Government and Opposition, Vol. 49, No. 1, pp. 139–158, 2014
doi:10.1017/gov.2013.34
First published online 19 September 2013

Review Article

*David S. Bell:** **Political leadership**

Kees Aarts, André Blais and Hermann Schmitt (eds), *Political Leaders and Democratic Elections* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

William P. Cross and André Blais, *Politics at the Centre: The Selection and Removal of Party Leaders in Anglo Parliamentary Democracies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Leslie Derfler, *The Fall and Rise of Political Leaders* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012).

John Gaffney, *Political Leadership in France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012).

Jean Garrigues, *Les Hommes providentiels: Histoire d'une fascination française* (Paris: Seuil, 2012).

Ludger Helms (ed.), *Comparative Political Leadership* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012).

Martin Lodge and Kai Wegrich (eds), *Executive Politics in Times of Crisis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012).

Rose McDermott, *Presidential Leadership, Illness and Decision Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Jean-Claude Monod, *Qu'est-ce qu'un chef en démocratie?* (Paris: Seuil, 2012).

Leadership is one of the main research themes in the social and human sciences. It is, of course, an area of study of vital contemporary importance, where the voting public's interest and that of the social sciences intersect. Political leadership is also an area of research that is developing fast and where new concepts and research approaches are being investigated with varying results. It is the political research area where the various facets of political life are illuminated by other disciplines and where many insights have

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been used to sometimes striking effect. There is, however, a great deal to be investigated: there are many un-illuminated corners of the problem, where the critical mass of research still needs to be built up. The books under review are a substantial contribution to that body of political research and they make appreciable and usually stimulating progress on all fronts. Where this concerns political leadership itself (as distinct from other leadership types), substantial findings and research methods are being discovered.

There is an extensive literature on leadership and a wide range of research studies of political leadership. In political studies it is a burgeoning area of publication. There is a well-developed field in the discipline of political studies devoted to the study of political leadership, and the different forms of leadership have received their share of attention in the main journals in recent years. Much of the study of leadership in politics has, for obvious reasons, been devoted to the attempt to understand the various tyrants, dictators, mass-murderers and cranks that have littered the past century. These forms of leadership are fascinating and need to be understood, but the difficulties of leadership in open societies, Western societies with party competition and press freedom, also need further exposition.

However, the problem of leadership is also a pressing one. In societies where the leader can dispose of opponents at will and destroy sections of the opposition, there are very different political constraints (though some would deny them the status of 'political' actions) from those found in the open societies of the West. In recent years the attention of the academic community has been turned to the problems of understanding competitive systems and their leaderships. This is in part a product of the increasing understanding of the importance of leadership in institutions that are suspicious of personal power and in part a recognition of the decline of the political party in Western Europe (throwing the leadership question into sharp relief). Thus the nature of political leadership in its sociological, personal, organizational, psychological, cultural and power relations has become the subject of individual and comparative studies, replacing the case-by-case approach and dispensing with the reliance on the work of academics in cognate disciplines.

In the set of books discussed here a common thread is the psychological aspect of political leadership, both in the external

facet of perception – image – by the public and in the internal drives to leadership and decision making. An important area for research in political leadership is the subjective universe of how people see and appreciate events and actions and how they calculate their options. Political studies has had no compunction about using the insights of other disciplines in the development of categories and of explanations for political leadership and most of this work has been woven into the current research with fruitful results.

The range of books under review has an eclectic spread, but the works demonstrate the vigour of the current study of political leadership. There are a number of comparative studies, although they are sometimes rooted in particular cases. There are individual case studies, but these illustrate comparative themes and are used to enlarge insights from the work of previous scholars. They demonstrate, overall, that political leadership is a creative process that is not the dependent variable, 'the cork on the waves', and that it should be taken into account as the prime mover in the politics of social interactions. Skowronek's *The Politics Presidents Make* (1997) tries to systematize the context and to show when and where leaders are constrained. Thus the solidity and impact of the research work in these books demonstrate the strength of the subdiscipline of political leadership and the determination to press ahead to make the comparative study an empirical and conceptual front line in political studies.

