The democratization of party leadership selection: the Portuguese experience

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Introduction

Political parties in contemporary democracies have experienced important organizational changes in recent decades, notably towards internal democratization (Bille 2001; Kittilson and Scarrow 2003). While leaders’ election by party congress or party national bodies remains the rule in most established democracies, in many European countries political elites have decided to change leadership selection procedures. The empowerment of party members for the selection of party leadership has not only occurred in Northern countries - for example in Denmark, Finland, Belgium or the Netherlands -, but it has been expanded also to Southern Europe since the late 1990s. Although the traditional indirect method of leadership selection is still clearly predominant, South European parties have recently undergone significant changes, especially in Greece (PASOK), Italy (Democrats of the Left-DS, now transformed in the Democratic Party) and Portugal (Bosco and Morlino 2007). The Portuguese case deserves particular attention as all major parties have adopted this form of selection during the last decade. The Socialist party (PS) was the first to introduce the direct election of party leader in 1998. This organizational change was to remain an exception until the two centre-right parties, the Social Democrats (PSD) and the Centrist Democrats-Popular Party (CDS-PP), have recently decided to introduce the selection of party leadership by individual members.

This evolution appears quite surprising as Portuguese parties have been characterized by a high degree of centralization, namely in regard to the selection of party candidates and leaders, the elaboration of policy orientations and strategic decisions. If we consider the inclusiveness vs. exclusiveness continuum adopted by Rahat and Hazan (2001) to gauge the degree of democratization, all parties have displayed a low level of intraparty democracy, members’ participation and openness of internal decision-making mechanisms (Bruneau 1997; Freire 2001; Lopes 2005). Overall, the main Portuguese political parties can be considered essentially as electoralist parties characterized by a great concentration of power in party executives,
while party leaders have maintained a great degree of autonomy (Magone 2004; Jalali 2007). The increasing governamentalization of the main parties and their entrenchment in the state have enhanced the marginalization of party members and the distance between grassroots and party elites (Lobo 2003; Lopes 2005). In this sense, it is even more puzzling that the adoption of every-member voting for leadership selection has taken place in a context of highly centralized political parties, low levels of intraparty democracy and an overwhelming elite control over party politics.

In this paper I will analyse three specific cases of “premier primaries” experienced in Portugal during the last decade. In the PS the democratization of party leadership selection has been in place for quite a long period, whereas in the two centre-right parties – PSD and CDS – this is a very recent change. The comparison between these experiences can shed more light not only on the causes and consequences of the democratization of leader selection, but also on important aspects of party organizational change. This is even more valuable in the Portuguese case as political parties have been resistant to transformations in party structures and internal functioning. Drawing on the democratizing reforms undertaken in many political parties for leadership selection, the following section will point out several rationales leading to the adoption of every-member voting. Then, the third part is dedicated to the examination of the Portuguese case, highlighting the differences and similarities between the socialist and the centre-right experiences. In the subsequent section I will consider the consequences of these reforms in the three parties, while in the conclusions I will discuss the main findings in comparison with similar cases across Western Europe, emphasizing the contribution of this research for the study of contemporary political parties.

Literature review: some hypotheses about the democratization of party leadership selection

The literature on political parties offers several interpretations about the adoption of democratizing reforms for leadership selection. Generally, party

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1 In this paper I will use the term “premier primaries” when referring to the election of leaders by party members, distinguishing from party primaries which usually indicates the selection of candidates through every-member voting. This is a terminological distinction which aims to differentiate between the two processes with no theoretical implications.
organizational change can stem from endogenous or exogenous factors (Panebianco 1988; Harmel and Janda 1994). Thus, the introduction of democratizing reforms can be the consequence of different elements and it can entail several functions. Drawing on party literature, as well as on the experience underwent by West European parties, it is possible to point out five main rationales for interpreting party primaries (table 1).

The first rationale has to do with parties’ public image and the need to enhance their electoral appeal among voters. In order to maximize parties’ and leaders’ support the democratization of leadership selection is seen as an electoral asset. This rationale often takes place after a major electoral setback, leading the leadership to try to mobilize new voters and attract new members. Usually this rationale implies the introduction of such changes when the party is in opposition and wants to (re)gain voters’ confidence (Cross 1996). Thus, the reform of party leadership selection is part of a strategic plan aiming at strengthening leaders’ image and party electoral performance. The Italian case can be considered an example of the strategic use of party primaries, especially with regard to the leader’s selection of the centre-left coalition for the 2006 election. The campaign undergone by Romano Prodi was the first step of his electoral strategy, aiming to enhance his popularity and to increase coalition’s performance².

This example leads us to consider also a second reason for the democratization of leadership selection. This focuses on the need to reduce internal conflicts as they can endanger the electoral performance and bar parties’ strategic and programmatic adaptation. While there are a number of means to reduce party conflicts, democratizing reforms seem not to be the optimal solution because they often imply high costs in terms of party public image. The oft-used explanation for the expansion of democratizing reforms for leadership selection stems from Katz and Mair’s hypothesis about the strategic calculus of party leadership in introducing internal reforms for party leaders’ selection (Katz and Mair 1995). According to this rationale, the adoption of one ballot one vote method is a way to reduce the power of party activists and middle-rank members, while empowering individual participation and rights. At the same token, party leaders are able to control easily internal struggles and to achieve a stronger cohesion. The selection of party leadership would be just a way to legitimize leader’s orientations and to attribute more freedom of manoeuvre in regard to strategic and programmatic action. The difference between the “cartel party” rationale and the

² See the several contributions in the special issue of Quaderni dell’Osservatorio Elettorale (2005) dedicated to party primaries. For different arguments, see also Valbruzzi (2005).
“rational-electoralist” one is that the former focuses on the internal party functioning, while the second entails essentially an externally-based motivation. In this sense, the cartel party model implies not only that intraparty dynamics are the main causes for the adoption of democratizing reform but also that activists have more radical orientations than members. This is a problematic assumption because it has not been confirmed by empirical research (Iversen 1994, Norris 1995, Kitschelt 1989).

