

**SELECTING THE LABOUR LEADER:  
FROM THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE TO CLOSED PRIMARIES**

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*Abstract – The article aims at assessing the functioning and characteristics of the most recent systems employed by the British Labour Party for selecting its leader. To this end I compared five leadership races: the huge success of Tony Blair in 1994 in the newly reformed electoral college system; the undisputed election of Gordon Brown in 2007; the narrow and disputed victory of Ed Miliband in 2010, still held under the electoral college system; the large but controversial successes of Jeremy Corbyn in the 2015 and 2016 closed primaries. The article first traces the evolution of the Labour leadership election systems in recent decades. Secondly, the five leadership races are analyzed and compared, taking into account two main variables: inclusiveness and divisiveness. These have been addressed looking at indicators such as selectorate and candidacy inclusiveness, campaign negativity, race competitiveness and elite attitude, which transversally affects all the other dimensions. The findings suggest that intra-party democracy may be dangerous for party unity and electability but the political context remains much more important than the intrinsic characteristics of the system of leadership selection used.*

*Keywords: Leadership selection, British Labour Party, electoral college, primary elections*

## *1. Introduction*

According to Stark (1996) leadership elections in the UK are determined by the general selection criteria of acceptability (namely capacity to unite the party, reconciling the party elite and the grass-roots), electability (capacity to be elected Prime Minister) and competence (political experience). Apparently, such criteria were not fulfilled by the Labour leadership elections in 2010 and 2015/2016, contrary to what happened in 1994 and 2007. In point of fact it is hard to find clear affinities in terms of political and personal attitudes between the 2010 and 2015/2016 winners, Ed Miliband and Jeremy Corbyn. Yet both of them had to face the hostility of the party elite (Corbyn much more so than Miliband) once elected (and before) and were widely portrayed as candidates unwelcome by the electorate at large, although Corbyn finally had a much better electoral performance than his predecessor.

That said, the aim of this article is to assess the characteristics of the leadership races that rewarded Miliband and Corbyn, in comparison with the previous leadership contests. It means to go beyond the simple intrinsic characteristics of the Labour leadership election system, in order to understand to what extent elements different from formal rules affected the final outcome and the successive fate of the newly elected leader.

In fact, after Ed Miliband unexpectedly succeeded in the 2010 Labour leadership election, the proposals for overcoming the electoral college and eventually moving towards a system closer to European party primaries multiplied. Yet, when the same system was used in 1994 for crowning Tony Blair as new Labour leader, the process of selection had been widely portrayed as a success. Notwithstanding this, there were apparently no protests when Blair's successor Gordon Brown was elected unopposed in 2007. Yet, we could wonder why the electoral college worked well – namely, it selected a leader able to unite the party and lead it to electoral victory - in 1994 but not in 2010, supposing that the explanation may rest in the different characteristics of the two races. Similarly, it is important to understand whether and why, both in 2015 and 2016, though the new leadership election system was capable of mobilizing a large number of voters, it apparently produced a split within the party and unfavourable electoral outlooks (that finally revealed unwarranted), thereby contradicting Stark's theory.

In this respect, different studies devoted to the most recent Labour leadership races (LRs) focused to a large extent on the distortions produced by the electoral college system at first and then by the inclusion of registered supporters and trade union members in Labour closed primaries (Jobson and Wickham-Jones 2011; Dorey and Denham 2011-2016a; Baldini and Pritoni 2016). In order to make a contribution to the hitherto academic debates on this topic, I rather intend to empirically analyse and compare the leadership races held in the last two decades taking into account two comprehensive variables: inclusiveness and divisiveness.

These are not intended to replace the criteria originally advanced by Stark, but to complement them. In fact, divisiveness and acceptability are largely similar concepts: the more the leader choice is “acceptable” for the different party components, the less the LR is likely to be divisive. In turn, there is a link between divisiveness and electability, in line with the point made by many US scholars (Hacker 1965; Atkeson 1998; Johnson et al. 2010), that a divisive LR is likely to harm the electoral prospects of the winner.

Thus, I want to assess to what extent leadership races with identical degrees of inclusiveness and divisiveness will select an equally “acceptable” and “electable” candidate. Of course, it does not mean that such a candidate will produce the same effect in terms of electoral result in subsequent national election, as there are a lot of intervening variables at work between the moment intra-party leadership selection has concluded and the electoral outcome produced.

LR inclusiveness has been assessed on the basis of two main indicators: the *selectorate*, namely the body entitled to select the party leader (Caul Kittilson and Scarrow 2006; Hazan 2006, Kenig 2008) and the *candidacy*. The latter concerns those who have the right to stand for leadership, both in terms of candidacy requirements (*formal factors*) (Barberà *et al.* 2010) and the level of autonomy enjoyed by the party elite in putting forward a candidate list (*political factors*), which may indirectly prevent unwelcome candidacies (Castaldo 2011; Vicentini 2014). Accordingly, the level of elite support for the running candidates has to be taken into account too in order to assess *candidacy* inclusiveness. Therefore, I distinguish between an “open” and a “sterilized” offer (Castaldo 2011), with the latter indicating a race with a single intended winner and the former a race with more than one candidate with realistic possibilities of winning.

As far as divisiveness is concerned, two other indicators are considered: the competitiveness of the leadership race and the negativity of the electoral campaign (Hacker 1965; Peterson and Djupe 2005; Venturino and Pasquino 2009). Both these indicators are strictly linked with the elite support issue, which transversally affects all the dimensions

considered: the participation of a candidate unwelcome by the party elite is likely to raise the level of negativity in the electoral campaign, while a strong control of the party elite in the pre-selection phase (to the extent of excluding candidates who may threaten the success of an “intended” winner) is likely to reduce competitiveness.

The article is organized as follows: the first part examines the evolution of the Labour leadership election system, in order to understand the reasons why the Labour Party developed a new system involving party (and trade union) members in the leadership selection process much in advance compared to other Western parties, while turning to the closed primary quite late with respect to its European counterparts. The second part is devoted to the empirical analysis (based on both literature and press review) of the five LRs under consideration, taking into account the four indicators already mentioned, i.e. *selectorate*, *candidacy*, *campaign negativity* and *race competitiveness*.

## *2. From parliamentary party dominance to the electoral college system and beyond*

Historically, the British parties have been strongly shaped by the parliamentary system in which they operate, meaning that the Parliament and the Cabinet are the real anchors of the system. Therefore, the centre of power in a British party is the leader and the parliamentary group, while the party organization is more a support than an element of impulse (Giménez 1998: 46-48). In fact, at the beginning of the 1990s Massari (1992: 109) argued that «the British parties have never implemented a model of internal participation of the members, which can be called “internal democracy”». However, at present all four main British political parties allow their members to intervene in candidate and/or leader selection (CLS) in some way. The Labour Party in particular undertook a process of CLS democratization earlier than most other European parties.

The roots of the campaign to expand the leadership franchise began to take hold during Wilson’s second government. The intra-party conflicts related to the LS method hid the political struggle between the moderate and left-wing of the party (Stark 1996: 41). As Shaw (1994) notes: «The constitutional reformers had three interlinked aims: to weaken the right’s hold on the party, to redistribute power from the parliamentary establishment to the rank and file, and to end the effective independence of the PLP (parliamentary Labour party) on which right-wing control was seen ultimately to rest».

