Abstract

The persistent process of personalization of politics has overshadowed the party organizations, shifting the attention on leaders and candidates and marking the transition from a “democracy of the parties” to a “democracy of the public”; as neo-populism or media populism. Thus, what has long been considered a characteristic of presidential systems, the personalization, made its entrance even in parliamentary democracies, characterized as a dominant variable in a new way of doing politics. The construction of the image of the leader becomes central. He guides and gives identity to the party, a man whose face, character and integrity become the symbol of the party he represents. Therefore, a greater prominence is given to the politician while, in parallel, the party organization gradually fades: it survives because it is “the party of the leader”.

Starting from a change that is common to the European democracies, this paper analyzes the consolidation of a personal politic in Italy, which saw the transition from a collegiate structure of the First Republic to personalistic organization of political parties, characterized by the emergence of a leader with great appeal and strong communication skills. The paper analyzes the transformation of the Italian political parties - with the emergence of strong charismatic leaders that make an extensive use of media as tools for acquiring consent - to see if the future of politics and parties is just personal or otherwise there are developing new strains to the development of institutional parties, which give centrality to the role of the State.
The leader’s party*

Democracies, since the end of the last century, have shown signs that institutions and political processes are being personalized: from the Anglo-Saxon world, where the majority system is clearly related to a leader taking precedence over both party and ideology, to France in its V Republic, to Adenauer’s, Brandt’s and Kohl’s Germany and Post Franco Spain, and even as far as Russia. Everywhere we look, a personal style of politics is advancing. The old collegiate system is giving way to a more personalistic organisation of political parties, with leaders who have great personal appeal, are defenders of the people, and experts in communication placing themselves at the helm. As a result, the personalization that was once considered a feature of presidential regimes, has found its way into parliamentary democracies too, becoming the dominant variable in this new approach to politics.

Literature dealing with personalisation in politics often focuses on either the emergence of charismatic leaders and new forms of populism (Mény and Surel 2000; Ignazi 2009), or the way leaders influence voting decisions and the organization of electoral campaigns (Boweler and Farrell 1992; Pguntke and Webb 2005; Wattenberg 1991). There is, in fact, no one type of personalization, but at least four.

We can talk about the personalization of the party leadership – whereby the organisational structure of the party centres on the leader – the personalization of votes – whereby the electoral system, as well as campaign strategies, lead to a strong identification with the person rather than the party or its electoral programme – the personalization of institutional roles – which is where power is concentrated in the hands of the executive and so represents a return to new forms of presidentialism – and the personalization of political communication which focuses so much attention on the candidate that it becomes a kind of one-man show.

Reflections on the causes of personalization always point towards the existence of a crisis, and the impossibility of change, as one of the conditions for the emergence of personal leaders. It is true that since 1980 we have seen a decline in those social cleavages which form the basis of Western European democracies (Blondel 2010; Katz and Mair 1994). This is the «crisis of intermediaries» that Ostrogorski talks about (1964), the kind of crisis that hits political parties when the electorate becomes more aware thanks to better access to information, and demands a more immediate relationship with their leader. The crisis in the relationship between traditional parties and citizens, and between citizens and parliament, which often happens in “headless”1 democracies, where there is no real

* Thanks to Mauro Calise - who first theorized about the “personal party” - for his encouragement and for the valuable suggestions in writing this paper.
relationship of trust between government and its people, has led to the development of personalized leadership.

As political parties lose their relevance so political leaders with big personalities, demagogic style and personal charisma, “magnetic qualities” manage to gain unquestioning popular support. According to Weber, this kind of charismatic plebiscitary leader\(^2\), has such power over the masses that he/she offers a return to the ethics and values that had been corrupted by the divisive anarchy of the State. A leader-led democracy enables the head of the executive to govern on the basis of a rapport of trust and responsibility with the electorate and to rise to power in times of crisis. Because it is during moments of crisis that the electorate is at its weakest in relation to the leader and savior. «The masses tend to see the outside world as inherently dangerous, always intent on creating new threats and when these […] materialize in the form of a “crisis” the masses react in a predictable way with a mix of depression, panic, fear of persecution and hatred. This is when they look for a Saviour. […] A modern electorate, in a highly dynamic and alien world, and one which citizens have no real control over, is extremely sensitive to the onset of an internal and/or international crisis, and immediately looks for a leader who believes, and manages to convince others, that he/she has the power to solve the crisis and control and direct events in the best possible way for their people» (Cavalli 1987).