Political psychology is mentioned in most of these volumes and is the central concern in Weinberg's *The Psychology of Politicians* (2012). Psychological investigation of leadership goes back to the early studies by H.D. Laswell – heavily Freudian – and, among many others, to the articles and books of Alexander George and F.I. Greenstein in the 1960s. The book is a conspectus of the state of the field, drawing on general research and on the findings of the contributors. It is not specifically concerned with leadership as such but deals with political life and its pathologies – part of a much broader project. It is complemented by more recent research, including that by David Owen (2007) and individual studies of leaders that collectively add up to a series of psychological portraits. In Ludger Helms's edited work *Comparative Political Leadership* (2012) the chapter by Stanley A. Renshon (2012) discusses the findings of those researching in this field and makes a number of important comments.

Stanley A. Renshon is, of course, the author of *The Psychological Assessment of Presidential Candidates* (1998) and studies of Presidents Clinton and Obama. In his chapter in Helms's book, Renshon (2012) makes clear that the integration of political psychology into the comparative analysis of political leadership is not a simple process; the transfer of findings is liable to distortion without some training in the discipline. Thus, as Renshon says, the nature of leadership is psychological at heart in style, motivation, choice and so on, and no useful account of political leadership can be given unless psychological theory is used. Renshon's look at ambition and the components of the politicians' identities is clear and explores the hypothesis of compensation. This idea – that the political leader's dynamic is to make up for elements lacking in his or her earlier development – is widely used (although different 'lacks' are identified).

A subset of the psychological investigation of leaders is the problem of what effect illness has on the leaders and their abilities. In the UK this is a topic discussed in the context of Churchill's illness, as reported by doctor Charles McMoran Wilson, Lord Moran (1966). Illness has also emerged in the history of President Wilson, and nobody knows the precise details of President Mitterrand's health over the course of his final septennate. David Owen (2008) has also looked perceptively at this problem, founding his discussion of the effects leaders' illnesses on the commonsense basis that we cannot assume that there is no effect or that it is a problem that can be ignored. Rose McDermott (2008), looking at the presidents of the US, makes a number of observations. McDermott's study, although not as wide in its selection of examples (restricted to the US) as Owen's book, is insightful and seminal and uses the work of previous researchers in a synthesis that is both readable (a rare attribute in this area) and reliable.

McDermott is a political psychologist and has published on risk in international politics and on the psychology of international relations in innovative studies. This book looks at Woodrow Wilson, F.D. Roosevelt, Kennedy and Nixon (with an aside on President Carter dealing with the illness of the shah of Iran), each of them exemplifying different aspects of the psychopathology of power. This extraordinary survey raises many questions – without obvious solutions – and, starting from the work of Hugh L'Etang (1980), provides a schema for estimating the impact of various illnesses.

Obviously, illness has an effect, but the political leaders do not necessarily have the self-insight to determine what their condition is. Nor do outsiders (not just doctors) usually have the authority or certainty to wrest command away from the failing individual. On one hand, UK prime minister Harold Wilson's recognition – if that is what it was – of his own failing powers is relatively rare at this level of politics. On the other hand, the intervention of doctors is likewise rare, although they did intervene in 1920 in the case of President Deschanel of France, who fled the presidential train in his nightshirt and ran around the countryside.

It is perhaps unfair to ask McDermott's *Presidential Leadership, Illness and Decision Making* (2008) what the comparative lessons are, but the book does attempt to draw general conclusions and these are woven throughout the discussions of the four US presidents. For those interested in psychological and physical health, there is here a rich source of observations and hypotheses. Political leaders are expected to have rounded and balanced personalities, yet the demands of political competition mean that the entry into the race is a barrier that few normal people care to attempt. As McDermott notes, in Western systems you have to put yourself forward for election: some political figures seek power for its own sake, but there are others with different motives seeking some form of self-validation and they are disproportionately represented. Voters can only choose from what is on offer and, in any case, find it difficult to differentiate the convinced from the narcissistic. This has implications for the chapter in the book that discusses what could be done. Apart from other considerations, none of the traits is evident until the problems of leadership become overwhelming, and then it is too late. There is a great deal more evidence on the early life and psychology of American presidents than there is on UK prime ministers. This book is a basic psychological study of the presidents and sometimes – from the political observer's standpoint – it is invoking psychological motives where there are colourable political ones. Psychologists may want to argue that the course of action was chosen instead of others because of an internal drive, but that needs the backing of evidence.

