Candidate Selection Through Primary Elections:
Theoretical Reflections and Observations on the Spanish Case

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Very first draft. Handle with care.

Introduction

Primary elections for the selection of candidates in political parties have long been a feature of political life in the US, and are usually seen as a further example of how party politics there bears little resemblance to Western Europe. Gallagher and Marsh's 1988 study found that only a tiny minority of European parties used primary elections of any kind to select candidates,
most leaving recruitment in the hands of the most important party organisers at constituency level (Gallagher 1988, 237, Table 11.1). A decade later forms of candidate selection involving internal party elections of various kinds are becoming an increasingly visible feature of West European party politics, with such major parties as the German Social Democrats (SPD) and Christian Democrats (CDU), the Spanish Socialists (PSOE), and the British Labour and Conservative parties adopting some form of membership poll to select candidates for public offices. This paper assesses the potential impact of these changes for West European party organisations. It begins by offering some preliminary theoretical reflections on primaries and party models, and examines the emerging empirical reality in cases where primaries have been adopted.

**Primaries and the Cartel Party**

The classic party types which underpin most studies of party organisation each appear to have their own characteristic forms of candidate selection (Ware 1996, 258). In the cadre party, candidate selection as such is an inappropriate concept: political parties are loose and informal organisations built around candidates who can be regarded as self-selecting (Duverger 1954). Although this party type is most associated with the nineteenth century régimes censitaires, cadre parties have persisted in some countries, and it is interesting to note that in the French UDF, for instance, candidates are still often local notables whose bids for office are not strongly conditioned by formal organisational rules (Ware 1996, 279). In the mass party, candidate selection is formalised and under tight party control. The initial dominance of the extraparliamentary structures in the mass party reverses the balance of power, and candidates emerge from an intraparty process. To emphasise the parliamentary party's subordination to the extraparliamentary organisation, many left parties have imposed a regular turnover of parliamentary personnel. The mass party is the guardian of the interests of its classe gardée, and its representatives in public office are closely controlled by the party organisation (Duverger 1954).

Newer party types reflect changes in the balance of power between organisations and holders of public office which have impacted on candidate selection processes. Kirchheimer's seminal article (1966) does not mention candidate selection, but the catch-all party's emphasis on electoral success rather than class allegiance indicates a strengthening of the party in public office over the extraparliamentary structure. Although few parties adopted the catch-all model wholesale, many mass parties took on catch-all party features. To this extent, although the formal rules of candidate selection did not always change, public office-holders became more autonomous of the extraparliamentary party, and electoral attractiveness began to take priority over organisational loyalty in candidate selection. The decline in grassroots membership (not to
be exaggerated: see Katz et al 1992) and partisan identification (Mair 1997, 128) across West European parties may have facilitated party leaderships - increasingly synonymous with parliamentary leaderships - controlling candidate selection processes. Although the study directed by Gallagher & Marsh (1988) concluded that there was no clear pattern towards the centralisation of control over candidate selection, what does appear clear is that candidates and office-holders are perceived by electors as being increasingly remote from society (Mair 1997, 153)¹.

This remoteness is one of the key features of the most recent party type to be identified by scholars. Katz and Mair's cartel party (1995) is characterised by an increasingly close relationship with the state, and an increasing distance from civil society. One of the most interesting features of the conceptualisation of the cartel party is that it does not assume linear development in key organisational variables. Whilst it is true that the cartel party's detachment from civil society does appear to be a logical progression from the catch-all party's deemphasis on class alignment, other variables move in counterintuitive directions. For instance, organisational weakness is not a necessary outcome of declining party ties with civil society, because parties can use state resources to compensate for their loss of capacity for social mobilisation. In this sense, it is particularly interesting that Katz and Mair identify an increasing role for individual party members in party decision-making, and specifically candidate selection, as a characteristic of the cartel party (1995, 21). The predictable linear tendency would not be in this direction: the move from the mass party to the catch-all party unquestionably undermined the role of grassroots party members in organisational decision-making (Kirchheimer 1966), and the cartel party's detachment from civil society would be expected to marginalise grassroots members even further. Why then does the cartel party appear to bring the members back in?