Table 1. Approaches for analysing party leadership democratization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approaches</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rational-Electoralist</td>
<td>Increasing party performance (electoral strategy)</td>
<td>Personalized leadership Populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartel party</td>
<td>Neutralization of middle-rank activists and internal conflicts</td>
<td>Greater leadership autonomy Professionalisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party crisis</td>
<td>Increasing legitimacy and introduction of collective incentives</td>
<td>Higher mobilization Reducing party conflicts Increase in the level of support for parties and leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>Redefine party policy vis-à-vis voters and members</td>
<td>Centralization Policy and programmatic change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intraparty democracy and social capital</td>
<td>Empowerment of party members</td>
<td>Internal competition Increasing satisfaction with political parties (and democracy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increasing mobilization and participation of party members</td>
<td>Higher levels of participation Greater transparency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third interpretation about the adoption of membership vote for choosing party leaders refers to the empowerment of leaders in contemporary parties. Overall, several reasons can account for this phenomenon: the transformations of mass political communication - especially in regard to campaign politics -, the presidentialization of executives and, last but not least, the weakening anchorage of party organizations.
(Poguntke and Webb 2005). In this sense, the democratization of leadership’s selection is a means to strengthen the legitimacy of the internal distribution of power. As there is an increasing concentration of powers in the leaders’ hands, party members became directly responsible for leadership selection. According to Ignazi et al. (2005), parties have lost their capacity to distribute ideological incentives and have more and more difficulties to retain members’ support through material benefits. Consequently, they prefer to introduce “procedural” incentives in order to stimulate membership participation and to enhance party cohesion. Thus, every-member voting is a necessary instrument to strengthen the linkage between parties and civil society, especially when party organizations are considered increasingly elitist and distant from citizens’ life. In order to overcome the crisis of political parties in contemporary society, which can be interpreted to a great extent as a crisis of their image within public opinion (Dalton e Weldon 2005), parties may consider the adoption of leadership selection reforms as a means to regenerate their legitimacy and their confidence among civil society.

The fourth rationale is centred on the need to increase the responsiveness of party leadership through the direct participation of party members (and voters). As several authors have noticed (Hokin 2001; Rahat 2008), this process can prompt a retrospective responsiveness, when party members are dissatisfied with their politicians so that they decide to use their “voice” in order to remove them from power. But it can also foster a prospective responsiveness and accountability (Maravall 2008). In this case the democratization would lead to the choice of moderate candidates who have better chances to appeal to the median voter, thus rejecting radical leaders with fewer chances of winning office.

Beyond theses reasons, democratization reforms can also be seen simply as the consequence of a normative concern by party leaders to enhance member participation and transparency (Harmel and Janda 1994; Valbruzzi 2005). This rationale is linked also to social capital theories which point out the importance of high levels of mobilization for increasing the quality of democracy.

The literature review regarding democratizing reforms has disregarded an important point which focuses on specific organizational dynamics. As Panebianco underlines (1982), democratizing reforms are often an instrument for challengers to gain internal power and defeat the dominant coalition. When we deal with parties in “third way” democracies, in which leadership’s authority is not constrained by party members, the main concern for party leaders is to control horizontal conflicts within the dominant
coalition. Our argument is that the rationale for the adoption of democratizing reforms in recent democracies is both an externally and internally driven process. On the one hand, party elites are pressured by the electoral competition and may use more inclusive leadership selection procedures to obtain benefits in the electoral arena. On the other, leaders can strengthen their position within the party by insulating themselves from critics or failures to achieve the main objectives. Every-member voting enhances party leaders’ legitimacy both internally and externally. Thus, in order to interpret the rationale of democratizing reforms for leaders’ selection it seems more fruitful to investigate the “instrumentality” of these changes, often used by party elites for their own desired outcome. In the sections to follow I will explore this argument in regard to Portuguese political parties, underlying the marginal impact of these reforms in altering the main features of intraparty politics.

The introduction of democratizing reforms for party leadership selection in Portuguese political parties

One of the most important organizational transformations undergone by Portuguese political parties during the last decade consists in the adoption of party leader’s election by party members. The PS was the first to introduce democratizing reforms in the late 1990s, while the two centre right parties adopted “premier primaries” only recently, between 2005 and 2006. In this section I will analyse how these parties undertook these reforms and the rationale behind these processes.

Portuguese political parties have been traditionally centralized and party leaders have displayed significant powers. This is a consequence of being externally-created parties (Duverger 1981) which attributed significant organizational resources to party leaders. In fact, they normally control the extra-parliamentary party which is the most important face of party organizations, as the party in central office overshadows the legislative party (Van Biezen 2003). Party leaders benefit also from the fact that, with the exception of three “presidential governments” (1978-1979), prime ministers have

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3 The Communist Party (PCP) represents an exception to the main organizational characteristics shared by governing parties. In this case party leadership is selected by the Central Committee which is the most important authority between congresses. This method has remained unchanged although some critics have recently defended the introduction of democratizing reforms. The Left Block (BE), an extreme-left wing party formed in 1999, has adopted a more collegial leadership. Both parties have remained excluded from government participation.
always been the effective leaders of their respective parties. Although formally selected by (and accountable to) party congresses, party leaders have a significant degree of autonomy in terms of intraparty dynamics, while cases of competition for party leadership were rare, especially when parties hold government positions. Mário Soares, the historic socialist leader (1974-1986), and Freitas do Amaral, the CDS leader (1974-1982) dominated the internal party life of their respective party, displaying very stable leaderships. While in the PS and in the CDS the leading role of party chair is evident, in the PSD party leaders have essentially been managers rather than uncontested decision-makers. However, during the PSD majority governments (1987-1995), party leader was able to control the extra-parliamentary party from the executive, reducing the centrifugal tendencies.