The case studies in the book look at how the psychological and physical effects of illnesses interact with decisions, and the studies draw conclusions from that. Woodrow Wilson suffered a stroke in October 1919 before the end of his second term; FDR was

incapacitated by polio before starting the ascent that would take him to the White House and Kennedy had Addison's syndrome and compounded serious problems even while starting on the route that led to the presidency. Woodrow Wilson, Roosevelt and Kennedy pose the problem of the interaction of the psychological with the physical and the question of what – if anything – the final illness meant for the incumbent president's decision making.

Woodrow Wilson already showed symptoms of inflexibility before the final clash over the League of Nations that is usually attributed to the psychological make-up of the president. If there was one project that characterized the 'Wilsonian' outlook, it was the League of Nations, but the president more or less destroyed it by adopting a position of intransigence over minor matters that could have been trip-wires placed by the opponents of the treaty. This inflexibility might have been exacerbated by illness, but it was a pre-existing trait in the president. FDR's political career is examined both in the way the illness gave a drive to the rising political figure of FDR and in the final year or so, when the clear deterioration of physical abilities was denied by the president, who would not acknowledge his illness. It was his companion who demanded that the president be seen by the official doctors, and there followed a course of treatment that prolonged his life. It could well be that the final year of FDR's presidency was prone to error because of the toll the illness had taken on him, but the evidence is not entirely clear. Some observations look plausible, such as his snap decision to support McArthur's plan to embark on the Philippines (although this apparently on-the-spot decision was Roosevelt's style and disguised long and intricate thinking). The non-specialist might wonder about the political judgements expressed in the book in its dismissal of Truman's record and suggestion that FDR had a special relationship with Stalin. Kennedy, on the other hand, comes out better from these assessments. McDermott suggests that Kennedy's health (in fact undermined by the use of what were, then, drugs not fully understood) was such that it is possible that he might not have survived long after re-election. In the round, however, the impact of Kennedy's illness and its treatments is ambiguous and may not have detracted from clear decision making, although that is an open question. What is clear is that Kennedy was in considerable pain at times and the doctors had none of the advantages of contemporary medical knowledge about the side effects of their interventions.

Of the case studies in McDermott's book, the most interesting – because it is purely psychological – is the case of President Nixon. McDermott provides an extended psychological profile of the president, synthesizing a range of sources and insights by Nixon's acquaintances that make the case for a 'borderline' personality. Although it is not mentioned in the book, Nixon may also be an example of the 'phaeton complex', in which the individual tries to compensate for a lack of affection in early life by going into a political career, where affection can be earned (see, for example, the history of UK prime ministers in Iremonger 1970). Perhaps the author leans over backwards to try to be fair to the disgraced president, but there is a curious list of achievements (contestable) and an omission of some odd episodes (to put it mildly) in Nixon's career – most significantly the near-treasonable interference in the Vietnam negotiations before the presidential elections in Johnson's last year. This is not just a debating point; one interpretation of Nixon's behaviour could be the impact of his father's approach to life rather than his ('saintly') mother's. Through this lens it could be that Nixon wanted to push the extremes of action to demonstrate that he had the toughness for action (to bomb Cambodia or burgle the Watergate), but the more dovish (Quaker) approach was not entertained. In this book Nixon's peculiar choice of close associates is mentioned as a psychological impulse: on the one hand Nixon could not bear to be contradicted but on the other hand humiliated those (like the unfortunate Rodgers) who were sycophantic. It needed a rare insight into personality to see how this president could be managed within the entourage. Another, perhaps partial, and odd omission when considering a religious country such as the US is a full discussion of the religious background of Nixon, one of two Quaker presidents. This maternal Quakerism is mentioned, memorably in the description of his mother's punishments: a direction to sit alone and to contemplate misdeeds. There is an account here of a searing withdrawal of maternal approval and it seems that affection was a continuous psychological problem.

As John Dickenson is reported to have asked at the drafting of the US Constitution: what is disability and who is to determine what it is? If McDermott is correct, there is a need for a mechanism to prevent the failing health of leaders intervening in the worst circumstances, but who should do this and how it should be done (invoking the twenty-fifth amendment) are unanswered questions. As a side issue

the illnesses discussed in McDermott's study seem to have acted as an impetus in the determination of leaders to enter politics and to drive them to the top of what Disraeli called the 'greasy pole'. It can be impossible in everyday working to distinguish illness from the expected effects of stress on leaders at the top. McDermott's discussion of this problem is more a raising of problems than a settling of them.