The first point to be made is that it is not at all certain that individual party members' participation in candidate selection necessarily amounts to an enhancement of the membership's role in a party. The atomising effect of membership ballots (Katz & Mair 1995, 21), and the various ways in which party authorities can condition the process, suggest caution; this point will be addressed later. But to the extent that membership involvement in candidate selection at least appears to empower grassroots party members, the cartel party's lack of social presence may be the key to explaining this development. Parties with declining memberships and ever fewer partisan supporters, dominated by political professionals and financed by state subsidies, suffer an apparent 'democratic deficit'. However unnecessary memberships may be to the basic functions and maintenance of cartel parties, the 'legitimising myth' that they contribute is a key element of parties' public images as representative organisations (Katz & Mair 1995, 18, Table 5.1., Scarrow 1996). The adoption of organisational reforms such as individual membership votes (which we can refer as the 'One member one vote' principle, henceforth OMOV) can be
seen as a natural response to parties' perceived detachment from civil society. Extending the role of individual members in intraparty decision-making, for example through participation in candidate selection, provides the cartel party with a defence against accusations of elitism and detachment from society. By democratising, or at least appearing to democratise, their internal structures parties can counter criticisms that they are simply support organisations for a political elite cut off from and indifferent to 'ordinary citizens'. Moreover, to the extent that party leaderships view membership decline as a problem, OMOV and other democratising reforms can constitute an attractive incentive for party membership. This may contribute to reversing the trend towards 'cartelisation', although the choice of rules and the atomising effect of individual membership votes may improve parties' public image at little cost to the job security of cartel party leaderships. The following section suggests ways in which to interpret the impact of OMOV on parties' internal dynamics in general, and on candidate selection in particular.

**The Logic of Primaries: The US Case**

The adoption of the OMOV principle in internal party affairs can relate to various forms of decision-making, from leadership elections and policy consultation to the selection of candidates for external elections. The practice of candidate selection by OMOV is generally called a primary election, although the specific form primaries take can vary in important ways. The best known example is of course the use of primaries in the United States, and the American case demonstrates clearly the complexity and variability of this type of candidate selection. The state regulation of the primaries process marks an important difference with West European party systems, where states have rarely intervened in internal party affairs, except in some cases where constitutions rather limply suggest that parties should be organised democratically. In some US states the Democrats and Republicans are even formally and nominally recognised as constituting the core of the party system, a phenomenon unknown in Western Europe (Katz & Kodolny 1994). Moreover, the federal structure of the US political system means that provisions for primaries vary considerably across states, creating important formal differences in the ways in which the same party's candidates are selected in different states; again this is alien to the West European tradition of relatively homogeneous formal party structures. For these reasons, the US example is certainly not an appropriate model through which to analyse the use of primaries in West Europe, although it is worth assessing the consequences of primaries in the US as a preliminary step in the analysis.

One of the most apparently positive effects of primaries in US parties is the relative ease with which politicians whose political credibility or popularity amongst party supporters has been gravely undermined can be denied the party nomination (Ware 1996, 288). This does
provide an effective solution to one of the more obvious problems of West European parties: the relatively impregnable position that party elites can enjoy when they control the party machinery. Given the large number of deputies who are elected in 'safe' constituencies, or in positions on party lists which make their election inevitable, cartel party leaderships can use their control over internal processes involving relatively small numbers of party activists to ensure that certain individuals are given safe candidacies. This means that loyal supporters of a particular party often have little choice but to vote for individuals that they dislike, since not to do so would damage the party as a whole. Recent examples in West Europe include the Spanish Socialists (PSOE) placing José Barrionuevo, a former minister accused (now convicted) of organising state terrorism, in a prominent place on the party's Madrid list in the 1996 elections. Given that Spanish voters choose closed lists, and the PSOE could expect to elect at least a dozen deputies in such a large constituency as Madrid, Socialist voters could only avoid voting for Barrionuevo by failing to vote for the PSOE list, an action which would above all favour the conservative opposition. Internal processes can practically ensure the election of unpopular politicians by placing loyal voters in a dilemma which only in extreme circumstances do they resolve by penalising the party: a good example of such circumstances is the case of Conservative MP Neil Hamilton, guilty of parliamentary malpractice, who won reselection for his safe seat in 1997, but was defeated when his party opponents withdrew in favour of an independent candidate, journalist Martin Bell, who rallied the opposition vote and a large proportion of disgruntled Conservatives. However, this happened in a general context of the collapse of the Conservative vote, and in normal circumstances Hamilton would have stood a very good chance of surviving once he had been reselected.