In both the socialist and the centre-right parties, the reform of leadership selection method stemmed from a strategic calculus of party leaders, aiming at strengthening their position in the electoral arena or against internal opposition. The decision to adopt every-member voting was a conflictual issue in all parties. This shows that the debates about democratizing reforms have important consequences for leadership contests.

After Soares’ withdrawal the PS has gone through a period of divided leadership. With the deepening of internal struggles, Jorge Sampaio, the new leader elected in 1989, proposed the adoption of every-member voting for leadership and candidate selection4. In the leadership contest that took place in 1992 António Guterres firmly opposed this proposal, defending the status quo. The challenger was able to gain the control over the party for a strict margin and implemented an organizational change which failed to strengthen internal participation and legitimization (Van Biezen 2003; Lisi 2006). After the success in the 1995 legislative elections, which favoured the neutralization of internal tensions and the subordination of the extra-parliamentary party to the party in government, Guterres decided to introduce the direct election of party leader in 1998, thus accepting the organizational change proposed by Sampaio.

Also the centre-right experience shows that the direct leadership selection was essentially an instrument to strengthen party leader’s power or to challenge the incumbent. In both parties the alteration of the leader selection methods has his roots in internal party conflicts.

4 See the motion advanced by Sampaio in the 1992 congress (“Directas Já!). This proposal included the introduction of primaries for all public offices. See also Público 5 May 2006.
Although the PSD decided to adopt every-member voting for leadership selection in 2006, the debate over this organisational change originated in the 1990s. The first proposal aiming at introducing the direct election of party bodies was put forth in 1992 by Luis Filipe Menezes, a well-known leader with strong basis in Oporto district\(^5\). Yet, the proposal was incapable of raising supporters within the party elite and it was immediately rejected by the PSD leader and prime-minister, Cavaco Silva.

After the defeat in 1995 election, the internal dispute for party leadership stimulated deep conflicts between the main party factions (Frain 1998). The debate about democratizing reforms for leadership selection emerged again in 1996 when Pedro Santana Lopes decided to oppose Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa’s leadership. One of the main ideas the challenger proposed for the renewal of party organization was the introduction of direct election for the main party bodies, while the incumbent leader’s motion put forward the introduction of party primaries only for party leaders at the regional level (distrital). As it became clear that the majority of party elite supported Rebelo de Sousa’s leadership, Santana Lopes decided to withdraw. This opened the way to the approval of party changes by adopting one member one vote for the selection of leaders at the regional level.

Santana Lopes attempted to impose again democratizing reforms in the XXIII congress (2000). Yet, according to an opinion poll to party delegates, the majority of party elite was against the introduction of premier primaries\(^6\). Santana Lopes was defeated by the incumbent leader, Durão Barroso, and the reform of leadership selection procedures had to be postponed. The debate reemerged after the failure of Santana Lopes’ government which led to his resignation from party leadership following the electoral defeat in 2005. The new leader, Marques Mendes, decided to convene a new party convention in order to approve statutes’ changes, namely the direct election of party leader and the payment of individual fees as a requisite to be eligible to vote. This proposal was to raise some tensions within local party leaders – especially in the Porto district – and it was openly opposed by the Youth organization (JSD). Some leaders proposed to further enhance internal democratization by introducing also party primaries for candidate selection and all public office holders at both national and local levels. As it has already emerged in the past, contrary to most Durão Barroso’s

\(^5\) Menezes has been secretary of state under Cavaco Silva’s government from 1991 to 1995 and mayor of Vila Nova de Gaia since 1998.

followers, Menezes and Santana Lopes were two of the strongest supporters of this organizational change. Several proposals emerged for the change of party constitution, basically differing in regard to the “recipient” of party primaries. Marques Mendes was able to be elected as the new leader and this opened the way to the approval of statute change.

Organizational matters have always awakened a low interest within the CDS party elite and they have mostly used as an instrument to show the renewal of party leadership or as a sign of intraparty democracy in order to appeal voters. It is interesting to notice that the debate about the selection of party leadership in the CDS-PP suddenly moved from a proposal aiming to reduce the inclusiveness of leader selection to the introduction of premier primaries. In fact, during the XVII congress (2000) party leader Paulo Portas put forth in his motion the proposal of introducing a senate, constituted mainly by local barons, which was to select the party leader7. Thus, unlike the PSD, the CDS proposed a restriction of the selectorate, criticizing the populism adopted by the two major parties. However, the proposal did not receive the support of the majority of party elite and the leader was elected by the national commission.

