The ability of Heseltine to secure votes was aided by the fact that the parliamentary ballots were secret, so there was nothing to stop a Conservative

MP from publicly expressing loyalty to Thatcher, and then voting against her. Recognizing the weakness of her position, Thatcher resigned. However, the prospects of Heseltine winning evaporated once Major entered the fray. As Heseltine had challenged Thatcher he could be portrayed as disloyal, whereas the same accusation could not be made against Major. Heseltine ended up being the stalking horse for Major. His failure would be cited thereafter, notably with regard to Brown and Miliband, with the phrase 'he who wields the knife never inherits the throne' (Quinn 2012, p. 48 and p. 91).

The relative ease with which Thatcher was challenged resulted in a slight tightening of the procedures in 1991. Incumbents could only be challenged if 10 percent of the PCP backed a rival, thus making the eviction hurdle higher than before, but not insurmountable (Denham and O'Hara, 2008, p. 24). However, between the autumn of 1992 and the summer of 1995 Major faced continual speculation about whether a challenger would emerge who could pass the 10 percent threshold, eroding his authority as Prime Minister. Keen to avoid Heseltine's fate Major's key rivals were reluctant to formally challenge, but their implicit willingness to enter the race in the event of a vacancy intensified speculation, immobilized Major and led to accusations of weak and ineffective leadership (Foley, 2002). It was his sheer irritation about the constant speculation that led to his bizarre 'put up or shut up' contest in 1995, when he resigned his position and immediately (and successfully) stood for the vacancy he had created (Heppell, 2008, p. 96).

The recriminations that surrounded the removal of Thatcher and the destabilization of Major suggested that the existing procedures left incumbents too vulnerable to eviction. Furthermore,

party members had been outraged by the removal of Thatcher, which had been instigated in direct contravention of their wishes and without their consent (Alderman, 1999, p. 265). In constructing their new election and ejection procedures their new leader, William Hague (elected in 1997) was motivated by the following. First, he wanted to end annual challenges. Second, he wanted to remove the speculation about challengers, whether from 'serious' candidates who aimed to win or 'signal sender' or 'stalking horse' candidates who simply destabilized the incumbent (Quinn, 2012, p. 99). Formal challenges were thus removed in the new procedures, to be replaced by a simple confidence motion. The threshold for initiating a confidence motion (at 15 percent of the PCP) was higher than the 10 percent threshold for challengers that had existed since 1991. A full-scale leadership election would be initiated if the incumbent fails to win a majority plus one in the confidence motion. If the no confidence vote fails then another confidence motion would not be permitted during the next twelve months. If a no confidence motion is carried, the incumbent leader would be forced to resign and would be barred from standing in the ensuing vacant party leadership election. If there are only two candidates, their names are submitted to a ballot of all party members, who have been members for at least six months prior to the no confidence motion, on the basis of one member, one vote. If there are more than two candidates, then a series of eliminative primary ballots would be held within the PCP, until only two candidates were left (Quinn, 2005: 810).

The new rules have been used three times. First, to elect Iain Duncan Smith in 2001 after Hague resigned in the aftermath of the general election defeat of that year. Second, to crown Michael Howard as leader without a membership ballot when he was the only parliamentarian to stand for the vacancy created when Duncan Smith was evicted via a confidence motion (October 2003).

And third, when David Cameron was elected in late-2005 after Howard resigned following their third successive general election defeat earlier that year.

How we interpret the now separate processes of eviction from selection is critical to understanding power dynamics within the contemporary Conservative Party. The experience of Duncan Smith might suggest that the new procedures offer no more protection than the old. There is, however, a need to draw a distinction between opposition and government, and when in office the eviction costs are higher. The risks to the Conservatives of using the confidence motion make it ill-suited to the demands of being in office, mainly because of the lengthy timescale involved. The only way that this can be overcome is if the Conservatives manufacture a confidence motion with the knowledge that only one parliamentarian will stand for the leadership once the vacancy is created – a speedy outcome which circumvents the financial, decision and unity costs associated with a protracted mass membership ballot. This is theoretically possible and could occur, even if at the time of writing there is no obvious heir apparent, and the removal of Cameron would throw the continuance of the Liberal Democrats in the coalition into doubt. Cameron is thus slightly less secure than Brown or Blair were through the electoral college, but as compared to the lower eviction costs faced by would be challengers to Thatcher and Major, he is more secure.