Finding the right leader, therefore, is a question of presenting citizens with the kind of person who can save them, who can reconcile them with politics by helping them overcome that sense of alienation which is always worse when people have lost their political identity.

And when people are looking for a leader who can cure all social ills, the political leader takes the citizens’ side and “commits to the cause” in a world where disillusionment makes people search for new values.

Modern leaders, however, are not so much noted for the kind of personal charisma that Weber referred to, nor the «magnetic qualities» that Ostrogorski identified, but for their skill in seducing the masses. Having the financial means and technological wherewithal at their disposal, they manage to establish a direct, trusting relationship with their electorate.

We can talk about a general tendency towards personal leadership, which refers to the decline in the role of political parties in contemporary democracies. Individuals in today’s society seem to have freed themselves of the kind of conditioning traditional groups and the

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1 Luciano Cavalli refers to two types of democracy, the «democracy with leader» type (or with «personalized leadership») and the «headless democracy» or party-led type.

A leader is, by definition, a person, which is why, as a political player, their personality (or charisma) affects the whole process, setting itself «on the one hand, against subjective collectives like parties, and on the other against any collegiate configuration of authority» (Cavalli, L. Governo del leader e regime dei partiti, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1992).

2 When talking about «plebiscitary democracy», Max Weber is referring to both democratic leadership as well as dictators and tyrants, but gives positive overtones to the term «plebiscitary democracy»: in his «plebiscitary democracy» the leader is, in any case, an expression of the people’s choice. Weber, M., Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, Tübingen, Mohr, 1980
old parties imposed and they want to decide for themselves which candidate to trust. This decision, however, is not limited to the election moment but continues afterwards, when citizens look with interest at who heads their government. In today’s political debate, it is no longer political parties that are centre stage but political leaders, premiers or presidents. This tendency coincides with the more objective prominence the head of government has assumed, or is assuming, in modern States and with the leader’s need to communicate directly with the population.

Unlike in Weber’s time, the power struggle is fought out within a very decentralized and personalistic system of political representation.

What emerges therefore is «a personalism without charisma, prisoner of the vicious circle of interests and passions (Roth 1990), a personalism which leads to the involution of political democracy whereby invisible power gains strength and webs of corruption multiply.

The rise of these charismatic leaders, especially in the new European democracies, seems to revive some of the ghosts of the past, bringing with it fears about the personalization of power and totalitarian and dictatorial tendencies.

The conviction that personalization is harmful for a democracy in some way derives mainly from the conviction that parties themselves, the strongholds of democracy, can lose their strength and authority to candidates or party leaders making the whole system much less democratic.

We cannot say whether personalization is a good or bad thing as far as democracy is concerned. It could be accepted as one of the possible ways forward for politics as long as specific responsibilities are attributed in a clear and just fashion, mainly by election, as is the case with the American system.

However, although we hear people on all sides talking about the Americanization of European governments, the process of Americanization has encountered serious opposition in the institutional structure of European democracies as regards both the selection of candidates and the system of government.

In Europe, in fact, political parties continue to play an important role not only in the selection of candidates but above all in the organisation of elections. The idea of the personal vote has not taken hold like in the U.S. because it is diluted by the party system and the organisation of the parliamentary system.