The organizational debate about how party leader should be elected emerged again after the electoral defeat in the 2005 legislative elections. After Portas’ resignation the struggle for a new party leader opposed Telmo Correia, a former Portas’ supporter, to Ribeiro e Castro, a member of the European Parliament, who was able to gather a significant consensus among critics of the previous party leadership. Rather surprisingly, Ribeiro e Castro was chosen by party delegates as the new leader, winning by a strict margin (55%). One of the first actions undertaken by the new leader was to enforce the direct election of party leadership, despite the contestation raised by internal opposition. As for the PSD, the changes of the selection process were linked to the challenges that the leadership had to face. In particular, internal fragmentation and divisions within the party elite were two major concerns for the new leadership. In this sense, the democratization of party leader selection was basically seen as a means to overcome internal party conflicts and to consolidate the basis of the new leadership.

In all three cases the introduction of democratizing reforms was linked to strategic opportunism of incumbents or challengers. A second factor that was responsible for the introduction of direct leadership selection is electoral defeat. As for

the Spanish socialist party, both the CDS and the PSD introduced this reform after the electoral defeat in the 2005 elections. However, the electoral dimension may play an important role also for incumbents. In fact, the PS adopted this organizational change when it was in power and party leadership planned premier primaries in order to benefit from this organizational change in the European and legislative election to be held in 1999 by influencing media agenda and, indirectly, public opinion. This is a strategy that has also been used by other South European parties as, for example, the Italian DS in 2000 and the Greek socialist in 2004, when Papandreu substituted Simitis through open primaries. Overall, the introduction of premier primaries was not only an instrument to marginalize party opposition but also an asset to spend in the electoral arena. Strategic considerations – both externally and internally - were important elements for triggering organizational reforms.

Another important aspect for characterizing leadership selection in Portuguese parties is competitiveness. To what extent this organizational reform has prompted competitive dynamics for party leadership? Overall, the opposition status seems strictly linked to the emergence of competitors, while parties in government are characterized by more plebiscitarian elections. Nonetheless, there are important differences between the two right parties which reflect the different characteristics of internal party dynamics.

As table 2 shows, competitive premier primaries took place only in four cases, whereas in the remaining elections there is a single contender. As Kenig has shown (2009), “coronation” is rather uncommon in inclusive selectorates as it may prompt media exposure, thus favouring high levels of competition. In all Portuguese governing parties party leaders are now elected by the same selectorate which is based only on party members. Despite this, the degree of competitiveness varies significantly, especially when we compare the experience of the two major parties, the PS and the PSD.

The election of the socialist leader has been characterized by plebiscitarian dynamics in which only a single contender has emerged. After the two Guterres’ reelects (in 1999 and 2001), Ferro Rodrigues has been “nominated” from the top as no opposition emerged in 2002⁸. Although at that time the party was in opposition, there

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⁸ Ferro Rodrigues was elected twice in 2002. After the election by party members, the new leader called for a second election in the XIII congress held in November 2002. In this occasion a challenger emerged,
were no challengers for the incumbent leader who benefited from internal legitimization and media exposure.

Until now, a contest between several aspirants has taken place only in one case. This happened after Ferro Rodrigues’ resignation, when three candidates contested the socialist leadership, stimulating members’ participation by raising electoral turnout up to 48%. Yet, competition proved to be more formal than substantial as José Sócrates obtained more than 80% of the votes, while Manuel Alegre achieved 15% of members’ support and João Soares only 5%. After the electoral success in the 2005 election, the new leader was able to be “coroneted” twice without facing internal challengers.

Table 2. The direct election of party leaders in Portugal (1999-2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Leaders</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Voters</th>
<th>% voters</th>
<th>% votes</th>
<th>Competition (number of candidates)</th>
<th>Institutional status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>António Guterres</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>74.700</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>96,6</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>António Guterres</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>53.645</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>96,3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferro Rodrigues</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>(10-15.000)*</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>96,4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>José Sócrates</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>36.182</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>80,1</td>
<td>Yes (3)</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>José Sócrates</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>25.709</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>97,2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>José Sócrates</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>25.393</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>96,4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ribeiro e Castro</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>5.037</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>93,7</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulo Portas</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>7.531</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>74,6</td>
<td>Yes (2)</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulo Portas</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>6.358</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>95,1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marques Mendes</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>20.649</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>90,9</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luís Filipe Menezes</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>20.701</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>54,1</td>
<td>Yes (2)</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuela Ferreira Leite</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>45.444</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>37,9</td>
<td>Yes (3)</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Unofficial data.

Source: Party headquarters.

a middle-rank leader practically unknown among the majority of both party members and public opinion. The final result was basically the same of the previous election, obtaining more than 96% of the votes.

* This figure is much more reliable than the previous ones as the enrolment file was updated during Ferro Rodrigues’ leadership and new rules were introduced in order to regulate party membership. The mobilization of party members was favoured not only by the competition between the three candidates but also by the political climate characterized by an increasing discontent vis-à-vis the centre-right government and, in particular, against the prime-minister Santana Lopes.
Premier primaries in the right parties have been characterized by more competitive elections. In these cases party leaders had a fragile position not only because they were in opposition but also because there were strong centrifugal forces within the dominant coalition. The competition was more limited in the CDS, where Ribeiro e Castro, the leader responsible for the introduction of the direct leader selection, was replaced by Paulo Portas, the CDS leader from 1998 to 2005. On the other hand, the PSD has been characterized by deep conflicts within party elite and greater instability. While the first leadership change after democratizing reforms was due to the defeat in local elections (2007), the second change took place in 2008 after a steady decline in electoral support registered by opinion surveys. Thus, the major centre-right party has emerged particularly sensitive to the electoral performance, influencing party leaders’ successes and failures. The likelihood of leadership change seems directly linked to the degree of support and credibility among public opinion. While positive results in the electoral arena limit challenges for the incumbent leaders, a negative outcome stimulates internal struggles and prompts competition for the leadership\(^\text{10}\).