From this perspective, primaries serve as a useful means of 'getting the rascals out', cutting off a potential escape route for politicians involved in scandals of one kind or another. A key element in this, of course, is that US primaries are a consultation of all the voters likely to support a particular party (and in some cases, some who may not), and therefore in effect they are not an internal mechanism at all. In some ways they resemble the French two-round single-member constituency electoral system, in which voters have an initial choice from a broad range of candidates, and then a more restrictive choice in the second round. In practice, the first round serves to eliminate the weakest candidate in each ideological bloc, whilst the second round usually constitutes of a 'two-party' battle between the winners of each intra-bloc contest. Although in some US states there are 'pre-primary' assemblies of party activists to determine which candidates are permitted to stand in the primaries, the essence of the US system is that party workers are effectively no more empowered than any registered party voter. The advantages and disadvantages of this situation have been exhaustively studied, but it is worth briefly assessing them before turning to the form of primaries used in Western Europe.
The principal advantage of such a system is its contribution to participation and responsiveness. Primary elections provide a further opportunity for citizen participation in party politics by providing voters with not only a choice between parties, but also a choice between sectors of their chosen party. For theorists of participation, this would contribute to citizens' political education and encourage them to recognise shared political interests (Ware 1979, 72-3). The low levels of electoral participation and clear marginalisation of substantial sectors of the population visible in the US suggest that this participatory logic is somehow flawed. As far as responsiveness is concerned, the argument would appear to be, theoretically at least, more powerful. Primaries prevent parties from ignoring the wishes of their core supporters, by allowing these supporters to choose their candidates. In a two-party system, a Downsian view of democracy would suggest parties quickly converge around the median voter, leaving less centrist loyal party voters with an unsatisfactory choice of candidates. The combination of a two-party system with a closed system of candidate selection would appear to provide the least responsive parties: the British case, with a two-party system imposed by the first-past-the-post electoral law, has in recent times led to a convergence of the two main parties around a small number of non-partisan electors located in marginal constituencies (who in ideological terms do not even constitute the 'median voter'). In the absence of internal party democracy, the most partisan voters (particularly on the left) are faced with the unpleasant choice of voting for an ideologically distant candidate from their preferred party, or abstaining, an action likely to favour the party they most oppose. In Hirschmanian terms, they are denied the option of voice, and are instead left with only exit as a means of pressurising their party (see Ware 1979, 78). Primaries do not allow parties to ignore the wishes of their core support in the search for vote maximisation, and therefore contribute to anchoring the parties more tightly in their respective ideological spaces.

There are further, more complex arguments about the effects of primaries on party responsiveness. Ware (1979, 80-81) suggests that the 'membership style of party organisation' produces ideologically and organisationally rigid parties whose responsiveness to their electorates, rather than their memberships, is limited. Drawing on Schattschneider's concept of conflict displacement (1960), Ware argues that 'membership parties' entrench particular interests and prevent new conflicts from being expressed politically:

The danger (...) is that, when the party becomes identified with a particular ideology or view point, no recruit will join the party unless he shares that ideology. If he does not share it, he cannot, by appealing to those outside the party, break this hegemony unless he can persuade others to bear the unreasonable costs (in terms of time and other resources) of membership. Since there arise no battles to be fought inside the party
between those who have rather different views of the political universe, the party can only become a service organisation for its office seekers (1979, 81).

'Membership' party organisations acquire a character and become institutionalised, creating barriers to new kinds of party member, and therefore risk becoming closed off from social and cultural changes. Parties risk becoming increasingly detached from their electorates simply by virtue of their lack of mechanisms for picking up changes in their wider social bases. If party candidates need to command the support of significant numbers of party voters, rather than just party activists, then they are less likely to lose touch with their electorates.

Primaries also favour what could be called 'retrospective' responsiveness. Primaries address the problem outlined in Michels' classic work (1962), that party elites cannot easily be prevented from abandoning or deemphasising the party's ideological objectives when it suits their own interests to do so. Some of the problems with intraparty democracy identified by Michels remained unaffected by primaries - such as the greater information available to party elites, and the potential use of the resources of government to persuade, cajole or buy the assent of party members. However primaries do present incumbent politicians with an important test of voter satisfaction with their performance. A politician who clearly fails to keep promises made to win an election is open to challenge from rival party candidates, and party voters have a useful means of calling the politician to account retrospectively. This can act as a strong incentive for politicians to be seen to meet voter expectations, an incentive missing in many West European parties, where incumbents merely have to persuade party workers of the case for their reselection, a test easily passed by a politician with supporters in key positions in the party structures.