As a matter of fact, the various resolutions presented at party conferences throughout the 1970s were routinely defeated (Russel 2005: 36-37). However, after the defeat of the Labour Government by Margaret Thatcher in the 1979 general elections, the reformers were

finally able to realise their projects. The left of the party succeeded in carrying resolutions supporting reselection and control of the manifesto at the annual party conference held in Brighton in October 1979, although the resolution regarding the election of the leader by the membership was narrowly defeated. But at the time of 1980 party conference at Blackpool the general resolution to expand the leadership franchise was very narrowly passed. The contenders finally agreed on a compromise proposal to elect the party and deputy leader by means of an “electoral college”. A special party conference held at Wembley in January 1981 established the rules to discipline this new method. In the end the decision was to assign 40% of the weighted votes for leader and deputy leader to affiliated organizations (mostly trade unions, but also Socialist Societies), and 30% each to the PLP and the individual members of the constituency associations. «The point of the reform was clear, bickering over the specific weights of the formula notwithstanding. There were over six million members of affiliated unions, and more than 300,000 members of constituency associations. These groups, with the support of the left, were now determined that their voices would be heard and counted in party affairs» (Le Duc 2001).

The new formula clearly increased the unions’ weight in leadership selection, and for this reason it was strongly criticized by the Labour right-wing, to the point of encouraging the final split in the party which led to the formation of the SDP.

The new system was employed for the first time to select the party leader in 1983, although it was already used in 1981 for selecting the deputy leader. Neil Kinnock easily won the contest and he was confirmed as party leader five years later. In 1992 Kinnock was substituted by John Smith who was elected leader with 90% of the total votes.

TAB.1 - *Labour leadership elections (1983-1992).*

	<i>Candidate</i>	<i>MPs/MEPs</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Affiliates</i>	<i>Total</i>
1983	<i>Neil Kinnock</i>	14.8 %	27.5 %	29.0 %	71.3 %
	Roy Hattersley	7.8 %	0.6 %	10.9 %	19.3 %
	Eric Heffer	4.3 %	1.9 %	0.1 %	6.3 %
	Peter Shore	3.1 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	3.1 %
1988	<i>Neil Kinnock</i>	24.8 %	24.1 %	39.7 %	88.6 %
	Tony Benn	5.2 %	5.9 %	0.3 %	11.4 %
1992	<i>John Smith</i>	23.2 %	29.3 %	38.5 %	91.0 %
	Bryan Gould	6.8 %	0.7 %	1.5 %	9.0 %

Source: <http://www.election.demon.co.uk/lableader.html>; Le Duc (2001).

The divisions which led to the creation of the system in 1981 have thus not figured heavily in its actual operation. The renewal strategy on which the party embarked after its

devastating defeat in the 1983 election involved gradually recapturing control of party institutions from the left, but working within rules which had been designed to empower the internal factions that were more likely to be antagonistic to this course (Le Duc 2001).

At the beginning of the 1990s internal democratization was also extended to legislative candidate selection. The electoral committees were substituted by closed primaries including party members and trade unions members, but this time the aim was exactly the opposite from that of the left-wing reformers of the 1980s: «In practice, the parts were reversed: now they were the “moderate modernizers” that changed the rules to their advantage» (Valbruzzi 2005: 231). Indeed the new moderate leaders of the party (Kinnock, Smith) intended to expand individual participation of the members precisely in order to reduce the weight of the “ideologized” and extremist activists and of the trade unions (Scarrow 1996). The enlargement of the *selectorate* was in fact supposed to include in the process of selection new members who were likely to support moderate positions and centrist candidates with greater electoral appeal.

In 1993 the party approved some adjustments to the electoral college system. It was decided that the three sections should contribute equally (33.33 %), while the trade union block vote at Labour Party conferences was abolished and substituted by a one-man-one-vote (OMOV) system, representing a partial step towards greater intra-party democracy.

In any case, there were no strong variations in terms of candidacy requirements: candidates for the leadership had to be sitting MPs. Under the original rules of 1981 they were required to have the support of 5% of the caucus in order to be nominated, but in 1988 this requirement was raised to 20%. With the 1993 reform such threshold was partially softened: 12.5% in the case of a vacancy in the leadership, but the 20% threshold was held for challenges of an incumbent leader. Accordingly, as Le Duc (2001: 332) states: «Unlike American primaries, there is virtually no possibility that groups from outside the formal party structure may decide for their own reasons to enter the contest... So long as candidates can be recruited only from among Members of Parliament, and are required to have substantial caucus support to be nominated, any further move along the continuum towards greater “inclusiveness” might be expected to have relatively modest effects on candidate recruitment. Nevertheless, it might be capable of producing a different type of contest for the leadership in some circumstances, and possibly even a different outcome than caucus selection».

The reformed system was used in 1994 and it crowned Tony Blair as new Labour leader. Because of Blair’s victory in the 1997 general election and his long permanence in power, the Labour Party did not have to recur to new leadership ballots for many years. Even

in 2007, when Blair left the Premiership and the party leadership to the former Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, the recourse to the electoral college system failed. Actually, there were others would-be challengers to the possible new leader, Brown. However, no other candidate obtained the 12.5% of the support from the parliamentary party that was necessary to run. As a consequence, Brown's election as party leader was just a coronation, with no need to pass the electoral college's vote (Kenig 2008: 242; Cross and Blais 2012).

Accordingly, a new leadership race involving party and unions members too took place only in 2010, after Brown's defeat in the general election and consequent resignation as party leader. This race rewarded Ed Miliband, whose election was widely criticised, also because of the distortions produced by the trade unions' vote, as we will see later on. To respond to such criticisms and also to re-legitimise himself with party members (as the majority of them had voted for another candidate), the newly elected leader immediately committed to supporting a new reform of the leadership selection method. This reform materialized a few years later by adopting the proposals of the February 2014 Collins Report, headed by Ray Collins, trade unionist and former Labour General Secretary. Following the Collins review, the electoral college was replaced by a pure OMOV system, according to the model of closed primaries already experimented (and gone beyond) by many Western European parties<sup>1</sup>. Nonetheless, the candidacy requirements remained strict: the percentage of MPs' nominations needed to stand in the race was raised to 15%. Nor the electoral system did change: as in previous elections, voting had to be held according to the alternative vote (instant-runoff) system.

### *3. Empirical evidences from five Labour leadership races*

*1994 Labour leadership election.* – The 1994 Labour leadership election was the first to be held under the reformed electoral college system, with the three sections contributing equally (33.33 %) and the union block vote substituted by individual voting. The success in terms of grassroots participation was extraordinary, with more than 900,000 persons taking part in the vote, including all the people who were entitled to vote because they were members of the trade unions. From this point of view the *selectorate* may appear even larger than the one usually involved in normal closed primary. However the fact that the votes of hundreds of thousands party and trade unions members counted as the votes of a few hundred MPs/MEPs

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<sup>1</sup>The term «primary election» is actually unsuitable to define races intended to appoint internal party offices like the party leader, as it specifically refers to the selection of candidates to the elections (Pasquino 2006). Nonetheless, in the public opinion's mind the distinction is often quite vague and it is particularly difficult to be applied to the British case, as the figure of party leader and candidate for the Premiership overlap.



suggests to consider this kind of “mixed selectorate” as slightly less inclusive than a party membership vote.