It is the institutions, therefore, which act as a kind of filter for the personalization of politics, and they offer a more solid defence as soon as the personalization of politics threatens to become the personalization of power.
The Italian case

The personalization of politics in Italy has come up against some fairly strong resistance in the shape of the proportional electoral system, the overall structural framework of the government and the dominance of certain party players. When it happened, it was by forcing the rules of a party-based system, governed by a leadership which remained resistant to personal power. In fact, until the end of the Eighties, Italy had a party system which guaranteed organizational, and electoral stability for both the government and political classes. On an organizational level, its stability derived from the strength of its two main parties, the Christian Democratic Party (Dc) and the Italian Communist Party (Pci). On an electoral level, on the other hand, the relationship between the main parties in parliament had remained unchanged for forty years: the Christian Democrats had ruled unchallenged. Although the absence of any alternative had its negative sides, it was obvious that the resulting government was very stable.

Within a few years a political landslide overturned all of this, helped along by the judicial inquiries of 1992 – 1994 which revealed the corruption affecting important sectors of the political classes. Change came with a new majority electoral system but this only led to a system of parties, movements, groups and factions which are constantly vying with each other and to a parliament which is so fragmented that the only thing which still holds is the authority of the head of government.

Maybe the real explanation behind the downfall of the Italian party system is the lack of an ideology. If we look at Italian political life over the last few years we can see that the political creed has been little used. Leaders of the main parties have defined themselves in turn as liberal, moderate liberals, reformist, europeanists and social democrats in a never-ending round of references so that, in the end, politics cut itself off from society completely, and people find it difficult to understand what is going on around them and prefer to have nothing to do with it.

In a situation like this, a charismatic leader who keeps a tight and decisive rein on his party seems to offer Italians the kind of change in the political class they were looking for and, at the same time, an illusion of solidity within the government.

Italy is the only country in Europe today with a major political party that was created by its leader. It is also the only country where that party, based on one person, has controlled the government for a considerable amount of time.

The tendency towards personalization was first seen with the victory of a leader who played on his personal appeal. Further indication was given in the debate on constitutional reform where many leading politicians were in favour of a presidentialist (or semi-presidentialist) system or premiership with a direct vote.
An insightful analysis of personal politics in Italy is offered by Mauro Calise in his essay “Il partito personale. I due corpi del leader” (2010). As Calise so clearly points out, the anomaly where Berlusconi’s personal party is concerned, is that the party structure has somehow become the personal heritage of its leader to the extent that it is one with State governance «from ad personam laws to strict control of television networks and a large part of the press, Berlusconi is just one step away from transforming Italy into a single-party regime: his own.» (Calise 2010). The Berlusconi model has become a winner, not only in Italian politics, but one to emulate, so that references to Berlusconianism can be heard on many sides. However, unlike in other European democracies, Berlusconi’s is a “personal” not “personalized” party. This is because, “unlike what happens in other Western democracies, the party does not act as a machine for selecting and supporting its leader. It is the leader that creates the party” (Diamanti 2011).

The “progressive personalistic colonization of politics” in Calise’s analysis, follows three different pathways. First and foremost, the colonization of leadership can apply to anybody, on the right or left. From the personal party established by Gianfranco Fini (a leader who emerged from the ranks of the Italian Social Movement and National Alliance party) to escape from Berlusconi’s shadow, to the Third Pole hurriedly created by Pier Ferdinando Casini (son of the Christian Democrats) to highlight his distancing from Berlusconi to attract voters from the centre. Even the “Lega Nord”, Northern League, feeds off the strength of its leader, Umberto Bossi, but survives as a party in government, and is even gaining ground because, unlike the other personal parties, it has held on to its structural framework which is like that of the old Italian Communist Party, “with widespread organization on the ground and experienced politicians at both central and local level”. (Diamanti 2011). Despite this, as Ilvo Diamanti explains, the League is still a personal and charismatic mass party which needs Bossi “in order to stick together”. The personal party which, in the end, is most similar to Berlusconi’s, both in terms of its success and the way it was founded on the strong personality of its leader, is Antonio di Pietro’s Italia dei Valori party. The ex-prosecutor, who was directly involved in bringing the Tangentopoli scandals to light in Italy, once he had shed his judge’s robes, presented himself, like Berlusconi, as an outsider to the corrupt political classes and eventually as a defender of legality and the State. Di Pietro, along with Berlusconi, paved the way for media populism making wise and ample use of the web in his political communication strategy and employing a kind of populist language to bring him closer to the masses.