Although the US experience suggests that these arguments about the benefits of primaries should be treated with some healthy scepticism, the case for primaries is not easily dismissed. However the apparent disadvantages are also substantial. Perhaps the most compelling point is that primaries on the US model lead to political parties effectively disappearing as cohesive organisations (Boix 1998). The key point here is that from the moment candidates are chosen by a 'selectorate' of non-party members, party candidates ceased to depend in any meaningful way on the party as an organisation. Candidates in US primaries are in effect independents - they obtain their own campaign finance, they organise their own campaign teams, and often they are no more closely associated with their party than any other voter. Again the French analogy is useful: US primaries resemble the first round of French legislative elections, with the important difference that the voters' choice is between individual political entrepreneurs, rather than between parties. Given this detachment between the party as organisation and the party candidates, it is no surprise that party membership is a meaningless concept in US politics. Winning selection as a candidate becomes like any other election: an
expensive campaign based on extensive use of image-making, opinion polls and television advertising, to such an extent that in practice nominations can be bought by wealthy individuals, or at least restricted to those with substantial financial support. It is open to debate whether this is a better system than the opaque processes by which 'insider' candidates emerge in Western European 'mass' party organisations.

It is this independence of candidates from party that brings about the disappearance of party *qua* organisation. US parties, unlike West European ones, are not coordinated groups of politicians working towards broadly similar goals. Whereas in Western Europe parties show high levels of parliamentary discipline, such discipline in the US is often absent (although the recent impeachment votes did see senators voting with few exceptions on party lines). A governing majority united behind a programme of policies is therefore very difficult to achieve, since parliamentary parties are loose collections of political entrepreneurs who have achieved election largely off their own efforts, and with widely varying political messages. This tends to reinforce the already strong conservative bias in the US political institutions, as the election of a government with a coherent programme of reform is much less likely than in West European political systems. This fragmentation results in a strong tendency for parliamentarians to concentrate on the distribution of benefits to their own geographical areas rather than any broader, ideologically defined programme.

The high levels of autonomy enjoyed by candidates and elected politicians leave party workers in a peculiar position. Party activists (except where pre-primaries take place) have barely more influence over candidate selection than any registered party voter (or in some cases, voters of the rival party!). There is therefore little incentive for political activism of the kind associated with party membership in Western Europe, with its strong doses of policy discussion, intervention in internal selection processes, and the feelings of solidarity that come from long-term attachment to a social institution. Political activism in the US is therefore more electorally-oriented and fragmented than in Western Europe, and often geared more to convincing voters of the merits of particular individuals rather than of ideas and policies. At its worst, the system of open primaries empties party of any meaning and transforms candidate selection, and ultimately the subsequent election, into a battle between political entrepreneurs rather than rival conceptions of the good society. This is likely to exacerbate the tendency towards increasingly professionalised and cosmetic political campaigning which has resulted from the development of communications technology and marketing and advertising expertise. There are therefore grounds for asserting that primaries in the US, rather than democratising political parties, have in fact led to their disappearance as such.

'Restricted' Primaries: Some Hypotheses
The logic of primary elections as observed in the United States suggests general patterns relevant to all kinds of primaries, but is not directly applicable to Western European cases for the important reason that no West European party has, or is likely to, open up the process to its whole electorate. Indeed it would be almost impossible to do so, given the absence of state regulation and the high levels of pluralism exhibited by Western European party systems. West European primaries have up to now been founded on the membership principle, and are therefore quantitatively and qualitatively different from US-style primaries. The European model could be described as a 'mixed' (Boix 1998) or 'restricted' model of primary: that is, a primary which is limited to formal party members and conditioned by the involvement of the party structures. This section will offer some theoretical reflections on the operation of this model. These reflections will centre on three aspects of party organisation: the renewal of party elites, the levels of participation and activism in parties, and the distribution of decisional power inside party organisations.