As already explained, the formal candidacy requirements for taking part in the Labour leadership elections are particularly strict: in 1994 the would-be candidates (who were required to be sitting MPs) had to collect the formal support of 12.5% of the Labour Parliamentary Party. Beyond this, the 1994 race is a perfect example of a “sterilized offer”. Gordon Brown, the only possible contender of the intended winner Tony Blair, was successfully pressed to withdraw from the contest (also in exchange of some promises, such as the one to “inherit” the leadership in the future, as in fact happened in 2007). The aim of the party establishment (and Blair himself) was first of all to avoid a divisive contest. However, there was also the fear that if the two stood against each other, this may have allowed another candidate to come through the middle and win. Actually, this was an extremely unlikely possibility, particularly as the alternative vote system meant that Brown’s second preferences would go to Blair and vice-versa, ensuring that one of them would have won. It clearly testifies to the capacity of the Labour elite to indirectly affect the process of selection beyond the importance of *formal factors*.

In consequence of this, the 1994 leadership campaign mainly aimed to publicize the event, thereby giving the idea of a strong, democratic and united party and putting the newly designed leader Blair in the spotlight. Accordingly, there was no space for conflict or controversy among the three candidates and their supporters (also because there were no substantial differences in their programmes), which means negativity was very low<sup>2</sup>.

As expected, Blair easily won in the first turn, obtaining an absolute majority in all three sectors of the electoral college (see table 2 below). Actually, his percentage was decidedly lower than that obtained by Kinnock and Smith in the previous years, but because of the abolishment of the unions’ block vote this was on the whole predictable. In each section Blair won more votes than Prescott and Beckett put together. The support Blair received in the PLP was slightly greater than that collected among constituencies and particularly affiliated trade unions, but this does not cast any doubt about his clear-cut victory, also among the rank-and-file. In fact, it was precisely the introduction of the OMOV system that allowed such a huge success. Though many trade union executives were attracted by Blair’s bandwagon

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<sup>2</sup>*The Guardian* (27/06/1994) commented as such the opening event of the campaign: «The three Labour leadership contenders last night did their best to sweep aside any lingering memories of dissent in the shadow cabinet with a display of unity and mutual admiration [...] throughout the session there was no needed, no undercurrents and no subliminal messages designed to gain the advantage. The event had all the politeness that one never came to expect in the fratricidal Labour Party of the eighties». The spin remained the same even one month later: «The stately and calm campaign which ended yesterday would have been inconceivable at the start of the 1980s» (22/07/1994).

during the campaign, the leaders of several important unions unsuccessfully tried to sway their members against him, a tactic that could have worked with the old block voting system. That said, the level of competitiveness was clearly low. As also the negativity in the electoral campaign was very low (or totally absent), we can maintain the leadership race was not divisive.

*2007 Labour leadership (uncontested) election.* – Gordon Brown’s appointment in 2007 turned out to be the most “exclusive” Labour LR since decades. Party and unions members were not called to vote due to the lack of other contenders, while MPs intervened only in the pre-selection phase. Thus, in this case it is much more appropriate to talk about an uncontested race rather than a sterilized candidate offer. In any case, *formal factors* prevented the only Brown’s official opponent John McDonnell to run, as he was not able to collect the 45 nominations required (stopping at 8.5% when 12.5% was needed). Yet, we may suspect that *political factors* too had played a role. In fact, many other possible candidates decided not to participate and supported the intended winner Brown (primarily supported by the outgoing leader Blair), who was also expected to become Prime Minister just after his election to Labour leadership. Accordingly, opposing Brown as party leader would have appeared quite a risky move for prominent Labour MPs, especially those aiming to enter his Cabinet. As Brown turned out to be a single candidate, the combination of no competitiveness and no negativity (due to the absence of a formal electoral campaign) accounts for the lack of divisiveness.

*2010 Labour leadership election.* – In 2010 the *selectorate* was the same than 1994, but despite the interest that might have been raised by the uncertainty of the outcome and the fact that a real leadership race had been lacking for 16 years, the number of voters decreased significantly compared to 1994. Taken together, constituent members (around 200,000 in total, as party membership had declined in the previous years) and affiliated members (almost 5 million) who took part in the vote did not go beyond 340,000 persons.

On the contrary, with the formal requirements being equal, *candidacy* inclusiveness increased significantly compared to both 1994 and (obviously) 2007. We can hold that *formal factors* partly contributed to reducing the candidate offer, as some minor figures were not able to collect the required signatures, but it is hard to claim that the excluded candidates would have had real possibilities to win. Rather, the influence of the party elite in forming and eventually manipulating the candidate list was questionable. In fact, differently from the 1994 leadership race, this time no possible challengers were forced to abandon because of *political*

*factors*. Actually, the Miliband brothers were strongly pressured by the party executives to decide between them who should go ahead, as had happened with Blair and Brown 16 years before; this time, however, no one agreed to step down. As a consequence, contrary to Blair in 1994, there were no natural leaders in the race. According to the polls, especially at the beginning, the Blairite David Miliband was the front-runner. As Blair had, he appeared to be the most likely winner of the leadership contest (*viability*), and he was also widely considered as the most competitive Labour candidate in the general election (*electability*) (Dolez and Laurent 2007). He had the support of the bulk of the Shadow Cabinet and the indirect endorsement of the former PM, Blair. However, his minor brother Ed appeared as the compromise candidate, so he was expected to get the highest number of second preferences. Accordingly, if David was not able to win by an absolute majority in the first turn (as was quite likely), Ed could be favoured over his elder brother (Denham and Dorey 2017). Moreover, the closer the ballot day came, the more the polls suggested that David's advantage was falling.

A look at the other candidates shows that Diane Abbot had no chances. Being the only candidate lacking Cabinet experience, she represented the real *outsider* of the race. Still, there was a need felt for the left to put up a candidate, and the party was in general agreement that it was desirable to have a woman involved. Balls had more of a chance than Burnham, but once Ed Miliband had decided to run, Ball's chances diminished considerably, as it was quickly apparent that the younger Miliband had more success in winning the support of the unions and of Gordon Brown's followers. That said, despite the "artificiality" of some candidacies (Pemberton and Wickham Jones, 2012), the high number of contenders representing different political orientations suggests a low degree of control by the party elite over the phase of pre-selection and an open candidate offer.

Thus, the leadership race was no longer a legitimizing event but a real contest with an uncertain outcome. In fact, the main interest for the media was the "storytelling" of the unusual struggle for the leadership between the two Miliband brothers. Rather than guarantee a fair competition, this "fratricidal" struggle implied that political and personal issues were merged, especially considering that the two had quite different ideas regarding what direction the party should take in the future (Dorey and Denham 2011: 299-302). Ed and David avoided attacking each other directly, but the clashes between their supporters were fierce. David was portrayed by Ed's supporters as aloof and elitist and was criticized for being the candidate of Blair and the Blairites, which meant being too close to business and the wealthy elite, a supporter of the decision to invade Iraq, and too far from the party's roots and the needs of

ordinary people. In turn, David’s followers accused Ed of being an opportunist for standing against his brother and moving to the left (adopting positions which he had never voiced in government and which would ultimately lead to another electoral defeat), stressing his inexperience in government and claiming he was too close to the unions and the failed Brown leadership (Wintour *et al.* 2010; Jobson and Wickam-Jones 2011; Dorey and Denham 2016). Accordingly, what started off as a sedate and dull campaign gradually came alive in the last month, when people finally realized that Ed Miliband might really win; the result was a much more “negative” campaign than had been expected at the beginning.