3 The text takes up the study published by Calise in 2000. He uses the term "personal party" for the first time, opening a debate by opening a debate that continues to this day. The text describes the transition from the First and Second Republic of Italy with the disappearance of the old mass parties and the emergence of the first personal parties. Calise, M. (2000) Il partito personale. Bari: Laterza
The left has tried to follow in Berlusconi’s footsteps too but the desperate search for a leader with first Romano Prodi and then Veltroni still goes on. And, for the Democratic Party, the primaries elections have become not only a way of selecting the party candidate to put forward for the general elections but a way of finding the new party leader. The primaries, therefore, represent the other way that personalization of politics has developed, and this time spreading down to grass roots. When a party is incapable of choosing its own leader because of internal division, it prefers its head to be crowned by the people.

The rise of charismatic figures sanctioned by large swathes of opinion is based on the principle that the popularity of a leader does not have to be mediated by either parties or parliament. This opens the door to the third type of personalization, which is that of the micro level. If “macro” refers to the Berlusconi “one for all” type of personalization, then “micro” is the type which grows at local level where direct, monocratic elections encourage the candidate to establish a rapport with the voter. The ground is thus laid for personal politics based on local canvassing, with door-to-door visits and, fundamentally, on distributive and patronage policies. It is in this context that “do-it-yourself” kind of politicians thrive. Anyone who wants to can create their own personal party, even if the leadership is weak, relying instead on the old practices relating to nepotism and clientelism (Calise 2010).

The history of the Italian republic over the last twenty years shows how the first route taken by personalization has become the most lasting one, and the one that most closely binds the leader to his party. The party is so much a part of its leader that in moments of crisis – like now or back in the Nineties – when the leader starts to lose power and the parties are incapable of carrying the match forward alone, new party-less leaders start to emerge who stick even closer to the route towards the presidentialisation of parliamentary republics.

**From party ideology to media-oriented leaders**

We have seen so far how the loss of party-political agendas and the decline in political ideology are compensated for by the strengthening of personal bonds.

On the one hand, a new style of politics sets itself up in opposition to a system based on party spirit, one where individualism and personalism are what counts and party ideology becomes bound up with the persona of the leader (Calise 2010). During the period of large political parties, it was the party structure that gave the party leader visibility. In today’s world, it is the personalization of the leader that gives visibility to the party both on the electoral stage and where public opinion is concerned. Politics is becoming more and more
the domain of individuals, of personal challenges and responsibilities, and much less the domain of parties, which are being transformed into machineries at the service of their leader.

On the other hand, the demise of the great ideologies that political parties were based on, and the difficulty these parties have had in finding alternative ways of relating to the public, has left ample space for the media to grow as the new intermediary between politics and society, providing the system with the necessary space, tools and channels to make it work. The media make sure that political discourse is heard and in this way the communication between candidate and voter changes, as does the language of politics and the issues on the political agenda as well as the way the various political choices are packaged and sold.

If we try to map these two aspects on a Cartesian diagram we can clearly see where the different leaders lie between our two observation points (see matrix below).

Along the vertical axis we can see the dichotomy that emerges when a strong party structure gives way to a personal party based on the leader’s charisma.
The organizational development of political parties along a continuum which goes from Duverger to Kirchheimer and Mair, is a process which has seen elitist organizations give way to people's parties which were then replaced by professional, personalistic parties which seem to override traditional party systems.