**The effects of direct leadership selection: lessons from the Portuguese experience**

When dealing with the effects of the introduction of the direct leadership selection the literature highlights both internal and external consequences. The first focuses on the increase in internal participation, on the one hand, and the internal distribution of power, on the other; the second aspect is centred on leadership’s ideological orientation and the personalization of party politics.

*Internal consequences*

Several authors have stressed that the introduction of party primaries should enhance internal participation (Carty and Blake 1999; Pennings and Hazan 2001). Although data on party activism are virtually inexistent for Portuguese political parties and figures on party membership and internal participation are highly unreliable, the

\(^{10}\) Portas, for example, had no challengers in 2008 after the positive results obtained at local elections, while Ferreira Leite still displays a vulnerable position within the party as, according to opinion polls, the PS continues to have a strong lead over the PSD.
evidence from participation in leaders’ selection shows that the introduction of democratizing reforms has a weak impact in fostering members’ mobilization. Overall, turnout varies greatly, ranging from 15% to 65%. On average the PSD displays the highest rate of participation (52.3%), while members of the small rightist party are less participative (22.3%), with the PS falling between the two right parties (39%). These figures are not significantly different from data on internal participation before the reform of leadership selection methods\textsuperscript{11}. If we observe the absolute number of voters we can notice an association between the competitiveness of the contests and the level of internal participation. In all parties competitive races mobilize a greater number of party members, whereas “coronations” are always associated to demobilization dynamics. This phenomenon is evident in the PS which has had difficulties to stimulate participation of party members while in government, also due to the fact that some centrist and moderate policies adopted by the socialist executive have been contested by its core supporters.

Participation in leader selection may depend on several factors among which different territorial traditions of electoral participation, parties’ electoral strength, the level of competitiveness between parties or socio-demographic characteristics. At the aggregate level, while competition reveals to be an important factor associated to internal participation, other variables fail to present significant correlation in the cases analyzed in this study\textsuperscript{12}. Beyond competition, the PSD and the PS show significant correlations (at the 0.05 level) also between turnout and the vote obtained in the 2005 elections ($r=0.491$ and $r=0.535$, respectively). Thus party local entrenchment, measured through electoral strength, emerges as an important element in explaining the variance of turnout in premier primaries\textsuperscript{13}. Yet a question remains open: is a greater competitiveness associated to higher levels of participation? In other words, the direction of the correlation between competition and turnout is the same for both the socialist and the centre-right parties?

\textsuperscript{11} Evidences from the internal referenda show the stability of the level of participation. The CDS call for a referendum in 1992 in which 26% of party members participated. Turnout in the socialist referendum in 1982 was 30%.

\textsuperscript{12} Turnout is measured at the level of parish (PSD), party constituencies (CDS) or provinces (PS). Competition is measured as the difference between the first and second candidate. Thus, the smaller the difference the higher is the level of competition. When there are more than three candidates we consider the difference between the two highest scores. The elections selected in this study are the only competitive ones for which we have available data.

\textsuperscript{13} A multivariate analysis was also run for explaining participation at the aggregate level. The results confirm that competition is the strongest predictor of turnout, also after controlling for age, education, party electoral strength, turnout in legislative elections and social capital.
Although participation is strictly linked to the degree of competition, data available for competitive contests show opposite trends in regard to the direction of the relationship between the two variables. The socialist experience, the party with a longer tradition as far as premier primaries are concerned, is quite significant in this respect: despite the high level of members’ participation in the first two elections, it must be noticed that in 2004 – after the clean up of membership file - the competition between three candidates raised the level of turnout (see table 2). In this case every-member voting and leadership competition stimulated political participation, increasing the mobilization of party members. Yet, the experience of centre-right parties suggests that when competition is just a struggle between top leaders the effect on party mobilization is the opposite one, as a strong competitiveness is associated to a low participation. As shown by figure 1, while in the socialist case the correlation between level of competition and turnout is strong and negative (r=-0.56), for the CDS the relationship is weaker and, most striking, positive (r=0.33). This means that the level of turnout was higher when Portas was able to gain more votes and the gap between the two contenders was significant. In the 2007 elections the challenger was able to mobilize his supporters more than the incumbent leader, raising slightly the level of participation. The PSD shows the same pattern in regard to the 2008 elections. Despite the higher score of turnout compared to the CDS, it is remarkable that the slope is almost the same. In both right parties participation depends to a great extent on the capacity of each candidate to mobilize and raise supporters at the local level, rather than on high levels of competitiveness.

The contradictory patterns in party mobilization can be interpreted as a consequence of the different organizational imprint and of the relationship between the national leadership and the party at the local level. Both the PSD and the CDS have developed an organizational structure from the top by using existing local networks during the democratization period (Lopes 2005; Jalali 2007). Those who control party local branches maintain a significant power in mobilizing party members. This phenomenon can be seen, for example, in local elections where the success of candidates is often independent from party support or electoral performance at the national level. The mobilization of party members is linked to local party dynamics and to endorsement of national leaders by local notables. Furthermore, in the CDS there are still many local party bodies that are not elected but they are simply nominated by the
national leadership. Thus, shifts of allegiances between local and national leaders are determinant in influencing mobilization at the grass root level.

**Figure 1: Turnout and competition in the main Portuguese parties**

![Figure 1: Turnout and competition in the main Portuguese parties](image)

*Source:* Party headquarters.

*Note:* For the PS we consider data based on Sócrates’ election in 2004 and on the election of regional leaders (N= 60). CDS (N=151); PSD (N=328). All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level.