TAB. 2 - 1994 and 2010 Labour leadership elections by the electoral college.

	<i>Candidate</i>	MPs/MEPs	Members	Affiliates	<i>Total</i>
<i>First Round 1994</i>	Tony Blair	198 (60.5%)	100,313 (58.2%)	407,637 (52.3%)	57.0 %
	John Prescott	64 (19.6%)	42,053 (24.4%)	221,367 (28.4%)	24.1 %
	Margaret Beckett	65 (19.9%)	29,990 (17.4%)	150,422 (19.3%)	18.9 %
<i>First Round 2010</i>	David Miliband	111 (13.9%)	55,905 (14.7%)	58,189 (9.2%)	37.8 %
	Ed Miliband	84 (10.5%)	37,980 (9.9%)	87,585(13.9%)	34.3 %
	Ed Balls	40 (5.0%)	12,831 (3.4%)	21,618 (3.3%)	11.8 %
	Andy Burnham	24 (3.0%)	10,844 (2.8%)	17,904 (2.8%)	8.7 %
	Diane Abbott	7 (0.9%)	9,314 (2.5%)	25,938 (4.1%)	7.4 %
<i>Second Round 2010</i>	David Miliband	111 (14.0%)	57,128 (15.1%)	61,336 (9.8%)	38.9 %
	Ed Miliband	88 (11.1%)	42,176 (11,1%)	95,335(15.3%)	37.5 %
	Ed Balls	41 (5.2%)	14,510 (3.8%)	26,441 (4.2%)	13.2 %
	Andy Burnham	24 (3.0%)	12,498 (3.3%)	25,528 (4.1%)	10.4 %
<i>Third Round 2010</i>	David Miliband	125 (15.8%)	60,375 (16.1%)	66,889(10.8%)	42.7 %
	Ed Miliband	96 (12.1%)	46,697 (12.4%)	102,882(16.7%)	41.3 %
	Ed Balls	43 (5.4%)	18,114 (4.8%)	35,512 (5.8%)	16.0 %
<i>Fourth R. 2010</i>	David Miliband	140 (17.9%)	66,814 (18.1%)	80,266 (13.4%)	49.4 %
	Ed Miliband	122 (15.4%)	55,992 (15.2%)	119,405(19.9%)	50.6%

Source: Labour Party website.

At the time of voting, as largely predicted, none of the candidates obtained the absolute majority by counting only first preferences. Consequently, according to the alternative vote system, the least voted candidate Diane Abbott was eliminated, and her second preferences were redistributed among the other four candidates. Later on Burnham and Balls were also eliminated, until only the two Milibands were left in the fourth round. Finally, Ed was able to win out, though with an advantage of only one percentage point. Thus, the risk dreaded by some observers, i.e. having a party leader that the MPs had rejected, like Iain Duncan Smith in the 2001 Tory leadership race, seemed to have come true.

The distribution of the votes in the three sections of the electoral college showed David to be the candidate preferred by the PLP (111 votes – i.e. first preferences - against 84 for Ed). But in the three successive rounds Ed confirmed that he was slightly preferred to David by both the MPs and the party members who had voted for the other three candidates, as he received more second preferences than his brother: 38 against 29 from the PLP; 18,012 against 10,909 from the membership (Dorey and Denham 2011). In any case, David still held an advantage of about 20 votes in the PLP section and 15,000 votes in the constituencies. Accordingly, it is hard to claim that the “oligarchic” choice made by the PLP was reversed by the “democratic” vote of the grass-roots: not only was David the candidate preferred by the PLP, but he also had the support of the relative majority of individual members in the constituencies, who represent the normal *selectorate* in closed primaries. In fact, most observers agree that Ed’s victory depended mainly on the trade union members’ vote (Jobson and Wickham-Jones 2011; Pemberton and Wickham-Jones 2012; Baldini and Pritoni 2016), although Dorey and Denham (2011) suggest Ed won because he was the most “acceptable” candidate to all sections of the Party.

However, differently from 1994, this time the combination of both negativity in the electoral campaign and the extremely close final results of the two main candidates made this a really divisive race. These premises foreshadowed a troubled leadership for the newly elected Miliband, as the following events confirmed. In fact, his five-year-long leadership was often putted into question both inside and outside the party, though never openly challenged before his electoral defeat (Bale 2015).

*2015 Labour leadership election.* – The 2015 LR was the first to be held under the reformed system approved in 2010. Candidates had to be elected by members and registered supporters who get the right to vote by paying only 3 pounds. Members of the affiliated trade unions were allowed to vote as well, but they needed additionally to register as Labour supporters to do so. All votes had to be weighted equally. Considering that the Italian and French model of

open primaries envisages the payment of at least 1-2 euros to participate in the vote and registration in a list of supporters sharing the party's (or coalition)'s values, the new system adopted by the Labour didn't look very distant from that of open primaries in Southern and Continental Europe. Moreover, the interest in the new leadership race – where the party membership had finally become decisive – along with the facility of registration, encouraged a lot of people to join the party in the weeks preceding the ballot. The Labour Party had indeed grown rapidly in size since the defeat in May's general elections, with the total number of people signing up to vote in the leadership contest exceeding 600,000. The number of full party members grew from just over 200,000 in May to almost 300,000, with a further 121,000 people paying £3 to become registered supporters and almost 190,000 joining up through their trade unions. However, there was also a significant number of people (about 3,000) who were excluded from registration because they were identified as members and/or supporters of other parties. Finally, turnout for the vote was 422,871 (76.3%) out of the 554,272 eligible voters, with 343,995 votes (81.3%) casted online, which also made this the largest online vote ever experimented in the UK. Accordingly, the absolute number of voters was significantly higher than in the 2010 LR (but not the 1994 LR), where trade union members were directly involved, placing this leadership race among the most highly participated closed primaries in Europe.

Instead, the level of *candidacy* inclusiveness remains more or less the same compared to 2010, even though the preconditions were largely different. In terms of formal candidacy requirements there were not significant changes: the percentage of MPs/MEPs endorsements needed to present the candidacy was raised to 15%, but the significant reduction in Labour parliamentary representation meant that 35 signatures were enough to run. Because of the loss of (or renunciation to) their parliamentary seats, some major figures of the Labour Party – such as the former Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer and former 2010 LR candidate Ed Balls, and the intended winner of the 2010 LR David Miliband – were automatically excluded from the contest. Other plausible candidates ruled themselves out, including the former Home Secretary Alan Johnson, while the Shadow Secretary of State for Education Chuka Umunna, the new “rising star” of the Labour Party, withdraw a few days after presenting his candidacy, citing press intrusion into his family life (Quinn 2015). Thus, the former minister Andy Burnham was the initial front-runner (Dorey and Denham 2016, 270).

The candidacy of the 66 year-old ardent socialist and anti-war campaigner Jeremy Corbyn emerged only at the very end. He was a well-known figure on the party's left, but

differently from the other race contenders (mainly Burnham and Cooper) he had never had any significant role within the party or in government; this was also because he often supported positions which were radically divergent from the ones embraced by the New Labour party establishment. For this reason the first serious hurdle on his way to the leadership was to find the required 35 nominations by Labour MPs in the space of only one week, while the other candidates moved much sooner and did not have any difficulty in reaching the threshold (Burnham 68, Cooper 59, Kendall 41). However, as in the case of the 2010 left-wing candidate Diane Abbott, there were a number of MPs (including the front-runner Burnham himself) who agreed to formally support Corbyn's candidacy only in order to provide representation to a wider range of opinions, though they made it clear that they would not support his campaign and would not advise their electors to vote for him (Dorey and Denham 2016). Accordingly, rather than excluding an unwelcome contender, the party elite pledged to enlarge candidate participation, clearly not understanding Corbyn's "dangerousness". Therefore, even though *formal factors* played a certain part in reducing the number of potential contenders (excluding no-MPs but also some minor candidates who were not able to reach 35 nominations), while others decided not to run autonomously, we can certainly conclude that the candidate offer was open.