It is true that all over Europe the collapse of political parties has led to a rupture of the old cleavages (Lipset e Rokkan 1967) and new ones have opened up based on specific issues like the environment – which is what Green Parties are based on – migration or regionalism – as a response to the difficulty being experienced integrating the countries in the European Union. These parties are often created on a wave of anti-politics, as was the case in Italy with the Northern League, which started life as a regional party to fight local issues before becoming an indispensable party in government. As new parties emerge, centering on revived ideals or around new populist or outsider leaders, the old parties have had to personalize themselves in order to survive the lack of social legitimacy. It is no longer the political parties with their strong organizational structure and their age-old traditions that take centre-stage but their leader, with his/her personal charisma and talent.

What made political parties so stable was their ability to attract and keep voters within their organizational network and this, in large part, relied on establishing a direct rapport with society. As this rapport has lost its verve, and political parties seem ever further removed from people’s normal daily lives, the organizational pre-conditions necessary for guaranteeing stability have started to be eroded.

Once they have given up on any kind of close relationship with their electorate, political parties seem remote from the everyday lives of their citizens and they start to operate in areas away from their voter-base. Thus a grass-roots, “bottom-up” party becomes a “top-down” one instead.

When political parties start to move away from the society they were once a part of, the electors themselves start to lose their sense of belonging to a specific party and slowly begin to make their own choices. And in the new political market-place, the new party elite addresses the consumer-citizen directly, offering his/her symbolic wares. A centralized leadership emerges and they have a direct relationship with registered members. This phenomenon often makes it easier for a leader to manipulate people. The members are given the impression that they have a say in the way things are organized within the party, through the web and social networks, whereas this is only an organized, vertical control strategy. This is the kind of strategy employed, for example, by Forza Italia, which, from the very beginning, has always tried to focus all the attention and power in the persona of its leader. This results in a party structure which mirrors the pyramid structure of the leader-tycoon’s industry which is why people talk about a “mass industry party”.
At the same time, along the horizontal axis, there is a move from party ideology to media leaders, marking a turn from the old century based on ideology to the new century based on media politics, where what counts is the person and personal appeal, with the accent firmly placed not on ideology but on the rules of political marketing and personal dynamics which the media are well capable of broadcasting.

In a century in which mass political parties and political ideologies are in a state of crisis, the parties tend to abandon traditional models and look for new models and a new direction. More often than not, however, they do not get very far before problems set in. A kind of “lightweight” model seems to emerge, where the political agenda, the ideology and the values of the party all lack substance. When there is no longer the kind of strong political identity that kept the old mass parties together, modern parties quickly lose their stability and their ability to attract the electorate. The past starts to seem less important, something to be filed away, and we start searching blindly for a new party model that will be competitive and that the electorate will be happy with. In this way, the whole situation becomes ambiguous and this knocks the voter off-balance because the one thing voters need in order to restore their faith in a political party is stability. But whether or not a political party manages to remain stable depends entirely on whether the party manages to defend its own identity, whereas political identity, today, seems to be something vague, confused, mixed up with other identities or even exchangeable.

In a mass-media society, party culture is quickly replaced by culture with no historical reference. Differences between the various parties, in terms of ideology and actual policy, have narrowed, and while fundamental divisions disappear and political consensus grows, it becomes less necessary and much harder to keep hold of an electorate. These changes affect the membership as well which becomes more virtual. Mass political parties traditionally needed their party supporters at local level, as this was how their political message could reach the electorate, which explains why groups of party managers worked so hard to recruit members. Today these kind of communication channels filtering through the party structure are no longer relevant, as there are far more efficient ways of doing it, through television and Internet. In a context where the financing of politics is diversified, and where the media has proved to be the best form of communication between political parties and citizens, a large number of active party members starts to seem irrelevant whereas what counts is the number of virtual members.

Intra-party dialogue has also changed, moving from a local to computer network, whereas inter-party dialogue has moved outside the halls of parliament and onto the pages of newspapers. The traditional organization of political parties seems to be adapting more and more to the new opportunities made available by the world of media.