In keeping with the study of 'crisis' leadership, many authors have explored the field further to look at the problems of political leadership in today's world. Political leadership crops up in several versions, often with a Weberian definition. Martin Lodge and Kai Wegrich in *Executive Politics in Times of Crisis* (2012) examine the political leadership of crisis politics from different angles and in major states but in a comparative perspective. The volume does not make for comforting reading but it is extensively researched and its contributors are the leading authors in this domain of public administration.

In today's politics 'crisis' has several dimensions, including the 1930s-style economic collapse as well as the challenge of climate change and social chaos. These give the 'crisis' a more urgent form than in the past and move the term from the realm of cliché. Executive leadership in Lodge and Wegrich's volume has a bigger constituency than the presidents and prime ministers with which the average student is familiar and includes rather more diverse figures – but essentially it covers the same central phenomenon as the other studies of political leadership. However, it does – and this is the core of the book – look at the administrative and organizational aspects of leadership in the crisis; that is what gives this collection its pertinence. It is a very wide-ranging set of inquiries, which defies a simple précis. For example, some of the chapters discuss changes in budget policy that were underway before the 'crisis' hit the executive, and the editors in their chapter dispute the idea that there is a move to 'managerialism'. Also offered in this volume is good reason to doubt the notion that the state has been diminished (rather that the power of the state has been extended in other directions) and it draws attention to the end of the faith in market-based problem solving.

Arjen Boin and Femke van Esch along with Paul 't Hart (2012) also look at crisis leadership in their chapter in Ludger Helms's edited work *Comparative Political Leadership*. This continues research

already undertaken and for which they have an established reputation (for example, 't Hart and Tindall 2009). In their carefully measured report they observe that in crisis situations the public expects political leadership but this leadership is not always forthcoming. They show that the belief systems that political leaders have is important in their handling of the crisis but that the adaptation of these beliefs is possible (although they note that the need to establish how this happens is a point for further investigation). As Rahm Emanuel is supposed to have said (perhaps *ben trovato*): leaders should never let a serious crisis go to waste. Strategic use of a crisis to enable leaders to portray themselves as struggling with titanic forces unleashed by other actors (or opponents) is noted here, as is the tendency of others to downplay the severity of the situation or to accuse other institutions of appalling behaviour. This pattern is empirically established using cognitive mapping methods and by drawing on the speeches of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Bundesbank head Axel Weber and UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown; the origins of the leaders' actions are tentatively attributed.

Leadership is too often treated as an isolated factor depending on one individual and Lodge and Wegrich's book (2012) reminds us that the executive in Western societies is part of a very large and ordered system that has to be persuaded and manipulated into responding to the political leaders' imperatives. This is the situation examined by Arjen Boin and Paul 't Hart (2012) in their chapter. They discuss the failures in collaboration that lie behind recent reforms to produce the professionalization, the concentration and the facilitation of coordination (in the European Union, for example). There is not one single solution but, based on this evidence, the authors offer a set of guiding principles for the executives. One of the lessons of this book, however, is that the 'crisis' does admit of easy solutions and the executive's response is dispersed and varied.

Ludger Helms's compilation, *Comparative Political Leadership* (2012), provides the best recent overview of the topic in political studies and will be the essential teaching vehicle in most universities until it is updated or replaced in the light of future research. It too is written in direct and accessible language – although some sections are a bit chewy. Discourse analysis is a crucial part of the study of political leadership and is used in a variety of settings in the studies in this volume. It is also the approach to political leadership in

the chapter by Jonathan Charteris-Black (2012). The use of computers has facilitated the analysis of keywords, which is a fruitful approach to the understanding of political leadership communication – especially of how authority is generated and made manifest. Here Tony Blair's rhetorical style is deconstructed and the point is made that the lack of attention to speech acts in leadership research is another of its lacunae. This empirical detail shows how Blair's speeches were able to persuade, but it is comparative in the way that it refers to the general British political rhetoric. This is a study that uses keywords as its base data and it uses 108 showcase (*epeidectic*) speeches for the analysis. This area of research, while not pristine, is gathering pace and showing results.