While the 2010 campaign was largely presented as a "fratricidal struggle" between the Milibands, this time the disputes among the candidates did not absorb the media's attention in the same way. Yet, the campaign finally turned out to be even more tense and compelling for the national media and public opinion, with the "storytelling" being progressively concentrated on a single candidate (Corbyn), rather than being portrayed as a two-horse race. In fact, in the weeks approaching the ballot, the pre-electoral polls started to suggest that Corbyn might win. This triggered off a virtuous circle that led the strongest unions to jump on his bandwagon (to the detriment of Burnham) and encouraged more and more people (especially young people), enthused by his anti-austerity message, to register as Labour supporters.

On the other hand, Corbyn's leap in the polls created panic among many Labour MPs, especially those who had supported his candidacy just to "enlarge the debate". The fear that Corbyn's success would irremediably split the party and damage its electoral prospects, together with the unfamiliarity with the new system, aroused serious controversies concerning risks of infiltrations, as much as some Labour MPs called for the election's suspension (Quinn 2016, Dorey and Denham 2016). Accordingly, while the other three contenders avoided to directly attack the front-runner, the most severe criticism of Corbyn came from actors not

directly involved in the race: the media, opinion leaders and Labour personalities, including Tony Blair. For his part, in line with the image of “calm revolutionary”, Corbyn kept a low profile throughout the campaign, avoiding any attacks on his internal enemies or New Labour’s past mistakes, rather preferring to direct all his criticism against the Conservative government and/or the malfunctions of the capitalist system and the failure of European austerity policies in general (Dorey and Denham 2016). That said, the level of negativity was rather high.

On 8 May 2015 Corbyn resulted the most widely voted candidate, something that was absolutely unforeseen at the very beginning but had been anticipated by the most recent polls. Yet, the magnitude of his success exceeded expectations. In fact, this candidate, who entered the game as an outsider, won the absolute majority of votes by a 60%, a percentage even larger than Blair’s in 1994. Accordingly, there was no need to look at the second preferences expressed by voters for the other candidates, which constituted the real obstacle to Corbyn’s victory. The data shown in table 3 confirm the impression that most of the new people who decided to register as Labour members were actually Corbyn supporters, as he got almost 84% of the votes expressed by this category (representing 35% of the total voters). In fact, Dorey and Dunham (2016) pointed out that Corbyn’s election was prompted by these “external voters” as much as Ed Miliband’s election was attributed to the unions’ support. This is a bit ironic, as the dismantling of the electoral college system in favour of closed primaries was just intended to avoid “external” distortions in the leadership selection process. Yet, Corbyn advantage decreased significantly among affiliated supporters and party members, but in these two categories his percentage was also more than double that of the second candidate, Burnham. This demonstrates that, differently from Ed Miliband five years before, the left-wing veteran got a resounding victory among the party grass-roots, contradicting the worries of all those who denounced the risks that the leadership election might be “corrupted” by radical voters who strategically registered for Labour at the very last minute. On the other hand, this time the vote of the Trade Unions was not qualitatively or quantitatively decisive, as it adjusted on the average result obtained by Corbyn and weighed less than 17% in the final outcome, although the Unions’ support for Corbyn during the electoral campaign was strong (Pemberton and Wickham-Jones 2015; Baldini and Pritoni 2016). Accordingly, we may claim that the level of divisiveness due to the negativity of the electoral campaign was partly balanced by the low degree of competitiveness. Yet, the magnitude of Corbyn’s success did not give him the internal support he needed to strengthen



his leadership, which indeed in the first year revealed itself to be even more fragile than Ed Milibands' had been.

TAB. 3 - 2015 and 2016 Labour closed primaries.

	<i>Candidate</i>	Party members	Registered supp.	Affiliated supp.	<i>Total</i>
<i>First Round</i>	Jeremy Corbyn	121,751 (49.6%)	88,449 (83.8%)	41,217 (57.6%)	251,417 (59.5%)
<i>2015</i>	Andy Burnham	55,698 (22.7%)	6,160 (5.8%)	18,604 (26.0%)	80,462 (19.0%)
	Yvette Cooper	54,470 (22.2%)	8,415 (8.0%)	9,043 (12.6%)	71,928 (17.0%)
	Liz Kendall	13,601 (5.5%)	2,574 (2.4%)	2,682 (3.8%)	18,857 (4.5%)
<i>First R. 2016</i>	Jeremy Corbyn	168,216 (59.0%)	84,918 (69.9%)	60,075 (60.2%)	313,209 (61.8%)
	Owen Smith	116,960 (41.0%)	36,599 (30.1%)	39,670 (39.8%)	193,229 (38.2%)

Source: Labour Party website, Quinn 2015.

*2016 Labour leadership election.* – Just one year after his election, Corbyn's leadership was upset by a vote of no-confidence by the Labour MPs, which opened the way for a new leadership race. It was also a consequence of the “leave” success in the referendum intended to decide whether or not the UK was to stay in the European Union, since most Labour MPs believed Corbyn did not convincingly support the “remain” campaign.

Following Corbyn's removal, there was a sudden hike in new registrations as Labour members. About 60,000 persons joined the party during the leadership crisis, thus bringing the new total to over 500,000 members, so that Labour became the largest political party in Western Europe. However, the Labour National Executive Committee did not allow members who had joined the party in the past six months to vote in the leadership election, so approximately 130,000 new members were excluded from voting<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, the fee for registered supporters was increased from 3 to £25, thus posing stricter limitations on the *selectorate*. Nonetheless, more than 500,000 people took part in the vote (76.6% of eligible voters), with about 50,000 new members voting as compared to 2015, and a larger participation of affiliated supporters, while registered supporters did not increase significantly (Dorey and Denham 2016b).

The *candidacy* dimension presents various facets: on the one hand it is fairly clear that the majority of the party elite was largely hostile to Corbyn. Moreover, the fact that Angela Eagle – the first person to launch her candidacy against the incumbent leader – decided not to run in order to enlarge the chances of the second candidate, Owen Smith, to beat Corbyn also suggests a certain level of elite control in the pre-selection phase.

<sup>3</sup>Actually, on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2016 the High Court sentenced that this decision was contrary to the Labour Party Rule Book, and entitled new members to vote. However, the NEC immediately appealed the decision, and on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2016 the Court of Appeal reversed the High Court's decision, concluding that, under the party rules, the NEC had discretion to set any reasonable criteria for members to vote.

Nonetheless, the Labour elite renounced the possibility of tampering with Corbyn's chances of re-election, as the NEC did not have the audacity to force the incumbent to collect the MP/MEP endorsements to present his candidacy (which would have been very difficult for him). It is hard to say whether this decision was suggested by a mistaken calculation, according to which Corbyn would lose anyway (although most of the polls suggested he was favoured over Smith), or rather if it was imposed by the fear of a grass-roots revolt. The fact remains that it was precisely the relaxation of the *formal factors* that allowed Corbyn's participation, thus suggesting an open offer with two candidates with realistic possibilities to win.