The second consequence of the introduction of the direct election of party leadership focuses on the internal distribution of power. From this point of view, democratizing reforms is linked to two aspects. The first concerns conflicts at the horizontal level - within the dominant coalition -, while the second is the relationship between the centre and the periphery.

Many authors have argued that party primaries would endanger party cohesion or leadership stability (Wattenberg 1984; Katz 2001). In what way this organizational reform has affected internal conflicts? Traditionally competition for party leadership of the main governing parties has been relatively rare, especially when parties hold executive positions. Incumbency automatically leads to insulate party leaders from internal oppositions and from organizational constraints, increasing consensus within the dominant coalition. However, overt challengers to incumbent leaders are relatively infrequent also when the party is in opposition. The PSD is the most sensitive to institutional shifts – from government to opposition and vice-versa -, while in the small rightist party leadership has been more successful in surviving to electoral defeats. The PS has fallen between the two centre-right parties.
Leadership (in)stability is reflected by figures of internal party factions. In order to assess the decrease or increase in party factions this study adopts the effective number of factions as indicator of internal tendencies (see Boucek 2000). We consider the share of the votes gained by each faction for the election of the National Council (or Political Commission) which is the most important authority between congresses. All governing parties show low levels of internal divisions, especially when compared to other South European parties (table 3). The score of the effective number of factions is extremely low for the small rightist party, whereas the PSD presents the highest level of party conflicts. The PS constitutes an intermediate case and it exhibits the most significant change with the reform of leadership selection method. In all cases the introduction of every-member voting seems to lead to a decrease in internal divisions rather than to strengthening centrifugal tendencies as hypothesized by the literature. The shift toward a more consensual leadership is evident in the socialist case, but also the centre-right parties present a slight decrease. As we have seen, leadership divisions are strictly linked to the performance in the electoral arena and this makes more difficult to disentangle the consequences of direct leadership selection. Hence, the decrease in party factionalism within the PS may be a result not only of the introduction of democratizing reforms but also of the long period spent in government during the last fifteen years.

Table 3: Effective number of factions in Portuguese parties (average)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average 1974-2009</th>
<th>Before primaries</th>
<th>After primaries</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>1.62 (16)</td>
<td>1.85 (10)</td>
<td>1.24 (6)</td>
<td>-0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSD</td>
<td>2.19 (27)</td>
<td>2.32 (24)</td>
<td>2.08 (3)</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDS</td>
<td>1.29 (22)</td>
<td>1.30 (19)</td>
<td>1.28 (3)</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Party headquarters
Note: Number of cases in parentheses.

14 This index is calculated following the formula developed by Taagepera and Shugart for the effective number of parties. Thus, the effective number of faction (Nf) is measured as follows: Nf=1/(Vf1²+Vf2²+...+Vfi²) where Vf is the share of the total votes obtained by each faction at the election of national party bodies. Kenig (2008) uses this index to gauge the degree of competitiveness, substituting the votes for the national organs by the share of the votes obtained by each candidate.

15 Blank or null votes are considered as one separate component of internal divisions when they represent more than 5% of the total votes. Often delegates at the congresses do not express any preference when they are against the incumbent leader but they do not have their own candidate for challenging the party leadership. In this case blank or null votes reveal an internal opposition.
The greater instability of the PSD dominant coalition can be seen also by observing the capacity of party leaders to survive while in opposition. Although the experience of democratizing reforms is still incipient – namely for centre-right parties -, it is important to notice the different patterns between the two main governing parties, on the one hand, and the CDS, on the other. Taking into account leadership tenure while in opposition, CDS leaders have remained in power on average more than 38 months for the all period (1974-2008), while Ribeiro e Castro – the first leader to be elected with the new rule – was able to hold power just for 23 months\(^{16}\). Despite the long period spent in government, the instability of the PSD leadership is even greater. While the average longevity of party leaders is almost 30 months for the same period, leaders in opposition remain in power for 21 months on average, while the score drops to 19 months if we consider leadership duration after the introduction of premier primaries. Leadership instability was lesser in the PS (68 months on average), but there are no differences if we compare leadership tenure when the party was in opposition before and after democratizing reforms (31 and 30 months, respectively). These data show two important aspects of intraparty dynamics. First, all governing parties seem particularly dependent on electoral performance. Leadership tenure has not been affected by the introduction of the direct leadership election. Second, there are striking differences between the PS, which presents the highest stability of party leadership, and the PSD which has been characterized by deep internal conflicts and by a greater level of leadership turnover.

Beyond the impact on factionalism, democratizing reform of party leadership selection can have important consequences also for centre-periphery relationship. In both the PSD and the CDS, members’ access to party organisation takes often place through clientelistic practices, especially where party notables are able to control local structures and the recruitment of new members (Jalali 2007). While national party bodies usually disregard party organization and members, local bosses can easily manipulate decentralized party organs and members’ access. In this sense, the introduction of direct leaders’ election may lead to significant changes in the internal distribution of power, as it may enhance the centralization and the concentration of power in the national party elite, reducing the importance of territorial cleavages. The introduction of party primaries has triggered many conflicts within the party leadership

\(^{16}\) These figures underestimate actual leadership stability in some parties since leaders who were still in office at the beginning of 2009 have not been considered.
in regard to the rules regulating the selectorate\textsuperscript{17}. As the main Portuguese parties (especially the PSD) have been characterized by a high level of stratarchy that bestows a significant autonomy to the local level (Jalali 2006), the introduction of one member one vote may change the internal distribution of power, as party leaders can control directly members’ participation.