It is true, as William Cross and André Blais say in *Politics at the Centre: The Selection and Removal of Party Leaders in Anglo Parliamentary Democracies* (2012), that the selection of leaders has not been the subject of attention in the way that memberships and voters have been. This question of leadership is a live issue in contemporary party politics, and the ramifications of the changes to selection are not yet clear. In political life the elite is now suspect as well as there being a perceived need to gain wider legitimacy – hence, the idea that the parliamentary party alone should make decisions is losing ground. Between 1965 and 2008 in Canada, Eire, the UK, Australia and New Zealand there was a clear move to give members a say in leadership selection. Canadian Conservatives, UK Liberal Democrats and Labour in Eire give members a full say and only New Zealand and Australia stand somewhat apart from this move.

Cross and Blais look at the Westminster-type systems and establish that the trend for an enlarged leadership electorate is one that has been seen in most Western systems. This trend to enlarge the 'selectorate' beyond the parliamentary parties (which has caused problems in coordination – as the election of UK Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith demonstrated) and the amorphous nature of the party membership has placed a high value on media exposure. Media performance is crucial, but so also is money raising, and that factor distorts the 'level playing field' that is supposed to prevail in these fraternal contests. Moreover, there is the all-important media interest in the major opposition parties, who thus get substantial media coverage. For the smaller parties it is a struggle to get attention. Increasingly, it is argued, the media image of a candidate is crucial in these competitions. Yet, in opposition parties

the infighting sometimes means that the criterion of electoral appeal becomes secondary to others (resulting in some unelectable figures heading opposition parties). After some time in the wilderness the focus moves from the issues in factional disputes to 'electability'. Of the 87 cases observed by Cross and Blais, those leaders who improved their party's standing electorally were twice as likely to resign than those who did not; politics is a rough old game. But ideological positions were not the dominant factor in the choice of leader in the contests. Party membership is normally a pre-requisite and the US open primaries have not made much inroad into Westminster-style systems (with Canada a partial exception).

Some general principles for selecting leaders are suggested: including parliamentary and extra-parliamentary members in the selectorate, fixing leadership terms, limiting opportunities for the removal of leaders. The book does not go further than the suggestion that each party should determine its own rules. A parliamentary system in which the prime minister is directly elected is bound to create tensions and contradictions. Parties innovate after defeats or setbacks, changing the system of selection after a defeat and widening the selectorate in opposition. New parties have also innovated in the selection of leaders. Selectorates do not have a role in removing the leader, although in some cases extra-parliamentary party bodies may, or are potentially able to do so. Leaders cannot survive indefinitely without the support of the parliamentary party but some leaders can rally the extra-parliamentary party in their support.

Electoral studies are a major branch of the discipline, yet the relative importance of leaders in elections is not yet understood. In the volume edited by Kees Aarts, André Blais and Hermann Schmitt (2011), a range of conclusions emerge, including that voters vote positively for leaders, rather than negatively against them. Trustworthiness, reliability and empathy are closely related to political leaders' images as well as to the final vote. Politically relevant performance-related traits are important criteria for judgements by electors, and decision making is similar in the US, Australia and Sweden – a representative sample of open systems. Physical characteristics are sometimes said to be key factors in the voters' decisions, but they were not very important in the one case where this was tested (Germany).

There is a Weberian aspect to much of the study of leadership that has a tropism towards the 'charismatic'. Weber's is a more

interesting idea than the current popular meaning of the 'larger-than-life personality'. 'Charisma' is crisis leadership: in other words, it is political leadership that is generated by societal demand in crisis conditions. A Weberian crisis cannot be manufactured at will and is carefully delineated in the literature, but the term 'crisis' also has a popular usage that has escaped rigorous definition. Most of the studies of leadership have tried to look at the determinants of leadership crisis and the nature of leadership responses. Given the current world recession and the upheavals associated with economic recession, 'crisis' leadership is a subject ripe for academic study.

For those interested in political leadership and the study of the nature of leadership in open societies, France provides a laboratory of choice. This, of course, applies to the monarchist and Bonapartist forces of the past but the shape and nature of republican leaders is a topic that attracts attention from the researcher because it is more or less unavoidable in any examination of the French political system. Raoul Girardet (1986) identified the central place in French political thought occupied by the 'saviour' and the rejection of that. Among the many intriguing facets of French politics is the frequent appearance of the '*homme providentiel*', the messianic political saviour who is destined to rescue the nation from its unhappy condition and who is able to impart a sense of hope. This is close to one notion of 'charisma' which keeps recurring in the study of leadership and which reappears in several forms in the course of these studies.

