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Has Australian Federal Politics Become Presidentialized?
Conclusion

Presidentialization has been an under-researched area in the Australian context. While in Europe, Latin America and in parts of Asia the thesis is continually updated, Australian academics for the most part have viewed the thesis with suspicion.[1] *All Hail the Leaders* has shown that the Poguntke and Webb (2005) volume is an invaluable contribution to the study of political leadership. However, their conception is not without flaws and I have highlighted some of these throughout. This was achieved by producing one of the more systematic investigations into presidentialization internationally and the most systematic study of the phenomenon in Australia. But what *All Hail the Leaders* did differently to many other examinations of presidentialization was to reduce the number of variables within the study by focussing solely on leaders from one party. The purpose of this was to plunge deeper into the inter-play between actors and institutions. This immersion has, hopefully at least, generated a more systematic understanding of how leaders exert power within institutions such as political parties.

The primary purpose of the Poguntke and Webb (2005) presidentialization framework was to identify signs of structural presidentialization and to differentiate this from the variables which may conditionally empower leaders. Australia has an institutional architecture that provides an opportunity for political leaders to be extremely powerful. Preferential voting in the lower house, publicly funded elections and the prime minister having their own department are just some of the advantages that leaders of Australia's federal political parties possess.[2] These advantages have also been held for some time. It is for this reason, that Australia shows very few signs of *increasing* presidentialization in some facets of Poguntke and Webb's (2005) framework. In fact, leader-centric politics has been the historical norm in many areas, rather than part of a rising tide as has been evident internationally.

The Periods Compared and Contrasted

At the heart of the Poguntke and Webb thesis is the idea that a variety of causal factors have coalesced producing the presidentialization of modern politics. Each of the four periods examined in this volume were unique in a number of respects. The Chifley leadership period (1945– 51) is the most different from the other three periods. Central to this was the technological difference in terms of communication mediums and electioneering. Radio was the dominant medium of the period and far less focus was given to individuals and their families than in later campaigns. In terms of the relationship with the party, Chifley as leader was still required to not only engage with the extra-parliamentary institutions of the party, but to adhere to their decisions. This highlights the different location of the locus of power during this period compared to the later cases examined, where the FPLP leader has at times ignored the decisions of the extra-parliamentary institutions. In the executive arm of government, it was during this period that the entrenchment of executive power started to emerge with the creation of the new post-war departmental setup, including the shift of much of Chifley's 'official family' from the Department of Post-War Reconstruction to the Prime Minister's Department (Walter, 1992:28–30). In the three key areas Poguntke and Webb (2005) focus on, the executive, the party and during elections, the evidence from the Chifley leadership period supports much of Poguntke and Webb's (2005) hypothesis that it was from roughly 1960 onwards that many of the causal factors which led to the presidentialization of politics emerged. As a result, the evidence from the Chifley leadership period shows very few signs of presidentialization. However, considering this is only one case before the 1960 line Poguntke and Webb (2005) alluded to, generalisations derived from this case are somewhat limited. Nevertheless, this case is still a vitally important case to compare later leadership periods against.

By the Whitlam leadership period (1967–77) much had changed. Not only had television become the dominant medium, but the traditional social and economic cleavages which tied the Labor base together were starting to unravel. The age of prosperity, which was all many had known, came to a shuddering halt in 1974 with the oil shocks and stagflation crippling the reformist agenda of the Whitlam government. In the executive, the Whitlam period coincided with a large increase in

the number of ministerial staffers and the use of the committee system became more entrenched as the complexity of government increased exponentially (Holland, 2002). In the party face clear changes to the relationship between party and leader emerged as well. While many of these changes are linked to the causal factors that Poguntke and Webb (2005) have identified, agency also played some role. In fact, it is hard to imagine that the changes to the structure of the party would have occurred at that time had it not been for Whitlam. In terms of elections, the change in the media and the parties was stark when compared with the Chifley period. While not uniform across all elections, the rise of more personalised, less policy driven election campaigns were on show and the 1972 'It's Time' election was where this effect was at its most apparent. However, the effect on individual voting intentions was unclear despite signs of a growing emphasis on personalised campaigning. Most importantly though, this was the first period in which signs of politics becoming increasingly presidentialized were apparent.