Digital media have enabled political parties to bypass the old gatekeepers of political communication and talk directly with their voters, and thanks to social media, the
communication style of political leaders has gradually become more informal, social, closer to the people and their language has even adopted the emotional overtones typical of social networks.

The *new media* have enabled politicians to make full use of new and effective means of communication as well as new meeting places and areas where people gather, like the so-called “virtual piazzas”. At the same time, the use of marketing techniques borrowed from industry has made it easier for politicians to get closer to their electorate because various surveys reveal people’s habits, tastes and opinions. In this context, anyone not using these techniques is at a disadvantage: it is the medialisation of communication that, these days, guarantees the relationship between politician and citizen.

Thanks to the opportunities offered by the new media, every voter can make up their own mind about politics and so voters become more independent and autonomous and much less easy for the party “oligarchies” described by Michels to control or blackmail. At the same time, of course, the voter, inevitably, feels more isolated and disoriented and is therefore more likely to fall victim to the dream seller. There are only two options; either let yourself be taken in by the charm and fantasy of the political show or else turn your back on it and walk away. For this reason, a gulf has opened up between government institutions and society in general.

In this long-trend move from the ideological party to the mediatic leader, we can examine a preliminary attempt to locate a number of parties in our matrix. This is mainly meant as a way to better clarify our scheme, but is also designed to foster discussion among participants to this panel.

In the lower right quadrant, we find Berlusconi’s personal party, by all means a prototypical example of an organization strongly dependent on the leader’s personal resources and using the media as its main – and highly intensive – channel for communicating with the electorate.

Berlusconi does not present a political philosophy but a lifestyle which reflects the cultural model his own television channels have been promoting for years, and one which has proved appealing to the general public. He projects himself as someone new who is above party politics. And he has done this by creating a new political party which has nothing to do with the old type. With Forza Italia, Berlusconi cloned his industry structure to create a new party model, which has become a «media-based party» (Calise 1996), because his message and power-structure are mainly based on the media and closely linked to it.

Taking advantage of a nation weakened by witnessing old guards of politics accused of corruption and the slow spread of a feeling of uncertainty, Berlusconi took advantage of the great opportunities offered by the wider political market that had suddenly opened up. He was aware that he needed to fill the political gap that had been created in Italian politics.
and being the owner of such important means of communication made his job much easier. (Ginsborg 2004, Poli 2001, Golia 1997).

His was a “mission” worthy of the great heroes, the charismatic leaders, and it was as such that Berlusconi presented himself to his public, as the man to “save Italy” along with his trusted army, many of whom came from the advertising industry.

Centralised decision-making was an aspect of private industry that Berlusconi transferred directly to politics. Every major decision depended solely on the industry-party owner, from what to say in public to which candidates to choose.

Without the old parties, and in the absence of any kind of ideology, politics becomes a kind of battle in which the winner is the person who has the right “weapons”. Modern weapons include the new technologies and media communication, professionals in the field of political communication, experts in electoral marketing, surveys, internet and anything else that enables politicians to bring their image and personal agenda onto the battlefield.

Di Pietro’s Italia dei valori also belongs to this category, though it can be located a bit further to the left with respect to the ideology/media dimension. Di Pietro’s rise center stage on the Italian political scene has been strongly dependent upon his role as a chief prosecutor in the Tangentopoli scandal, a role he was very clever to exploit through a series of dramatic TV appearances. It is however true that he has also based his popular appeal on systematic emphasis on anti-politics ideology, repeatedly calling for a widespread and unqualified criticism of the party establishment (both in government and opposition). In this respect, we may distinguish between two phases (and related location on our matrix). All through the nineties, Di Pietro’s transformation from a general prosecutor to a political leader largely drew from his sensational media presence. With the passing of time, his newly formed party started to rely also on a widespread anti-party sentiment which had by then become an established feature of Italian politics.