One aspect of this is for the leader to relate the contemporary to a not too remote past that weaves a continuity into the narrative of quotidian politics: in de Gaulle's terms, to show how the exemplary sufferings connect with the exceptional tasks devolved on the French nation. This is touched on in many studies (notably by Stanley and Inge Hoffmann (1968) in a famous essay that remains pertinent). The book by John Gaffney (2012) examined here unweaves this particular cultural tapestry to reveal the basic threads in Fifth Republic leadership. This is a research that is not restricted to France but, because of the cultural referents, will in all likelihood be read more by those looking at the French system than by those looking at leadership more widely.

What de Gaulle did was to establish the presidency of France as the focal political institution by bringing together the conservative and right-wing demand for strong leadership and the republican

reverence for popular sovereignty. This was no trivial achievement – given prevailing French political thought – and it established leadership at the centre of the Fifth Republic in a unique way. De Gaulle was powerfully aided by the Algerian war, which meant that the public looked to de Gaulle as the source of authority and the guide to action, but the predominant situation of the president was prolonged by astute political manipulation. This book examines the conundrum of the president's role. It also sets out a typology of political leaders as well as suggesting that there is a problem in the idea of leadership in French republican tradition which has – except in emergencies – refused to countenance the president as political leader (rather than as ceremonial head of state). De Gaulle's use of the symbols of republican France and emphasis on the French political past enabled – or facilitated – this change in outlook to one of embracing the executive presidency. De Gaulle's influence has meant that the idea of presidential leadership has remained in place and firmly established in the Fifth Republic.

Jean-Claude Monod's *Qu'est-ce qu'un chef en démocratie?* (2012) also enters this terrain with an extended discussion of 'charisma' in its Weberian setting but taking the French case as a guide. In the 2012 presidential elections the contrast between the 'Mr Normal' of the Socialist candidate François Hollande and the hyper presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy brought to the foreground the question of what a republic should require in a leader. Monod tries to rehabilitate the idea of the republican political leader and draws up an 'ideal type' against which leaders in open societies can be evaluated. This is an allusive study that draws on ideas, some Greek but mostly from German or French philosophies, and makes perceptive distinctions. In the process, the book rehabilitates the concept of 'charisma' and tries to present this idea as the basis for a political leadership compatible with the republic of today.

Political leaders, in this account, are the 'artists' (to use another of Hoffmann's terms) of the political scene. In the French case under Gaffney's review the new style of leadership established by de Gaulle is an amalgam of the traditional republican sensibilities with the un-republican (or anti-republican) *homme providentiel*. This is the focus on 'myth' that the political environment requires and which, in leadership, is the side the public sees only much later in the career of the politician (usually after the leader has stepped down from power). In the case of de Gaulle it was a matter of reconciling

the presidential leadership that de Gaulle was offering with the new republic and the institutions that were stretched (to put it tactfully) in de Gaulle's leadership. Subsequent leaders of the Fifth Republic have interpreted this in their own ways, but the idea of the republican executive president has taken root and is not in itself seen as illegitimate in current French politics (quite the reverse), despite a dubious legal and constitutional foundation. Gaffney (2012) looks at the development of the leadership of the Fifth Republic and at how that has been woven into the contemporary tradition and myth surrounding the leadership of the republic and the creative political mastery that have made it central. It is tempting to say that this is a 'political culture' approach, but the concept has been laden with presuppositions and is liable to create the wrong impression (or turn potential readers away). However, this aspect of political leadership in the US, where the presidency is the dominant political institution, needs more attention and a more rigorous approach than has yet been devoted to it. Much of this analysis is linguistic and symbolic and requires the detailed and specialist understanding of the meaning and manipulation of language that the expert can provide.