To this respect, while for the socialists the reform has enhanced the degree of centralization without altering substantially the internal distribution of power (Lisi 2006: 390), the evidence from the PSD experience thus far has been mixed. Menezes’ election seemed to show that local leaders still maintain significant powers. However, according to many observers, the 2008 primaries suggest that the role played by local leaders is decreasing and their influence on the selection of party leader is dwindling due to the lack of correspondence between the support of local leaders towards the three candidates and the final scores. In other words, party leaders at the national level may establish direct links towards members, overcoming the role traditionally played by local leaders with regard to mobilization.

External consequences

Beyond internal consequences it is worth examining whether democratizing reforms have had some effects on the electoral arena. To this respect, the first important aspect is the ideological dimension which is related to the responsiveness approach. Several authors stress that more inclusive selection procedures lead to the emergence of more moderate party leaders in order to appeal to the median voter, rather than reflecting middle-rank activists’ preferences (Carty and Blake 1999; LeDuc 2001). According to this hypothesis directly-elected party leader should present moderate stances. Thus, by entitling party members to select party leadership it would be easier to neutralize party activists and to increase the responsiveness of parties towards the median voter. Although this hypothesis may find some evidences in the Labour experience (see Hopkin 2001), it is hard to apply it with regard to parties in Southern Europe. In the PS, the frontrunner has always displayed a moderate orientation, while left-wing candidates have always run as outsiders. The socialists have privileged a centrist strategy which was overwhelmingly supported by both party elite and members. Similarly, both the PSD and the CDS leaders have shown a great congruence with party

\textsuperscript{17} Problems around formal aspects regarding the inclusion in the selectorate raised legal conflicts within party bodies in both parties.
electoral bases and no deep programmatic or ideological changes have taken place since the introduction of the direct party leadership selection\textsuperscript{18}.

The second aspect focuses on the diminishing role of political parties and the strengthening candidate and premier-centred politics. One of the consequences stressed by political observers is that the adoption of party primaries would increase the personalization of political parties. To what extent these reforms will lead to import some characteristics of American-style primaries in the Portuguese case? Since the 2004 election of the socialist leader, internal party campaigns have attracted a widespread attention from mass media and they have been organized as electoral campaigns with a campaign staff, external consultants and a widespread use of opinion surveys, raising the costs normally associated to internal elections\textsuperscript{19}. This fact suggests that one of the main objectives of the direct election of party leaders is to improve parties’ image through media coverage. Thus, mass media have played a fundamental role by contributing not only to inform party members but also to influence voters and public opinion. This phenomenon has also an important impact on the functions developed by party organizations and local structures. As the link between party leaders and members is now mediatized - rather than mediated by party structures - leaders are directly accountable to party sympathizers, further “hollowing-out” the traditional functions developed through party representation. However, the Portuguese experience shows that party leaders have traditionally dominated internal party life also before the introduction of democratizing reform and that political campaigns have always been essentially candidate-focused. Furthermore, semi-presidentialism has enhanced the role played by party leaders and has eroded the links between party organizations and citizens (Lobo 2005).

One way to assess the direct impact of democratizing reforms in the electoral arena is to examine whether leadership effects on voting behaviour are stronger since the introduction of this organizational change. Although electoral studies reveal that party leaders are an important factor in influencing voting choice (Lobo 2006), there are no systematic effects of leadership selection procedures. In the 2002 and 2005

\textsuperscript{18} According to post-electoral surveys, shifts in the ideological spectrum have been very small. The electorate average placement of the PS was 4.6 on a ten-point scale (from left to right) in 2002, and 4.7 in 2005. The PSD score on the same continuum was 7.3 in 2002 and 7.0 in 2005, while the CDS swung from 7.7 to 7.3. See Belchior (2008) in regard to the congruence between parties and voters.

\textsuperscript{19} Also the socialist leader Ferro Rodrigues (2002-2004) benefited from the direct election in order to reach more easily voters and improve his image. Thus, the campaign for party leadership often represented the first step of the electoral campaign and it allowed the new leaders to test the impact of their political messages and to gain more feedbacks from voters.
parliamentary elections the fact that the PS was the only party adopting direct leadership selection did not constitute a relevant asset for the electoral contest. In other words, until the two centre-right parties introduced a similar selection process, the PS has not benefited from democratizing reforms in the electoral arena. However, as Strom put it, “all parties seem to recognize that intraparty conflict is an electoral liability” (Strom 1993: 342). This means that the electoral dimension is an important factor in managing leadership contests and limiting competitiveness of leadership selection. Moreover, as we have seen, the survival of party leaders is strictly associated to the success in the electoral arena. Although the democratization of leadership selection methods may not necessarily lead to a decrease in internal divisions, it makes competition for leadership more transparent, softening the negative consequence of intraparty conflicts in terms of public image.

If party leaders have strengthen their position in regard to media coverage, the distance between political parties and civil society has not decreased with the introduction of direct leadership selection. This organizational reform has compelled party elites to maintain a more rigorous control of member files, showing the weakness of the party on the ground. The trend is one of decline or stability for virtually all parties (table 4). Regardless of the leadership selection method, Portuguese parties display weak links to citizens and a feeble capacity to retain members. However, internal competition for party leadership seems to stimulate the growth of party membership, especially due to the efforts of each candidate to attract new members and to obtain benefits in the short-term for the leadership contest. Despite this, the overall picture does not change, showing that party democratization has not significantly changed internal party politics. Thus, if we consider the evolution of party membership as an indicator of the potential benefits from the introduction of democratizing reforms we must conclude that there have not been significant consequences. Furthermore, the decline of centre-right parties in recent opinion surveys confirms that these reforms have not improved the image of political parties among voters. Contrary to party elites’ expectations, the introduction of direct leadership selection has failed to constitute an electoral asset.