As far as elite renewal is concerned, primaries in the US have been demonstrated to facilitate the removal of politicians whose credibility has been seriously undermined, whilst maintaining a relatively high level of continuity in the parliamentary elite, which would appear to be a good balance (Ware 1996, 287-8). There would appear to be a good chance that restricted primaries could have a similar effect, to the extent that opening up reselection votes to the whole party membership would appear more likely to dislodge corrupt or otherwise discredited politicians than committee decisions, whose lack of transparency and dependence on party leaders makes them more likely to defend the interests of incumbents than challengers. However for this function to be fulfilled requires party grassroots members to be as intolerant of malpractice amongst their own party leaders as non-members. Misplaced loyalty to party representatives, and the strong ties politicians can develop amongst their most committed supporters (sometimes through dubious practices such as patronage and other kinds of favouritism) can insulate discredited politicians from the hostility of the wider electorate. In a sense, the consequences of restricted primaries for elite circulation depend on the size and composition of the party membership: small memberships, especially if socially homogeneous and unrepresentative of the wider electorate, may not make different choices from those made by the more closed structures traditionally used for candidate selection in West European mass parties. However, primaries do allow alternative candidates to challenge discredited or superannuated incumbents with some chance of success in circumstances where there is unease amongst the grassroots about the record of the party's elected representatives.

Different hypotheses can be proposed regarding the effects of primaries on party membership. If the predominant incentive for joining a political party is the pursuit of solidary benefits (Wilson 1970), then such changes can be expected to have little impact on participation, and may even undermine the kinds of collective action and activities which attract
participants, particularly activists. If purposive incentives predominate, then participation could rise as citizens take advantage of opportunities to extend their influence over politics by voting in primary elections (pace Olson). In some cases, the introduction of primaries has been accompanied by other forms of membership consultation, so purposively motivated citizens would be likely to be attracted into membership by parties' use of primaries. If selective material incentives predominate, little change would be expected, as the opportunity to participate in primaries would be unlikely to affect the cost-benefit analyses of political careerists. The variety of payoffs for political participation suggests that the consequences of organisational changes such as primaries will vary across different types of activists.

Estimating the likely effects of primaries on membership levels is rendered difficult by the lack of conclusive empirical research into motivations for membership, and the similarly inconclusive nature of the theoretical debate on participation. In these circumstances a 'pluralistic' approach\(^2\) can help generate working hypotheses based on the recognition of the diversity of party members in Western Europe. Whilst the 'Olsonian' view of participation is clearly unable to cope with the variety of forms of collective action which are not dependent on selective incentives, it must be recognised that the free-rider dilemma is an important obstacle to political action, including party membership. In this analysis I will therefore adopt a loosely Olsonian approach, which recognises the power of the free-rider argument, whilst accepting that many individuals are sufficiently attracted by collective incentives to overcome the free-rider dilemma.

The first hypothesis suggested by such an approach is that party membership is unlikely to be significantly increased by the adoption of party primaries. Not only will individual votes cast in primaries, like those in general elections, have a more or less negligible impact on parties' internal dynamics, most primaries are unlikely to have the resonance of a general election, where the results have a more dramatic impact and the whole process is accompanied by intense media and citizen interest. Primaries for important candidacies, such as parties' candidates for head of the government, may have a similar impact, but asking party members to vote for more or less unknown candidates to stand in routine elections for less important posts is unlikely to generate high levels of interest. The novelty of primaries may increase participation and membership temporarily, but in the long run party membership is likely to be broadly unaffected. It could be suggested that those citizens susceptible to being attracted by involvement in party primaries are probably already party members or political activists of some other kind, and that a very marginal expansion of the membership role is unlikely to stir the emotions of the politically unmotivated free-riding majority. Moreover, as a secondary hypothesis, it is quite likely that participation in primaries, with the possible exception of those for the most important offices, will decline over time as party members realise that, as individuals, their internal influence barely changes with the introduction of primaries.
Regarding the consequences of these organisational changes for membership involvement in party decision-making, the analytical approach adopted produces barely more cheering hypotheses. A classic, 'Michelsian' approach (Michels 1962) to internal party dynamics would see the democratising potential of such changes to upset the balance of power within party organisations, as votes by individual members isolated from the party intermediary elites would be less easily controlled than party conferences attended by party officials. The loosely 'Olsonian' view, on the other hand, would interpret individualised membership votes as a means of discouraging participation, by isolating party members from each other and subjecting them to an obvious free-rider dilemma (the use of postal votes in some parties exacerbates this effect). Primaries give greater power to individual party members, but this redistribution of power is at the expense of the most active party members and local officials who populate the party committees which traditionally control candidate selection in West European mass parties. Members would have little incentive to take part in collective activities with other members, and the most active members would have little more influence than the least active, undermining incentives for activism. Activists motivated by solidary or selective incentives would not be affected by primaries, but there could be a fall-off in activism from members interested in purposive incentives: why go to the trouble of carrying out party work and working on tedious committees if this provides no more formal organisational influence than possession of a party membership card?