Where political leadership depends on the ability of politicians to draw on and use traditions and to create their own myths, there is inevitably a cultural aspect that informs the understanding of the actions taken and places them in context. This is not a determinist understanding of leadership action: the leader does not do what the culture in some way requires. But the culture of the society provides possibilities and constraints that political leaders can recognize and use or – possibly – ignore or even misunderstand. It is this area that Gaffney (2012) explores in French politics and in the establishment of the political leadership of the Fifth Republic. There are insights into the leadership of the presidents as well as the contenders and the prime ministers who exercised executive authority in this time. There is an extended section on President Sarkozy that untangles the chameleon form of leadership during his presidential term and how that was innovative or, perhaps, failed. This is an investigation that needs to be extended across systems to develop the understanding of political leadership and its context.

Jean Garrigues (2012) goes further back in French history than John Gaffney does and is interested in the category of the *homme providentiel* and the differences between leaders, but the analysis

in his volume is political in focus in that the chiliastic myth is not taken at face value and the study overlooks the essential rallying of the nation that claims to bring together the components sundered by a maleficent political class of ordinary or 'little' figures. In this book the leadership of Léon Gambetta, General Boulanger, Georges Clemenceau and Marshal Pétain in the Third Republic and de Gaulle in the Fifth Republic are given detailed attention. Of these, Boulanger is probably the least well known but is well worth the study. In this analysis the emergence of the *homme providentiel* is made likely by the conjunction of circumstances that conjoin a long-term degree of dysfunction with a revealing event. The *homme providentiel* plays on this discontent with language recalling past solutions but also forging a link to the future. There is an assertion that this is no ordinary situation but is the move to the future through the *homme providentiel*, who is the representation of the general will (interpreted in a Rousseau-like fashion). Needless to say, the reliance on the *homme providentiel* is not always successful or well-founded. General Boulanger could have taken power in the late 1880s but at the critical point he fled to Brussels and shot himself on the grave of his mistress, whereupon the balloon was pricked. What a more politically astute leader could have done is uncertain, but de Gaulle proved an exceptionally more adept politician and able to use the 1958 crisis for his own defined purposes.

There is one topic that is constantly under discussion in both the public arena and in academic works, and that is the gender bias in leadership: whether the physiological differences between men and women have any consequences for leadership. Anne Stevens (2012) in a contribution to Ludger Helms's edited work tackles this issue and makes a series of key points in a wide-ranging study. Her chapter takes a different approach, looking at what leadership functions are in societies and in that way expanding the 'universe of instances' needed for comparative judgement – that is, taking out any bias in the definition of what leadership is (see also Norris and Lovendusky 1992). One methodological problem is the small number of women in top positions (however widely the net is cast), but in this study of the top leaders and how they are divided between genders the process of selection of leaders at the highest levels is the most important factor. In the exercise of leadership the perception of the leadership qualities of a politician are crucial and these work to the disadvantage of women in political life at leadership positions.

This particular discussion of the gender divide in political life tends to see the inbuilt problems of the male-dominated world of rhetoric and expectations as obstacles or impediments that men do not have to overcome (in fact these aspects assist men).

Leslie Derfler's *The Rise and Fall of Political Leaders* takes a comparative look at Olaf Palme of Sweden, Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Indira Gandhi of India. These leaders are treated in three separate biographies that trace their careers in the political systems and pay particular attention to the interim period between losing office for the first time and then regaining it. This is an unusual, if not unique, way of looking at the problem of leadership and puts the emphasis firmly on the rebuilding of the political career. These are, however, very different political leaders in very different political systems (credit has to be given for extending a study across three demanding linguistic and political divides). It is the nature of the leaders' careers, of success, failure and rebuilding that motivates the selection. It does, notwithstanding, lead to an odd set of comparators. Thus Sweden is an advanced industrial society with a distinctive form of social democratic government, and in Palme's time the Swedish Social Democrats had been in power for almost 50 years. Gandhi's India is a massive and relatively poor country with divisions along ethnic and religious lines that have few parallels in the West. And Nigeria, emerging from military governments, was a vast, unwieldy federation with unsettled issues of revenues, distribution, regionalism and so on. Treating each of these leaders in separate compartments does not assist the comparative framework, although a final chapter draws some interesting threads together and makes a series of general points.