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20 This is confirmed also by the irrelevance of sympathizer files which have been created at the same time (or soon after) of the introduction of premier primaries.
Table 4: Evolution of party membership in Portuguese political parties (1999-2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BE</th>
<th>PCP</th>
<th>PS</th>
<th>PSD</th>
<th>CDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>131.000</td>
<td>114.974</td>
<td>77.055</td>
<td>n.a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>131.504</td>
<td>124.611</td>
<td>87.290</td>
<td>40.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>131.000</td>
<td>122.548</td>
<td>93.000</td>
<td>32.571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>66.917</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>n.a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>74.949</td>
<td>115.895</td>
<td>35.298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>77.500</td>
<td>75.949</td>
<td>121.420</td>
<td>n.a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>5.200</td>
<td>77.500</td>
<td>90.629</td>
<td>116.000</td>
<td>34.744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>6.900</td>
<td>80.000</td>
<td>89.000</td>
<td>142.673</td>
<td>34.353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>7.000</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>140.000</td>
<td>41.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>6.700</td>
<td>59.000</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>150.000</td>
<td>33.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>58.928</td>
<td>105.232</td>
<td>153.361</td>
<td>17.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>73.000</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>n.a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: party headquarters

Conclusions

The experience undergone by Portuguese parties in regard to democratizing reforms of leadership selection suggests that this change have not had a significant impact on party politics. The three cases analysed in this study show that leadership selection reform is strictly linked to internal party struggles and to the institutional position. Rather than leading to a radical change through the empowerment of party members, democratization of leadership selection is essentially a consequence of the strategic calculus of party elite. In the socialist case - with the exception of Sócrates’ election in 2004 -, all premier primaries can be considered as “plebiscitarian” ones, characterized by low competition and weak mobilization. On the contrary, as we have seen, both the PSD and the CDS have used primary elections in a period of leadership transition while they were in opposition, aiming at strengthening the legitimacy of party leadership and at improving party image in public opinion. Both centre-right parties decided to undergo an organizational change after the 2005 electoral defeat which stimulated internal rivalries. In this sense, the struggle for party leadership seems to be the most important factor in favouring the adoption of premier primaries, confirming Panebicanco’s hypothesis that democratizing reforms are essentially a “Trojan horse”
for enforcing a change of the dominant coalition. At the same time, this change aimed to expand support among voters and to increase electoral gains.

This finding is also supported by similar experiences across European countries such as, for example, the Spanish or the Italian case. First, the PSOE decided to introduce party primaries in 1998 after the victory obtained by the PP two years earlier, while in the Italian case the centre-left coalition decided to implement the direct election of prime-minister candidate in 2005, just some months before the legislative elections. Second, in both cases the introduction of party primaries was an important asset to spend not only in the electoral arena in order to appeal new sympathizers but also within party organisation for defeating the internal opposition and for enhancing the legitimization of the new leadership. The case of the PSOE, the DS or the PASOK confirms that the introduction of every-member voting aimed essentially to strengthen party electoral appeal both internally and externally. In South European parties the introduction of premier primaries was essentially an elite-driven process, without a considerable input from party members. Openness and intraparty democracy had a marginal importance in party politics, especially if we take into account that every-member voting has not led to deepen the degree of democratization in intraparty dynamics, neither candidate selection or decision-making processes have significantly changed, with substantial powers still in the hands of oligarchic leaderships.

This strategic use of democratization reform is also confirmed by the lack of internal debate among party members and the limited consequences for members’ powers and internal participation. According to party elites, democratizing reforms had three main objectives: the first was to open and to democratize party organization; the second aim was to make party leadership more responsible, while the third was to enhance internal participation and mobilization. Although for the two rightist parties the experience of direct leadership selection is relatively embryonic, an overall evaluation of party democratization reveals the failure to achieve these objectives. This is evident especially in regard to the capacity to attract new sympathizers and members, to change intraparty dynamics and to foster internal participation. Furthermore, in terms of accountability and responsiveness there are no evidences of relevant changes due to the introduction of new leadership selection methods. Portuguese political parties, and in particular leadership selection, have always been constrained by electoral performance.

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21 This does not mean that, especially when open premier primaries have been adopted, the reforms did not prompt a high mobilization. For an overview see Bosco and Morlino (2007).
Thus, there is no evidence that a more inclusive selection procedure is associated to greater responsiveness and accountability.

The Portuguese experience reveals the importance of isomorphic processes which can increase the legitimacy and the positive image of political parties through the adoption of premier primaries. Without any real effect on the internal party functioning, political leaders have thus found an easy way to enhance their power, while alimenting the participatory and democratic myth. Thus, it seems implausible that these reforms would lead, as in the United States, to weaken party control over candidate selection and to reduce party organizations to “empty vessels” (Katz 1990). Party politics in Portugal – and, more in general, in Western Europe – is still well entrenched and no internal reforms will change this status quo in the foreseeable future, unless radical changes will take place. Overall, these findings confirm that one basic difference between the American experience and West European parties is based on the importance that party organizations still retain in the latter case (Hopkin 2001: 349). In this sense, contrary to the findings highlighted by LeDuc (2001) in regard to the effect democratization of party leadership selection in Britain, Canada and the United States, the Portuguese experience suggests that these reforms may not imply – at least in the short term - the loss of party control over leaders’ election and, more in general, the irrelevance of party organizations.
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