The Hawke leadership period (1983–91) consisting almost entirely of the time in government, highlights above all else, the ability of an electorally popular Australian prime minister to dominate the executive and their party. For example, compared to the British prime minister they are in much more powerful position with centralised advice through the PMO and PM&C, and with a variety of resources that would be the envy of their British counterpart. During this period, the relationship between the leader and party changed once again. While it could be argued that Whitlam shifted the pendulum from extra-parliamentary dominance to a more balanced model, Hawke destroyed any notion of extra-parliamentary control over the parliamentarians and even more so over a successful prime minister. The platform was ignored, conference resolutions rejected and the factions, not the party, became the engine that drove decision making. The factions (in particular the 'Right' and the 'Centre-Left'), which started to lose their ideological distinctions, became the central cog in delivering Hawke his reform agenda. This is despite many of these changes not only contradicting the party's guiding principles and platform, but also despite large sections of the rank and file opposing the policy agenda. The elections during this period highlighted the increasingly personalised nature of Australian election campaigns. As ideological differentiation between the major parties diminished,

elections became symptomatic of brand style politics more commonly associated with presidential elections. The level of newspaper coverage that Hawke received remained relatively consistent with the Whitlam period which provides evidence to counter some of the myths about the Hawke period (see Appendix: Table 1). While once again difficult to measure, based on preferred PM polling data during this period, the evidence suggests that Hawke had some impact on voting behaviour even if this figure was small.

The first Rudd leadership period (2006–10), is a proto-type case of the phenomenon Poguntke and Webb (2005) described. In the executive face, Rudd's attempts to totally dominate the bureaucracy and the cabinet, became a touchstone for deeper problems, but were solely about his approach to governing, rather than any structural changes to the system. However, the number of advisers in the Prime Minister's Office did increase (Department of Finance, 2008a; 2008b; 2009a; 2009b; 2010a). The relationship and interaction between the leader and the party, which by its very nature is elastic, ostensibly snapped during this period. Rudd showed very little regard for the extra parliamentary elements of the party and this was demonstrated by the authoritarian manner in which the conference was run as well as the involvement of the leadership in pre-selection battles. Put simply, the presidentialization metamorphosis was complete. The one election Rudd contested was atypical of presidentialized elections with deeply personalised slogans and social media being the order of the day. Rudd's elevation to the leadership was based almost solely on his electoral appeal and as soon as his electoral utility began to fade, he was unceremoniously dumped. The presidentialized nature of Rudd's reign was further played out in that when he was challenged, he could not compete sufficiently enough in a leadership ballot to not be humiliated.

While this section has described some of the differences and key themes of each of the periods highlighting their contextual differences, the section that follows will more explicitly identify trends across the cases. It will then conclude by comparing the findings from the Australian case to the comparative data Poguntke and Webb (2005) compiled. What will be shown is that the Australian case does not fit neatly into any of the common case types as articulated by Lijphart (1971:691). In fact, the Australian case seems to have elements of both the 'theory

confirming' and 'deviant case' types (Lijphart, 1971:691). According to Lijphart, (1971:692) 'the theory-confirming type, strengthens the proposition in question', while the deviant case can 'uncover relevant additional variables that were not considered previously'. Specifically, the importance of the Australian case is that it supports many of the conclusions of Poguntke and Webb (2005), while also highlighting some of the conceptual weaknesses in the framework.

Identification of Trends

When one examines the leadership periods through the lens of the presidentialization thesis conceptualised by Poguntke and Webb (2005), some clear trends emerge. Some of these add weight to the thesis; others raise questions about the current conceptual parameters. Poguntke and Webb have addressed many of these, but the evidence from the Australian case re-draws attention to some of these. Having applied the model systematically to the four cases, it is now worth exploring any trends, using the 'three-faces' framework as an organising principle.

The Executive Face

As has been mentioned throughout, the Australian prime minister has a long history of possessing institutional advantages that far surpass those of comparable leaders. These advantages have continued to increase. In fact, relatively consistent with the case studies examined in the Poguntke and Webb (2005) volume, the resources the Australian prime minister enjoys has steadily increased over time (see Appendix: Table 1). Most notably this has been evident in the growth of the PMO and the PM&C since the Whitlam period. Of course, whether increasing pluralisation of advice equates to increasing power is an altogether different question, and one which core-executive theorists and court politics advocates, would have a very different view of compared to Poguntke and Webb (see Rhodes, Wanna and Weller: 2009; Rhodes: 2013). Additionally, there is evidence of policy making becoming increasingly centralised. Data supporting this could be found in all three of the later cases examined. Both centralisation and the pluralisation of advice, it could be argued, are an effect generated by the existence of a myriad of global forces. Poguntke and Webb (2005:13–6) touched on some of these when they

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outlined what causal factors were contributing to the presidentialization of modern politics. This included the 'internationalization of politics' and 'the changing structure of mass communication' (Poguntke and Webb, 2005:13–5). Despite the large resource pool Australian prime ministers already had to call on, it is plausible that these global forces drove increases in the Australian executive further. Naturally, some of this accumulation would have been due to the actors involved, and their influence has been traced in various works in the literature (see Tiernan, 2007). But ultimately, prime ministers have responded to an environment where the requirements on their time have been ever expanding. Thus, while the Australian case may not exhibit as clear a trend as some other polities in the executive face, the evidence suggests that it has still been affected by the same elements which have altered liberal democratic governance globally (see Appendix: Table 2).