This reasoning can be developed to generate rather pessimistic hypotheses on level of intraparty democracy in parties using primaries. The elimination of any 'differential of influence' between active and non-active members could seriously undermine the supply of purposively motivated intermediary party officials, leaving party structures more strongly in the hands of careerists or pursuers of solidary incentives, neither of whom have any incentive to challenge the decisions made by party leaderships. Admittedly this is perhaps to stretch the point a little far, but in the most pessimistic scenario, parties would consist of a small number of professional party bureaucrats easily controlled by their employers and a diffuse and apathetic membership, which would occasionally participate in candidate selection exercises framed by party leaders. The emergence of movements of collective action within the party grassroots - possibly in opposition to party leaders - would be increasingly unlikely, and the paradoxical effect of primaries would therefore be to make parties even more oligarchical than before.

So to summarise, the above analysis suggests the following four hypotheses:

- **H1.** Restricted primaries have no sustainable impact on party membership.
- **H2.** Participation in restricted primaries will decline over time.
- **H3.** Restricted primaries undermine voluntary activism.
H4. In parties using restricted primaries internal dissent will tend to decline and officeholders and paid staffs will become increasingly powerful.

These hypotheses are, of course, only as good as the assumptions on which they are based, and it was pointed out earlier that the diversity of motivations for participation in political parties makes it difficult to generate predictions. They should therefore be seen as working hypotheses to guide the empirical research necessary to establish precisely the impact primaries have on West European parties. This is an embryonic project, since primaries are at present used in very few parties in Western Europe, and in most cases have been established only recently. The next section provides a preliminary account of the adoption of restricted primaries in the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) in 1998.

**Primaries in Spain: The Democratisation of the PSOE?**

Amongst the relatively few cases where primaries have been adopted by West European parties, the most dramatic impact has been felt in the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE). A primary election held in Spring 1998 to choose a candidate for Prime Minister for the elections due in 2000 produced the completely unexpected defeat of the party secretary in favour of a relatively under-resourced and marginalised rival. Although most of the elections to choose candidates for the Spanish Congress and local elections passed off without major surprises, the party leader's defeat was a political earthquake and a remarkable example of the destabilising potential of primaries.

The PSOE's decision to adopt primaries can be regarded as having two main sources. First of all, the idea was first proposed by the Catalan Socialist Party (PSC - federated with the PSOE), which has a separate tradition from that of the PSOE and has often been seen as a more forward-looking and open organisation than its counterparts in the rest of Spain. The adoption of primaries by the Catalan organisation provided the inspiration and model for the adoption of a similar process in the PSOE. Second, the PSC's proposal and the PSOE's acceptance of primaries can be interpreted in terms of the party's recent history. A party hastily reconstructed as Francoism was being dismantled, in 1982 the PSOE was handed a massive election victory and unchallenged government power by the bizarre collapse of the governing party of the transition, the UCD. The party's organisational development was conditioned by this background, and its structural weakness, small membership and ideological divisions led to the adoption of a rigid, closed and highly centralised structure by the party's all-dominant leadership (Prime Minister Felipe González and his deputy Alfonso Guerra). As the party took control of the government machinery, patronage was used extensively to recruit cadres and activists and calm ideological rancour, whilst dissent was uncompromisingly stamped on. This model,
successful in providing the Socialist governments of the 1980s with cohesive parliamentary support and an adequate electoral machine, was incapable of reacting as the party's credibility was undermined by the corruption scandals of the 1990s. Defeated at the polls in 1996, the PSOE was perceived by many voters as a corrupt and ideologically lifeless organisation, led by a now discredited generation of leaders who had emerged in the 1970s. In this context, the disciplined structure of careerists, functionaries and clientelistic bosses was patently inappropriate to the party's new needs (Vargas-Machuca 1998).