Table X. 1 ABOUT HERE

Presidentialization of parties in the UK

21

Analyzing the processes of institutional change within both parties has demonstrated the gap between the rhetoric of decentralization, participation and democratization, and the reality of increasing centralization around the leadership. The UK constitutional structure – the Westminster Model – has been important in facilitating this by fostering the concentration of power. In Panebianco's (1998) terms, the genetic features of the two main parties have been important in shaping the trajectory of the reforms discussed in the previous section, the effect of which has been to enhance leadership autonomy and to boost the image and power of the Prime Minister vis-à-vis their parties when they are in office (Seyd, 1999, p. 386). The critical aspect of the processes of leadership selection reform is that membership participation relates to selection but not ejection. Not only are the membership excluded from initiating ejection procedures, but the ejection hurdles are high. As such democratization serves an alternative purpose, legitimizing the selection of party leaders. This has enhanced leadership authority and has provided them with a stronger mandate to lead (and possibly initiate change) while intensifying their security of tenure (Weller, 2012).

Ultimately, debates about leadership election procedures are not really exercises in party democracy. They are disputes about power within parties and the relationship with the leadership. The trends identified in regard to leadership election rules form part of a broader picture of the presidentialization of parties in the UK. In short, following Katz and Mair (2002) we can observe that when considering the three faces of party organization, in the case of both Labour and the Conservatives the party in public office is firmly in ascendency relative to the party on the ground and the party central office. The modernization processes undertaken by

Labour from the 1980s and the Conservatives following their landslide defeat in 1997 were orientated towards regaining office, based on the view that greater centralization of power and leadership autonomy would aid that goal.

Poguntke and Webb (2007) identify three faces of presidentialization: the executive face, the party face, and the electoral face. In relation to the first, the autonomy of the leader is dependent in part on formal powers and institutional resources (Samuels and Shugart, 2010), but is also contingent on their ability 'to appeal successfully to relevant constituencies' (Poguntke and Webb, 2007, p. 8). The use of plebiscites by both Conservative and Labour leaders conforms to the presidentialization of this face. However, in both parties retaining the confidence of the parliamentary party remains of vital importance to the leader, as failing to do so can lead to removal, as happened to the Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith in 2003. If a leader can continue to appeal to at least one key constituency, his or her prospects of staying in office are good. In relation to the parliamentary party this is axiomatic, as they control the ejection procedures. However, popularity with either the party membership, or especially the electorate, can help ensure survival. Simply put, the experience of the UK in recent decades is that 'parties may let their leaders 'have their way' as long as they can deliver the electoral rewards' (Poguntke and Webb, 2007, p. 8).

The shift to a form of OMOV leadership selection procedures relates directly to the second dimension, the party face of presidentialization, as does the centralization of power we have noted in relation to both parties. Nevertheless, while Conservative and Labour leaders have enjoyed autonomy in terms of developing a policy program, they have faced increased

backbench rebellions in parliament. This arguably illustrates 'the stretching of autonomy between leader and followers' as the former seeks to demonstrate leadership by making a stand against elements of their own party (Poguntke and Webb, 2012, p. 19). This is often associated with a modernization process, for example Blair on Clause IV, and more recently David Cameron over issues such as equal marriage (ibid.). However, when in government the costs of rebellion can be high in terms of an image of governing competence, meaning that the size of the government's parliamentary majority remains a key factor for leadership autonomy both in relation to the party and the executive.

In terms of the third face of presidentialization, concerning electoral processes, Poguntke and Webb (2007, p. 10) note that this may be observed through 'a growing emphasis on leadership appeals in electoral campaigning', in terms of media coverage increasingly focusing on the leaders, and via 'the growing significance of leader effects in voting behavior'. These trends have all been evident in British politics over the past two decades, culminating in the 2010 general election which exemplified these trends. The main innovation of the campaign was the introduction of three televised debates between the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat leaders. The debates 'dominated the media agenda and became the centrepiece of the campaign', even if their impact on the eventual result was limited (Wring and Ward, 2010, p. 802). For the first time in UK elections, polls indicated the electorate regarded their evaluation of the leaders as equally important to policies when choosing which party to vote for (Ipsos Mori, 2010).