One of the missing variables is the nature of party domination in Sweden and India. In both of these countries the near one-party rule over many years (though not in a totalitarian system) meant that the opposition – when it got its chance through the mistakes of the leaders of the majority – was ill-prepared for the exercise of power, and public opinion (initially receptive to a change) then turned against the incumbents. This disillusion was not the expected reaction, but it enabled the two leaders here (Palme and Gandhi) to justify their actions retrospectively and to reinforce their polar positions. Both Palme and Gandhi were assassinated. In Palme's case this shocking event shook Swedish society and its sense of itself, and the assassin was never caught (in the account here the list of

potential assassins with grudges takes more than half a page). President Obasanjo is, of course, a product of the Nigerian military and perhaps belongs more in the 'military-civilian' twilight (to use Rustow's term) than as a party leader in the manner of Palme or Gandhi. President Obasanjo's problems were of a different order: nation building in a society that was held down by almost permanent military government. Nigeria's institutions and sense of national identity had no parallel with Sweden and were very different from Mrs Gandhi's India.

Ultimately, the lessons that are drawn from the three political leaders are more interesting when taken from the revival of their careers than at the beginning. In their initial defenestration there is a difference. Palme was unfortunate in arriving just as European inflation took off and the growth of the post-war '*trente glorieuse*' diminished. Gandhi's extraordinary *coup d'état* and subsequent blunders need some explanation (and get a psychological one here). When it comes to the fall, the fate of Obasanjo is the most interesting. His initial withdrawal was to run a chicken farm but the former president's status was such that the new leaders could not leave him in peace. There followed a period in jail and a return to power. President Obasanjo is one of the few African leaders to quit office voluntarily and one of the few to be genuinely missed. In terms of his legacy the situation is more fraught. President Obasanjo is not the Nigerian 'Mandela' but he did show that a peaceful transition and open society might be built. Of course, this would have to be the work of several hands and not one leader – a major problem of construction for the biggest state in Africa. Palme's legacy is more intricate: there was a destabilizing of society, but the impact that Palme had was limited by the system and party through which he had to work; Sweden was not a one-man show. All the same, the dissipated impact of Olaf Palme is not easy to pin down. Mrs Gandhi's legacy was the dynasty of the elite and the differentiation from the Congress Party; this process had been part of Mrs Gandhi's political movement. India was a more divided society, it leaned to the Hindu side of the state, and the problems of civil liberties and state imposition were to an extent reaffirmed in her second term.

Biographers have made much of the ascent phase of many leaders and this section is relatively brief in Derfler's work (2012). Their ideas of nationhood and what it was to lean to the left are very

different, as are their relationships with their parties. It is interesting to note that they used their memoirs to recast their political positions and advance their claims to political resurrection. Likewise, the use of foreign policy looks, on this reading, like an attempt to rebuild authority in a time of failing legitimacy. This last section of the book is an interesting departure point for future research in comparative leadership.

There is a tradition of reviewers making a plea for further work in the area under review, and this topic is no different – the need for more case studies and, in particular, for the extension of comparative work and of hypothesis development should be underlined. Having made one plea for further research in the area of political leadership, the case must also be made for the investigation of particular fields of research. This, notably, requires further understanding of 'conservative' (not 'Conservative' leadership) leadership. This category of leader is often dismissed and misunderstood. Most of the studies here are concerned with the so-called 'charismatic' leader – the transformational in Burns's terms (2003) – to the relative neglect of the more stolid leader. In biographies and case studies this concentration on the striking or exceptional is more understandable, although the comparativist can hardly be allowed to neglect the most common leaderships. There is a form of minimalist, unflamboyant, leadership that is common in functioning societies and is more appreciated in retrospect.

Renshon (2012) makes this point in the chapter in Helms's edited volume. Transformation and realignment may be misleading ideal-types in which the heroic vision of the leaders working against the odds is the 'black swan' of leadership models. Thus Attlee, rated one of the best of the post-war British prime ministers, was able to keep a disputatious and quarrelling cabinet together in a common endeavour in turbulent times. By the same token, US President Eisenhower commented that, although nothing happened on his watch, the difficulty of ensuring that 'nothing happened' was almost overwhelming. In the French context the political leadership of the derided Fourth Republic kept the regime in existence against the repeated hammer blows from left and right while putting into effect policies judged in the national interest but opposed by powerful sectors in society (European integration, decolonization, economic modernization and so on). They were very different politicians

and very different approaches were taken but, being low key and conservative, they were underestimated. One function of leadership is to make people work together; to get wilful and potentially obstructive personalities in harness is a considerable political achievement – many leaders have been unable to make that work for them.

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