These circumstances provided a compelling rationale for a process of internal party democratisation to breathe new life into the party, recruit new members and overcome the stagnation of the organisation's decision-making structures. The decision to adopt primaries was also, as ever, a response to short-term strategic considerations on the part of the party leadership. Felipe González, party leader since 1974 and Prime Minister between 1982-96, resigned at the party's 34th congress in 1997, and the peculiar circumstances of his resignation - characteristic of the way in which he had run the party - are at the root of the organisational change analysed here. González unexpectedly announced his resignation at the party congress itself, taking practically everyone by surprise. He then took advantage of the resulting confusion to place a close (and subordinate) ally, Joaquín Almunia, at the helm. After such a bizarre chain of events, Almunia realised he lacked a strong legitimacy as party secretary, and this formed part of the motivation behind his adoption of primaries: it was assumed that the party secretary's candidacy for the Prime Minister's office would be amply backed by the party faithful, overcoming Almunia's democratic deficit and allowing him to claim to be regenerating the party. The rival candidate, the left-wing ex-minister José Borrell, was regarded by many outside the party as a cosmetic addition to the contest for the purposes of avoiding a 'Bulgarian-style' vote for the party secretary. Instead, Borrell won by a clear margin (55% to 45%), to the amazement of everyone, including the two candidates. Although there were few other surprises, the result of the contest to lead the party list in Madrid in this year's local elections produced a similar result, the local party boss Joaquín Leguina losing out to marginalised former minister Fernando Morán.

A number of implications can be drawn from this remarkable set of events. First, it indicates just how different primaries are from traditional mechanisms of party democracy. In the case of Almunia (and indeed of Leguina) individual party members voted in their majority against their party leaders, who had been elected as leaders by party assemblies in the tradition of delegated internal democracy. The delegated 'pyramid' principle, in which members elect local committees and delegates to higher level assemblies who take decisions on their behalf, is capable of producing quite different results to direct membership consultation on the OMOV principle. How is it possible for the party membership to elect delegates to party offices and then elect their opponents as electoral candidates? The results of the PSOE primaries suggest
that the traditional form of internal democracy is a fairly blunt instrument as far as reflecting the plurality, complexity and even inconsistency of membership opinion is concerned. This was particularly the case for the PSOE, a highly disciplined party in which central control had been vigorously exercised. The use of clientelism to strengthen control over the party structures is important in this. By the 1990s some 70% of delegates to party congress were public office holders (Gillespie 1994, 55), whose living depended on the continued favour of a powerful party apparatus. Without primaries, the party decision-making structures were relatively easy for the party leadership to control, and since the leadership had a vested interest in preventing significant changes in organisational practice or personnel, delegated democracy was a source of stagnation and ideological decay.

A second point that should be made is, to an extent, a direct contradiction of the above. Despite the extraordinary impact of the primary for the party's electoral leadership, the vast majority of primaries did indeed produce the expected result. This is not to deny the destabilising potential of primaries which is more than adequately demonstrated by Almunia's defeat. However, it must be suspected that such a defeat is exceptional and unlikely to be repeated in the foreseeable future. The first such primary election took place in a period of transition to a new leadership, and there is little doubt that had Felipe González been standing the party membership would have overwhelmingly supported him. To this extent, primaries have produced a renovation of the party elite in an organisation which was already undergoing important changes of personnel, and which was in a state of flux. The party secretary was not an authoritative figure and owed his position to González's dubious manoeuvring at the party congress. There must therefore be some doubt over whether primaries would have been capable of unseating a leader who had emerged through more 'normal' procedures and enjoyed a much clearer mandate from the party's structures. This is not to detract from the totally unexpected nature of the result, but to suggest that it is premature to interpret Almunia's defeat as an example of how primaries can overturn entrenched elites. Almunia's position was in many ways quite weak; the strength of entrenched elites is indicated by the large number of 'officialist' candidates elected in the rest of the primaries held in 1998.