Both these two (types of) personal parties can be easily contrasted with the traditional parties which have ruled Italy all through the first post-world war two half century. The PCI, the Italian Communist Party, occupies the extreme corner of the upper left quadrant, as it based its electoral strength and cultural hegemony on a lasting – though weaker and weaker – ideological stance, as well as on a corporate organizational structure which, up to the fall of the Berlin wall, could still count on several hundred thousands of militants and a highly centralized recruiting and mobilization system (Accornero, Mannheimer and Sebastiani 1983, Caciagli and Corbetta 2001). As for the DC, the Christian Democratic Party, it should be properly located in the same quadrant, though quite a bit closer to the center. Indeed, the ideological aspect had long declined as a strategic resource though, it must be noted, Christian Democrats never proved apt to fully adapt to the emerging environment of the media logic. While always maintaining a strong control over the national broadcasting system, it was used as a channel for distributing hefty spoils rather than
exerting political influence. In this respect, it should be noted that it was only with the rise of Craxi’s socialist party that spectacularization and personalization became a key element of the television environment (Pasquino 1990, Cuperlo 2004). A similar argument may be made for Dc’s contrasted relationship with the personalization drive. Christian Democrats always practiced personalization at the micro-level, a heritage of the notables party which was quickly adapted to the so-called horizontal clientelism of mass patronage organizations, especially – but not exclusively – in Southern Italy. However, when they had to face the issue of macro-personalization, that is the emergence of strong leaders with a tendency to assert monocratic control on party life, the reaction of the Christian Democrats remained one of resistance and resilience. As a result, they were caught by surprise and totally disbanded from the rise of the leader-based political environment now dominating the contemporary Italian scene.

On the other side, still flying the flag for ideology but moving towards the lower left quadrant, with an emphasis on personal charisma but moving away from “upper house” politics, we find leaders like De Gaulle who, for France between the 1940s and 1960s, represented an anti-party and populist form of nationalism.

Charles De Gaulle is remembered for projecting himself as a kind of spokesman for the ordinary person, unlike the traditional political classes. A leader who was anti-political and an outsider, De Gaulle fuelled the image of himself as a charismatic leader using radio too, but he always stuck steadfastly to the ideology inherent in Gaullism.

With De Gaulle’s institutional programme, at the heart of the Fifth Republic, anti-political rhetoric became one of the government’s main tools, used to legitimize specific and rather complex choices (Campus 2006). Away from the political establishment, De Gaulle was able to impose himself, thanks to his popular consensus. He was a charismatic leader who thought of himself as one of the people. He thus fought for the right of the majority through a referendum, which is the main instrument in a direct democracy, when it came to constitutional reform (Bartolini 1981). Personal and populist politics here, away from party politics, managed to represent huge structural objectives and to knock down the traditional barriers dividing government and its people, and De Gaulle managed to stay in power for a long time.

This is also the kind of traditional populism quadrant that Latin American leaders like Chavez fall into, who oppose the kind of media populism we find in the next quadrant which is where another French leader Nicolas Sarkozy sits. Positioned on the horizontal axis slightly further towards the media logic side because of his intelligent use of television and the press, Sarkozy, compared to the two Italian leaders we find in the same quadrant, Berlusconi and Di Pietro, is not an outsider but an insider of French politics, who has pushed towards renewal of the Ump (Union for a Popular Movement/Union pour un mouvement populaire). On the other hand, however, his hold on the party is a result of the
professionalisation of political communication which strengthened his position in relation to that of other party members, giving him the opportunity to turn his party into an efficient electoral machine (Maarek 2007). Sarkozy invests a lot in communication with the media, his strategy is to court journalists and he has even become friends with some of them, winning himself a slot on the front page of many papers. With a view to becoming a familiar figure for his electorate, Sarkozy is happy to share not only his ideas and image as leader, but also his private life, his family and his persona. The French president pays enormous attention to detail when planning the “stories” he wants the media to recount, including the cover photos, interviews and speeches. He has almost become a media golden boy, guaranteeing them regular and continued coverage (Artufel and Duroux 2006).