Finally, it is worth briefly commenting on the impact of coalition government since 2010 on the presidentialization of parties in the UK. As Bennister and Heffernan note, 'a coalition involves

compromise, so a prime minister heading up a coalition government, even one as predominant a party leader as Cameron, should not be as powerful as a prime minister leading a single-party government' (2012, p. 778). However, their study concluded that while coalition does constrain the prime minister within the executive in some ways, 'no formal, substantial change in the role of prime minister has been enacted' which remains 'predominant' (Ibidem, p. 20). In party terms, Cameron has benefited from the absence of an obvious replacement leader within his own party, while coalition has also provided cover for moves to distance himself from his party on some issues. Linking up with the Liberal Democrats also ensured Cameron's government enjoys a sizable majority in the Commons. Additionally, since its inception the fulcrum of the Coalition has been the relationship between Cameron and the Deputy Prime Minister (and Liberal Democrat leader) Nick Clegg. Once again this has demonstrated the personalized and leader-centric nature of contemporary British politics.

Conclusion

This chapter has identified a clear trend towards the presidentialization and personalization of parties in the UK, even within the institutional confines of the parliamentary Westminster system, which has enabled centralization and leader-centered politics (Samuels and Shugart, 2010). As such, it corroborates the work of other academics such as Poguntke and Webb who have concluded that 'the major features of presidentialization remain pertinent in the UK, even under circumstances of coalition government' (2012, p. 24). The genetic features of the main parties have meant that the path each has taken towards greater leadership autonomy has varied and the selection and ejection mechanisms differ in each case. Overall, however, the effect of

these endogenous party factors has been to lead to a greater presidentialization of politics as a whole, evident particularly in terms of party competition and election campaigns, but also in terms of the concentration of power in the hands of the Prime Minister.

References

Alderman, K. (1999) 'Revision of Leadership Procedures in the Conservative Party', Parliamentary Affairs, 52(2), 260-74.

Bale, T. (2012) The Conservatives since 1945: The Drivers of Party Change (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Bennister, M. (2007) 'Tony Blair and John Howard: Comparative Predominance and Institutional Stretch in Britain and Australia', British Journal of Politics and International Relations, 9(3), 327-45.

Bennister, M. (2012) Prime Ministers in Power: Political Leadership in Britain and Australia (Basingstoke: Palgrave).

Bennister, M. and R. Heffernan (2012) 'Cameron as Prime Minister: The Intra-Executive Politics of Britain's Coalition Government', Parliamentary Affairs, 65(4), 778–801.

Bogdanor, V. (2004) 'The Constitution and the Party System in the Twentieth Century', Parliamentary Affairs, 57(4), 717-33.

Cabinet Office (2010) The Ministerial Code (London: HM Government).

Clark, A. (2012) Political Parties in the UK (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

Denham, A. (2009) 'From grey suits to grass roots: Choosing Conservative leaders', British Politics, 4(2), 217-35.

Denham, A. and K. O'Hara (2008) Democratising Conservative Leadership Selection: From Grey Suits to Grass Roots (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

Dorey, P. and A. Denham (2011) 'O, Brother, Where Art Thou? The Labour Party Leadership Election of 2010', British Politics, 6(3), 286-316.

Dorey, P., M. Garnett and A. Denham (2011) From Crisis to Coalition: The Conservative Party 1997-2010 (Basingstoke: Palgrave).

Dorey, P. and A. Kelso (2011) Reform of the House of Lords since 1911 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

Dowding, K. (2013) 'The Prime Ministerialisation of the British Prime Minister', Parliamentary Affairs, 66(3), 617–35.

Drucker, H. (1981) 'Changes in the Labour Party Leadership', Parliamentary Affairs, 34(4), 369-81.

Dunleavy, P. (2005) 'Facing Up to Multi-Party Politics: How Partisan Dealignment and PR Voting have Fundamentally Changed Britain's Party Systems', Parliamentary Affairs, 58(3), 505–32.

Evans, E. (2012) 'The Liberal Democrats', in G. Baldini and J. Hopkin (eds.) Coalition Britain: The UK election of 2010 (Manchester: Manchester University Press), pp. 79-95.

Evans, E. and E. Sanderson-Nash (2011) 'From Sandals to Suits: Professionalisation, Coalition and the Liberal Democrats', British Journal of Politics and International Relations, 13(4), 459-73.