To return to the issue of competing electoral logics within the party organisation, a third implication of the process in the PSOE is its consequences for the coordination of the party structures with the candidates elected in the primaries. If delegate democracy and primaries produce contrasting results, than this creates potential for friction between the party officials elected in assemblies and the candidates elected in primaries. In the case of the PSOE, this friction emerged immediately at the level of the party's national leadership, as Borrell naturally interpreted his victory as amounting to his emergence as party leader. The months following the first primary were replete with diplomatic incidents between Borrell and Almunia, as the former attempted to assert his new-found authority and the latter used his strength in the party's
executive committee (comité federal - the party's key decision-making body) to block Borrell's emergence as de facto leader. Although an uneasy arrangement has been agreed which affords Borrell the more prominent role, the potential for primaries to fragment party leadership is evident, and the confusing situation in the party has hampered attempts to use the positive image generated by the primaries to improve the party's political standing. Of course there is nothing new in parties having candidates to head the government who are not party leaders, with parties in France, Italy and Germany having experience of such 'two-headed' leaderships. However, the strength of the executive and comparative weakness of extraparliamentary structures in Spanish parties suggest that such a division of labour could be problematic in a governing party. The only example in the Spanish democracy of such a division - Leopoldo Calvo Sotelo's brief tenure as Prime Minister in the ailing UCD government of 1981-2 - turned out to be a fiasco.

It is far too soon to take the analysis of the PSOE's case much further, since the process began less than a year ago and the elections for which the primaries elected candidates have yet to take place. This account of the process has not attempted to test systematically the hypotheses outlined earlier for this very reason. However there are already some indications of the potential consequences of the introduction of primaries. In fact, one of the most striking outcomes is that, in the short term at least, the party's public image seems to have improved (although this has not yet been translated into a recovery in the opinion polls). For a party long perceived as unresponsive and sclerotic, primaries have for now produced a positive outcome, shaking a complacent and unresponsive party hierarchy into responding to membership discontent, and providing the potential for the first generational turnover in the party's recent history to take place. Moreover, the Catalan party is advancing further in its own process of internal democratisation, by extending participation in the primaries to 'sympathisers' - non-members who can register as party supporters without paying any membership fee - and even ordinary voters, who in the recent primary for the candidate to head the regional government were free to take part in the consultation (of whom there were apparently 31,000, half the total number of votes cast in the primary). If this process continues and is adopted by the rest of Spain's Socialists, the potential for party transformation will be considerable.

Conclusions

This paper has presented some theoretical interpretations on the impact of primaries on party organisation, and offered some preliminary conclusions on the adoption of such primaries in one West European party. Primaries can be interpreted in two quite contrasting ways. On an optimistic reading, parties are becoming more open and participative organisations with a genuine aspiration to involve the maximum number of party supporters in their internal affairs.
On a pessimistic reading, parties' tendencies to become oligarchical and detached from society are being accentuated. The Spanish Socialist Party's use of primaries has not provided any conclusive evidence of which of these interpretations is most accurate, and further research is necessary to assess which of these views corresponds to reality.

Primaries can be seen as a fairly natural development in West European democracies where parties are increasingly distant from their traditional social bases, and politics is increasingly seen as a profession. If the great ideological battles of the past are widely taken to be over, then party politics is likely to be downgraded to a Schumpeterian competition for office, serving only to turf out the corrupt or incompetent. In this context increased competition for personnel in the form of primaries makes sense. It can therefore be speculated that the move towards the 'cartelisation' of West European parties will bring more moves towards 'internal democratisation' along the lines of primaries. The hypotheses presented in this paper suggest that there is good reason doubt the use of the term 'democratisation' to describe this process.

Bibliography


Notes

1. The lack of systematic organisational research makes it difficult to establish the true extent to which the catch-all party model has been adopted by Western European parties. The debate on the catch-all thesis centred almost exclusively on electoral change, and organisational change has been examined in a superficial and patchy manner. Organisational studies have taken off in the 1990s, but not surprisingly it has focused on contemporary changes. The empirical validity of Kirchheimer's claims on party organisational change remains largely untested.

2. A good example of this approach can be found in Kitschelt's work on Green and Socialist party organisations (1989 & 1994). Kitschelt develops a typology of party members, (*pragmatists*, *lobbyists* and *ideologues*), each of which responds to different combinations of incentives. In the absence of a means of estimating *a priori* the relative weight of these types in a given party, it is impossible to generate predictions; however it does provide a framework in which to develop compelling *post hoc* accounts of intraparty phenomena.