A leader who is much more aware in his use of the media, the first to take advantage of the power of the web and social networks, is Barack Obama, who we see in the same quadrant but positioned much further towards the media side.

Although supported by the Democrats, Obama has founded his leadership on a strong appeal to the nation and the people who saw in him a solution to the fragmentation of national leadership. A pragmatic politician, but one who is still able to dream.

Obama invented a new way of campaigning. From the organization and the way the campaign was financed – forfeiting public funding in favour of contributions from his electors themselves, thus increasing loyalty – to the way he managed to create viable coalitions and use modern technology to communicate with voters, Obama’s 2008 campaign signaled a new era in campaign strategy, based on grass roots mobilization and effective use of the web for disseminating the message. The American people believed in Obama because he invested in them and offered them a new message spoken by a new face.

Obama’s appeal rests largely on the messages he sent over the web on his own official website and supported by the social networks YouTube, Facebook, MySpace and Twitter. It must be remembered that one of Obama’s main campaign strategists was one of the co-founders of Facebook, Charles Hughes, specially recruited to create MyBarackObama.com (Clayton 2010). And it is through the power of narrative, and his ability to recount rather personal stories, that this leader manages to bring together people and values. His slogan, “yes, we can” gave the Democrats a new motto,; their role was no longer to “defend” but to “change”, all the while carrying with them the identity of the nation.

Barack Obama’s victory restored part of the moral leadership that the United States had lost (Jones and Vassallo 2009), during the Bush years and the advancing economic crisis which made the USA’s position as guide to the International system somewhat wobbly.

If we move towards the party side but stay close to media-based politics, we find Tony Blair in the upper right quadrant, famous as the leader who changed the face of Labour. He modified the organizational structure of the party, placed new emphasis on communication
and personalized his politics. At the same time he managed to project an image of a party that was compact, coherent and modernized which helped to convince the moderates in the electorate.

Blair, for England, represented the new man, someone who was good at interpreting the anti-party feeling that was rife and he set himself up as a symbol of the new in contrast to the long-winded party bureaucrats. To give credence to this self-image, Blair surrounded himself with experts in communication who constantly monitored public opinion and thus managed to keep his party on message at the centre of electoral communications.

The Labour Leader lived his life through the media. There were dozens of cameras ready to follow him wherever he went, giving the impression of a leader in touch with his people.

A cunning strategist, who made careful use of the media, Blair is different from the colleagues we see in the lower right quadrant because his is the kind of personalization that acts indirectly (King 2002) on the party, through organizational restructuring, redefining the rules and official party objectives and a strong centralised role for the leader (Calise 2000, Kavanagh 1995, Webb 1992). The Labour party has a strong political tradition behind it and a solid organizational structure similar to that of the Italian parties in the upper left quadrant. But while the latter did not recognize the need for urgent organizational reform, Labour questioned its own political identity and was able to renew its image and move towards the new. The experience of the English Labour party shows us that change is possible but only with the determination and the ability to move beyond the tough, rigid organisational structure which immobilises political parties.
Party in progress

It may be too early to sanction the definitive demise of the party as a collegial body as we have known it all through the past century. Yet, evidence is growing that political parties may be facing a transformation even deeper than the one Kirchheimer indicated, with the evolution of the mass party into a catch-all organization. In that watershed evolution, change mainly concerned the erosion of the traditional social basis of political parties, and their substitution with a much more diversified and volatile electorate. What we are witnessing now is the weakening and deterioration of the party's original nature as a corporate entity, and its replacement with an individualistic ethos. The combined forces of personalization and media communication are undermining established procedural routines and recruitment patterns, thus moving the whole party environment towards new and unchartered waters. While the leader's party may look as the natural outcome of this process, one should question whether this may in the end prove as a viable and successful solution. The decline of political parties has a lot to do with the excess of demands and expectations they had to face as the main institutional pillars of contemporary democracies. A challenge which may easily prove well beyond the reach of forthcoming personal leaders.
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