The elite's coup against Corbyn foreshadowed a very tense leadership campaign, as the issue at stake (at least for Corbyn's opponents) was the party's very unity and future. On his part, the challenger, Smith, attacked Corbyn for his position on Brexit, presenting himself as the person able to prevent a party split and give Labour back a governing party profile. Nonetheless, the closer the ballot came, the more Corbyn's lead appeared stronger, which incited Smith to pursue his opponent's leftist policy agenda, by proposing renationalisation of the railways, increased public spending and enhanced workers' rights. This did not help to convince the Corbynites, at the same time as it probably annoyed the anti-Corbynites. On the other hand, it was quite easy for Corbyn to frame the contest as Members vs MPs, Grassroots vs Westminster. All this suggests that the level of negativity was as high as in 2015.

The result was announced on 24th September 2016 and Corbyn's success was even stronger than the year before. As shown by table 3 above, he got almost 62% of the vote, gaining about 60,000 votes more than in 2015, of which the majority came from a significant increase in party members' votes (almost 50,000), but also from a slight increase in the trade union affiliates' votes (more than 20,000). On the contrary, he lost some votes among registered supporters (about 4,000) compared to 2015. This suggests that many of the people who decided to become registered Labour supporters in 2015, in order to support Corbyn's candidacy in his first leadership election, subsequently decided to join the Labour Party as full members once their preferred candidate was elected leader (Dorey and Denham 2016b). On the other hand, differently from 2015 – when the overwhelming majority of registered supporters turned out to be Corbyn's supporters - in 2016 there was also a certain percentage of people who decided to register just in order to hinder the reaffirmation of the incumbent leader. In fact Smith got more votes among registered supporters than the sum of the three other contenders running against Corbyn for the leadership in 2015.

That said, the very high level of the campaign negativity combined with a very scarcely competitive race suggests a level of divisiveness very similar to the year before. Anyway, at least until the very good performance in 2017 general election, Corbyn's leadership constantly appeared at stake.

#### 4. Comparing five Labour leadership races

The table below compares the five LRs under consideration on the basis of the different indicators discussed above. The last row also introduces a very basic measure of electoral performance: Labour vote in the general election and gains or losses compared to the previous election. It helps me to provide some brief reflections concerning a possible link between the level of inclusiveness and divisiveness of the LR and Stark's criteria for leadership selection (mainly acceptability and electability).

TAB. 4 - Comparing five Labour leadership elections.

Leadership race	1994	2007	2010	2015	2016
<i>Selectorate</i>	Electoral college	PLP	Electoral college	Party members	Party members
<i>Number of voters*</i>	333 (98% PLP) 172,000 (70% M) 780,000 (20% A)	313+39 MPs (nominations)	271 (98% PLP) 127,000 (72% M) 211,000 (12% A)	422,871 (76,3%)	506,438 (77.6%)
<i>Number of candidates</i>	3	1 (2)	5	4	2
<i>Candidacy (formal factors)</i>	Sitting MPs collecting 42 PLP nominations (12,5%)	Sitting MPs; 45 PLP nominations (12,5%)	Sitting MPs; 33 PLP nominations (12,5%)	Sitting MPs; 35 PLP nominations (15%)	51 PLP nomination (20% to challenge the incumbent)
<i>Candidacy (type of offer)</i>	Sterilized offer	Uncontested/ sterilized offer	Open offer	Open offer	Open offer
<i>Negativity</i>	Very low	No campaign	High	Very High	Very high
<i>Index of competitiveness*</i>	0.671	0	0.988	0.595	0.764
<i>Winner</i>	Tony Blair (57%)	Gordon Brown (88% nominations)	Ed Miliband (50,6%)	Jeremy Corbyn (59,5%)	Jeremy Corbyn (61,8%)
<i>Polls' favourite</i>	Tony Blair	No polls	David Miliband	Burnham first, then Corbyn	Jeremy Corbyn
<i>Elite's favourite</i>	Tony Blair	Gordon Brown	David Miliband	Burnham and Cooper	Owen Smith
<i>Labour votes in the election</i>	1997 election 43.2% (+8.8%)	2010 election 29.0% (-6.2%)	2015 election 30.4% (+1.5%)		2017 election 40.4% (+9.6%)

My elaboration. M = party members, A = trade unions' affiliates, PLP = parliamentary Labour party.

\* Precise data concerning 1994 and 2010 party members and trade unions members' turnout are not available, so both the absolute number and the percentage shown are approximate.

\*\* The index is calculated subtracting to 100 the percentage distance between first and second candidate (Piereson and Smith 1975), and the outcome is divided for 100 in order to have an index ranges from 0 (absence of competitiveness) to 1 (maximum of competitiveness).

To summarize, the inclusiveness of the 2015 and 2016 LRs is higher than the 2010 LR. All three races were very inclusive in terms of candidate offer, but the 2015 and 2016 closed primaries are clearly more inclusive in terms of *selectorate*. On the contrary, the 1994 LR appeared much less inclusive than the other three races because of the “sterilized” candidate offer, although the *selectorate* was the same as the 2010 LR (and actual participation was much larger). Yet, 2007 LR is not at all inclusive.

As far as divisiveness is concerned, the 2010 race appeared slightly more divisive than the 2015 and 2016 closed primaries because of the very close final results, although the level of *negativity* in the electoral campaign was slightly lower. In this case the difference from the 1994 and 2007 LRs is even higher, as the former was characterized by a very friendly campaign, and Tony Blair’s success was ample, while in the latter case competitiveness and negativity were absent.

This may explain the reason why in 1994 the electoral college system produced Blair’s triumph, pleasing all the observers – as Blair was seen as far superior to his opponents Margaret Beckett and John Prescott in terms of acceptability, electability and competence (Stark 1996: 127–131) – while in 2010 the same system barely rewarded a candidate like Ed Miliband, producing significant discontent. In fact, David Miliband appeared as the strongest candidate in terms of both electability and competence and he was also the candidate preferred by the party elite, although he was less “acceptable” to the electoral college as a whole (Dorey and Denham, 2011; Jobson and Wickham-Jones, 2011; Pemberton and Wickham-Jones 2013; Quinn 2012: 64–82; Denham and Dorey 2017).

In sum, while the number of persons entitled to vote did not change, the 1994 race was much less inclusive than the 2010 one because the candidate offer was constrained. This clearly affected all the other indicators considered here. It is probable that if Gordon Brown had finally agreed to run against Blair, the latter would have won anyhow. However, such a LR would have turned out to be more divisive, producing a tougher electoral campaign, far closer final results and a split within the party establishment<sup>4</sup>. This is why in 2010, too, there were many attempts to convince one of the two brothers to withdraw from the contest. The fact that this did not happen on the one hand contributed to democratize the race: not only were there more candidates running, but different political orientations were also represented.

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<sup>4</sup>Just after Blair’s election as Labour leader Brown declared: «Tony and I have worked so closely in the past [...] that we could not have ended up fighting one another [...] people would have questioned not just us but our ideas. It would not have done Labour any good at all [...] I think the party has made the right choice» (*The Guardian*, 04/08/1994).