Fielding, S. (2003) The Labour Party (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

Foley, M. (1993) The Rise of the British Presidency (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

Foley, M. (2000) The British Presidency: Tony Blair and the Politics of British Leadership (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

Foley, M. (2002) Tony Blair, John Major and a Conflict of Leadership (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

Hayton, R. (2012) Reconstructing Conservatism? The Conservative Party in Opposition, 1997-2010, (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

Heffernan, R. (2003) 'Political Parties and the Party System' in P. Dunleavy et al. Developments in British Politics 7 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 119-139.

Heffernan, R. and P. Webb (2005) 'The British Prime Minister: Much More than First Amongst Equals' in Poguntke, T. and Webb, P. (eds.) The Presidentialisation of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 26-62.

Heppell, T. (2008) Choosing the Tory Leader: Conservative Party Leadership Elections from Heath to Cameron (London: I.B. Tauris).

Heppell, T. (2010) Choosing the Labour Leader: Labour Party Leadership Elections from Wilson to Brown, (London: I.B. Tauris).

Heppell, T. (2013) 'Prime Ministers and their Parties in the United Kingdom' in P. Strangio, P. t'Hart and J. Walter (eds.) Understanding Prime Ministerial Performance (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 129-150.

Ipsos Mori (2010) General Election 2010: An overview, downloaded on 28.06.2013 from: http://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/News/General_Election_2010-An_Overview.PDF

Johnson, N. (1997) 'Opposition in the British Political System', Government and Opposition, 32(4), 487–510.

Katz, R. and P. Mair (2002) 'The Ascendancy of the Party in Public Office: Party Organizational Change in Twentieth-Century Democracies' in Gunther, R. et al. (eds.) Political Parties: Old Concepts and New Challenges (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 113-135.

Lynch, P. (2007) 'Party System Change in Britain: Multi-Party Politics in a Multi-Level Polity', British Politics, 2(3), 323-46.

McGuiness, F. (2012) Membership of UK political parties - Commons Library Standard Note SN/SG/5125 (London: House of Commons Library).

Norton, P. (2011) 'The Politics of Coalition' in Nicholas Allen and John Bartle (eds.) Britain at the Polls 2010 (London: Sage), pp. 242-265.

Panebianco, A. (1998) Political Parties: Organisation and Power (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Poguntke, T. and P. Webb (2007) 'The Presidentialization of Politics in Democratic Societies: A Framework for Analysis' in T. Poguntke and P. Webb (eds.) The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 1-25.

Poguntke, T. and P. Webb (2012) 'Party Leadership in the Age of Presidentialization: Lessons from Germany and Britain', paper presented to World Congress of International Political Science Association, Madrid, July 2012.

Quinn, T. (2004) 'Electing the Leader: The British Labour Party's electoral college', British Politics and International Relations, 6(3), 333-52.

Quinn, T. (2005) 'Leasehold or Freehold? Leader-Eviction Rules in the British Conservative and Labour Parties', Political Studies, 53(4), 793-815.

Quinn, T. (2012) Electing and Ejecting Party Leaders in Britain (Basingstoke: Palgrave).

Russell, M. (2005) Building New Labour: The Politics of Party Organisation (Basingstoke: Palgrave).

Samuels, D. and M. S. Shugart (2010) Presidents, Parties, and Prime Ministers: How the Separation of Powers Affects Party Organization and Behavior (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Seldon, A. and P. Snowdon (2001) A New Conservative Century? (London: Centre for Policy Studies).

Seyd, P. (1999) 'New Parties, New Politics? A Case Study of the British Labour Party', Party Politics, 5(3), 383-405.

Stark, L. (1996) Choosing a Leader: Party Leadership Contest in Britain from Macmillan to Blair (London: Macmillan).

Webb, P. (2000) The Modern British Party System (London: Sage).

Weller, P. (2012) 'Fight, Flee or Fulminate: Prime Ministerial Challengers, Strategic Choices and Rites of Succession', Political Quarterly, 83(1), 152-62.

Wring, D. and S. Ward (2010) 'The Media and the 2010 Campaign: the Television Election?', Parliamentary Affairs, 63(4), 802–17.

i Constitutional laws such as those determining the powers of the House of Lords are Acts of Parliament like any other, and can be passed, amended or rescinded through the normal legislative process (for an example the 1949 Parliament Act).