On the other, it inevitably increased the level of divisiveness, contributing to weaken Miliband's leadership and perhaps also his electoral appeal, as a divisive LR is likely to harm the electoral prospects of the winner. Instead, the two LRs rewarding Corbyn finally revealed less divisive (according to the two indicators that I considered) because he was elected with a larger margin, though the primaries' campaign was as much negative. Yet, it is not sufficient to explain why he had a much better electoral performance than his predecessor(s), also considering that until few weeks before the general election Corbyn's polls was even worse than Miliband's ones. Either way, the hostility met by Corbyn before and after his elections as new Labour leader in 2015 and 2016 suggests a very high level of divisiveness. Accordingly we can suspect that even if Ed Miliband (or possibly David) had won by a larger percentage, this would hardly have kept him from having to face internal opposition. Still, many observers criticised Ed Miliband's election because of the distortion produced by the unions, but even supposing that a system of closed (or even open) primaries would have rewarded David rather than Ed, it is possible to suspect that the leadership race would have produced some tensions anyway.

In turn, it is hard to guess whether Corbyn would also have won (twice) with the old electoral college system: in both races he had no chance of success among Labour MPs, but *ceteris paribus* he would have maintained the majority of votes among the other two categories (party members and affiliated). Still, Corbyn would hardly have reached the absolute majority of votes in the first round, and he would probably have been disadvantaged by the count of the other candidates' second and third preferences (Dorey and Denham 2016: 278; Baldini and Pritoni 2016: 157). Clearly, he was not an acceptable candidate for Labour MPs/MEPs, also because he was widely considered a non-electable candidate. From this point of view, Corbyn's case is different from Ed Miliband's, who remained the second best candidate for Labour MPs. Accordingly we could maintain that the passage from the electoral college to the closed primary provides a major role in (s)electing the Labour leader to the extra-parliamentary party. Corbyn's support among party members outside the House of Commons was indeed totally at odds with the dislike and distrust among the parliamentary party. This clearly had serious implications for party cohesion and unity, and consequently for electability or credibility as a potential "party of government". In fact, many Corbynites preferred Labour remained a "pure" Socialist Party out of government if the alternative was "selling-out" and abandoning Socialism in government, as Blair and New Labour did. Indeed, according to the polls, most of Corbyn's primary voters did not support him because they were looking for a candidate able to win the general election, but mainly because they appreciated his political

proposals (Dorey and Denham 2016: 277). Thus, the reasons for his election mainly rest in the fact that, as a consequence of the 2015 electoral defeat, ideological and policy concerns have become more important selection criteria for the Labour grassroots than considerations of a party's internal unity and electability (Cross and Blais 2012; Dorey and Denham 2016-2017; Quinn 2016).

Concerning this it should be emphasised that while Stark's criterion of "acceptability" is often defined as the capacity to unite the Party it can also be interpreted differently. Corbyn's "acceptability" towards much of Labour's 2015 and 2016 *selectors* was not his unifying potential (on the contrary, it was recognised that he would be a divisive figure), but the fact that he symbolised a clear break with Blairism and New Labour. Although many observers interpreted this as a kind of electoral suicide, it is worth noting that the New Labour successful "recipes" of the late 1990s were apparently no longer appealing after the economic crisis, and from this point of view Corbyn's proposals were mistakenly interpreted as electorally unsuitable.

In fact, the leadership contest was held immediately after the second election defeat in a row, and it invariably entailed a rethinking over the reasons for the defeat. During his leadership tenure, Ed Miliband was not able (or willing) to overcome the New Labour era. At the time of the 2010 LR he was widely criticised for being an opportunist in distancing himself from policies which he had supported while he was serving under Brown's government. On the other hand, the grassroots and the unions – who decisively contributed to his election as Labour leader – were progressively disappointed because he proved unable to promote an ideological restructuring of the party. This was not a problem faced by Corbyn in 2015, as he had never been in government, and had repeatedly opposed (New) Labour's policy stance. Thus, while it was quite easy for the Conservatives to portray Miliband as an undecided leader during the 2015 electoral campaign, Corbyn's 2017 campaign for anticipated elections probably turned out to be much more convincing even because his "coherence" cannot be questioned. Accordingly, we could hypothesise that for all those voters who felt the need for a significant programmatic reverse, Corbyn (also thanks to his greater charisma compared to his predecessor) progressively came to represent a serious alternative to May's government, although his ideological positioning was largely criticised by the media and external and internal opponents. Moreover, the space between the leadership election and the general election is long enough to allow for a number of intervening factors, which means that the level of "electability" measured at the time of the leadership contest is necessarily different from the one which would be assessed in the weeks preceding the general vote. In

fact, contrary to the expectations, Corbyn's electoral appeal increased during the last months of the electoral campaign, up to the Labour's remarkable resurgence in the 2017 election (Dorey 2017). On the contrary, at the time of his unopposed appointment as party leader in 2007, Gordon Brown appeared as an acceptable, competent and electable candidate, but then he faced a serious defeat in 2010 general elections.

##### *5. Concluding remarks*

Is there a trade-off between maximising intra-party democracy and ensuring party unity and electability? Is there something suggesting that inclusiveness and divisiveness are not two separate concepts but rather two extremes of the same variable? My findings do not provide a clear answer to this question: while it might be good to have a large number of voters involved, is possible to suspect that leaving them with too much freedom of choice (avoiding to intervene on the candidate offer) increases the risk of a divisive contest, whose aftermath is likely to be disastrous. Nonetheless, though a constrained candidate offer may help avoid a divisive race, what comes next is hard to predict. As many leadership races in other European countries have demonstrated, succeeding in a non-divisive race does not guarantee the newly elected leader from internal and external challenges and even less it guarantees electoral success. Moreover, the party elite's ability to intervene in the pre-selection phase (but also its willingness to accept a significant reform of the leadership selection rules) does not leave the political context out of consideration.

In this respect, Corbyn's victories appear to be linked to a shift of paradigm for UK middle-and-lower-class left-wing voters, increasingly damaged by the European economic crisis, rather than an accidental and unforeseen consequence of the new system of election adopted by the Labour Party. Actually the opening to registered supporters might have had a certain relevance for Corbyn's first success in 2015, but it is hard to deny that Corbyn was able to convince a large part of the Labour grass-roots with his radical proposals. In fact, also the election of Ed Miliband may be interpreted as a first clue of this ideological shift by the Labour grass-roots (but Miliband was not seen as much convincing as Corbyn), something that the party elite itself was not able to oppose. On the contrary, the success of Tony Blair in 1994 took place inserted in a context wherein both the party establishment and public opinion agreed on the necessity for Labour to renew its image, rethink its ideological rigour and loosen its traditional relations with the trade unions, in order to appeal to a larger audience and get back into power after almost two decades of opposition. Thus, it is likely that the end of the New Labour era also reflected in the leadership selection procedures and outcome.

In this respect, we could suspect that the “democratisation” of the leadership selection procedure in 2010 was also intended to make the leadership more attentive to grass-roots’ stances, as previous Labour leaders and Prime Ministers were supposed to have enjoyed too much autonomy from the mass party. Thus, on the one hand the extra-parliamentary *selectorate* for Labour’s leadership contests – including the trade unions, party members and registered supporters – reflects and reinforces the inherent tension between being a parliamentary party focused on winning general elections, and being a mass, extra-parliamentary party, seeking to hold its MPs and leaders accountable to the Party outside the Parliament. On the other it is worth noting that the image of Labour MPs acting on behalf of their constituents *vs.* party grass-roots which are only concern about “betrayal of socialism” is a bit unwarranted. Corbyn’s satisfactory electoral performance perhaps reveals that the extra-parliamentary party was more connected with (a part of) British voters’ moods than most of the Labour establishment.

In conclusion, the political context seems much more relevant than the selection system used. This explains why the same electoral college system produced different outcomes in 1994 and in 2010, whereas the two different systems of the electoral college and closed primaries in the end both resulted in apparently controversial outcomes in terms of acceptability and electability. Thus, the level of inclusiveness and/or divisiveness of a leadership race cannot be evaluated without considering intra-party dynamics and external influences. Similarly, the three criteria (acceptability, electability and competence) that are supposed to guide *selectorates* in their search for a party leader might be misleading if we do not consider that they can be interpreted in different ways by the party elite and the grass-roots, or simply that their meaning is likely to evolve over the time.



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TAB.1 - Labour leadership elections (1983-1992).

	Candidate	MPs/MEPs	Members	Affiliates	Total
1983	Neil Kinnock	14.8 %	27.5 %	29.0 %	71.3 %
	Roy Hattersley	7.8 %	0.6 %	10.9 %	19.3 %
	Eric Heffer	4.3 %	1.9 %	0.1 %	6.3 %
	Peter Shore	3.1 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	3.1 %
1988	Neil Kinnock	24.8 %	24.1 %	39.7 %	88.6 %
	Tony Benn	5.2 %	5.9 %	0.3 %	11.4 %
1992	John Smith	23.2 %	29.3 %	38.5 %	91.0 %
	Bryan Gould	6.8 %	0.7 %	1.5 %	9.0 %

Source: <http://www.election.demon.co.uk/lableader.html>; Le Duc (2001).

TAB. 2 -1994 and 2010 Labour leadership elections by the electoral college.

	Candidate	MPs/MEPs	Members	Affiliates	Total
<i>First Round</i> 1994	Tony Blair	198 (60.5%)	100,313 (58.2%)	407,637 (52.3%)	57.0 %
	John Prescott	64 (19.6%)	42,053 (24.4%)	221,367 (28.4%)	24.1 %
	Margaret Beckett	65 (19.9%)	29,990 (17.4%)	150,422 (19.3%)	18.9 %
	David Miliband	111 (13.9%)	55,905 (14.7%)	58,189 (9.2%)	37.8 %
<i>First Round</i> 2010	Ed Miliband	84 (10.5%)	37,980 (9.9%)	87,585(13.9%)	34.3 %
	Ed Balls	40 (5.0%)	12,831 (3.4%)	21,618 (3.3%)	11.8 %
	Andy Burnham	24 (3.0%)	10,844 (2.8%)	17,904 (2.8%)	8.7 %
	Diane Abbott	7 (0.9%)	9,314 (2.5%)	25,938 (4.1%)	7.4 %
	David Miliband	111 (14.0%)	57,128 (15.1%)	61,336 (9.8%)	38.9 %
<i>Second Round</i> 2010	Ed Miliband	88 (11.1%)	42,176 (11,1%)	95,335(15.3%)	37.5 %
	Ed Balls	41 (5.2%)	14,510 (3.8%)	26,441 (4.2%)	13.2 %
	Andy Burnham	24 (3.0%)	12,498 (3.3%)	25,528 (4.1%)	10.4 %
	David Miliband	125 (15.8%)	60,375 (16.1%)	66,889(10.8%)	42.7 %
<i>Third Round</i> 2010	Ed Miliband	96 (12.1%)	46,697 (12.4%)	102,882(16.7%)	41.3 %
	Ed Balls	43 (5.4%)	18,114 (4.8%)	35,512 (5.8%)	16.0 %

<i>Fourth R. 2010</i>	David Miliband	140 (17.9%)	66,814 (18.1%)	80,266 (13.4%)	49.4%
	Ed Miliband	122 (15.4%)	55,992 (15.2%)	119,405(19.9%)	50.6%

Source: Labour Party website.

TAB. 3 - 2015 and 2016 Labour closed primaries.

	<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Party members</i>	<i>Registered supp.</i>	<i>Affiliated supp.</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>First Round 2015</i>	Jeremy Corbyn	121,751 (49.6%)	88,449 (83.8%)	41,217 (57.6%)	251,417 (59.5%)
	Andy Burnham	55,698 (22.7%)	6,160 (5.8%)	18,604 (26.0%)	80,462 (19.0%)
	Yvette Cooper	54,470 (22.2%)	8,415 (8.0%)	9,043 (12.6%)	71,928 (17.0%)
	Liz Kendall	13,601 (5.5%)	2,574 (2.4%)	2,682 (3.8%)	18,857 (4.5%)
<i>First R. 2016</i>	Jeremy Corbyn	168,216 (59.0%)	84,918 (69.9%)	60,075 (60.2%)	313,209 (61.8%)
	Owen Smith	116,960 (41.0%)	36,599 (30.1%)	39,670 (39.8%)	193,229 (38.2%)

Source: Labour Party website, Quinn 2015.

TAB. 4 - Comparing five Labour leadership elections.

<i>Leadership race</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>2016</i>
<i>Selectorate</i>	Electoral college	PLP	Electoral college	Party and union members+registered	Party and union members+registered
<i>Number of voters*</i>	PLP:333(98%) M:172,000(70%) A:780,000(20%)	313+39 MPs (nominations)	PLP:271(98%) M:127,000(72%) A:211,000(12%)	422,871 (76.3%)	506,438(77.6%)
<i>Number of candidates</i>	3	1 (2)	5	4	2
<i>Candidacy (formal factors)</i>	Sitting MPs collecting 42 PLP nominations (12.5%)	Sitting MPs; 45 PLP nominations (12.5%)	Sitting MPs; 33 PLP nominations (12.5%)	Sitting MPs; 35 PLP nominations (15%)	51 PLP nominations (20% to challenge the incumbent)
<i>Candidacy (type of offer)</i>	Sterilized offer	Uncontested/sterilized offer	Open offer	Open offer	Open offer
<i>Negativity</i>	Very low	No campaign	High	Very high	Very high
<i>Index of competitiveness**</i>	0.671	0	0.988	0.595	0.764
<i>Winner</i>	Tony Blair (57%)	Gordon Brown (88%nominees)	Ed Miliband (50,6%)	Jeremy Corbyn (59,5%)	Jeremy Corbyn (61,8%)
<i>Polls' favourite</i>	Tony Blair	No polls	David Miliband	Burnham first, then Corbyn	Jeremy Corbyn

<i>Elite's favourite</i>	Tony Blair	Gordon Brown	David Miliband	Burnham and Cooper	Owen Smith
<i>Labour votes in the election</i>	1997 election 43.2% (+8.8%)	2010 election 29.0% (-6.2%)	2015 election 30.4% (+1.5%)		2017 election 40.4% (+9.6%)

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My elaboration. M = party members, A = trade unions' affiliates, PLP = parliamentary Labour party.

\* Precise data concerning 1994 and 2010 party members and trade unions members' turnout are not available, so both the absolute number and the percentage shown are approximate.

\*\*The index is calculated subtracting to 100 the percentage distance between first and second candidate (Piereson and Smith 1975), and the outcome is divided for 100 in order to have an index ranging from 0 (absence of competitiveness) to 1 (maximum of competitiveness).