The Party Face

In the party face, the domination of the elites over not only their parliamentary colleagues but the extra-parliamentary institutions increased from the Whitlam period to the Rudd period (see Appendix: Table 2). Each period further alienated the rank and file and entrenched the autonomy and resources that the leadership had within the party. In a party with such prescriptive institutions as the FPLP, this development has come sometimes through the drive of individuals and at other times through a variety of causal factors which have structurally altered the political process. For instance, the decline of cleavage based politics has meant the death of pure ideological separation between the factions. Hence, the leadership has been able, as occurred in the Hawke leadership period, to use the factions to have their policy agenda implemented, as they became nothing more than organisational tools and policy delivery instruments.[3] The evidence of presidentialization, as conceptualised by Poguntke and Webb (2005), clearly points to the importance of the Whitlam period. It is here where the interplay of structure and agency is at its most complex. There were structural pressures on the party to change course during this period, however, agency also played some role as well. Most importantly, the ability of the leadership to exert influence and power within the institutions of the party increased dramatically during

this period. The rise of the parliamentarians only increased from this point onwards. While the leadership style of Whitlam, Hawke and Rudd were all vastly different, as was the way they attempted to exert influence, each of these leaders was able to extend the influence of the leadership. Whitlam was able to provide the parliamentarians with much greater control over the intra-party institutions due to structural changes to the party. Hawke, aware of this control, ignored the conference and rejected the platform, his control exerted due to a combination of behavioural and structural factors. While Rudd simply abandoned any form of internal democracy. Rudd, similar to Hawke, used a combination of structural and behavioural components to exert power over the party. Of course, a myriad of other actors are involved in such huge changes, however, in each period a combination of structure and agency accentuated the capacity of the leadership to exercise intra-party power.

The Electoral Face

In the electoral face, from Whitlam to Rudd there is evidence of campaigns and the focus of the media becoming clearly more personalised. While some sporadic evidence existed in the Whitlam period of personalisation, and even more during the Hawke period without being overwhelming, the Rudd 2007 election was the most personalised of all. However, the path of the media focus section has a less linear trajectory. In fact, a few interesting observations emerge from this component. The first concerns the actual coverage of leaders, while the other is concerned with the type of coverage. In terms of the actual coverage of the leaders across the periods, the samples from the final two weeks of each election campaign in the broadsheet newspapers shows a slight increase overall in terms of the number of articles that mentioned the leader. This can be seen all the way from the Chifley period to the Rudd period (see Appendix: Table 1; Graph 1). However, more interesting is when the elections from opposition are examined from the Whitlam period onwards. Those of 1969, 1972, 1983 and 2007 all have higher than average coverage of the leader (in terms of percentage of mentions) in these campaigns. This certainly adds empirical data to the claim that leaders are more central to campaigns from the opposition benches. When the types of articles are examined, two spikes in the data can be identified. The first occurs

sometime before the Whitlam period started and after the Chifley period ended. While the second clearly happens between the end of the Hawke period and the 2007 election campaign (see Appendix: Graph 1, 2 and 3). The first spike could plausibly be explained as a reaction to the type of campaigns the party was running and the emergence of polling. While the second spike could conceivably be related to the increasing centrality of polling, the demise of ideology based politics and increasing personalisation. These waves of personalisation provide clear empirical data to support the hypothesis that Australian election campaign coverage by the print media has fundamentally changed. While it has only been broadsheet newspapers examined, tabloid newspaper coverage would be expected to be even more personalised.

Ultimately, when the four periods are viewed chronologically using the Poguntke and Webb (2005) model, the least convincing aspect is that which Poguntke and Webb have already accepted, namely the leader effect on voting behaviour (Webb et al, 2012: 78). This acceptance comes with a caveat though. It is the lack of clear empirical data to support or negate this hypothesis that Poguntke and Webb emphasise as problematic for this part of their thesis. However, they contend that more and more evidence is emerging internationally which supports their hypothesis. Further to this, they argue that the direct impact of leaders may be 'further back in the funnel of causality' than can be measured (Webb et al, 2012:94). Nevertheless, this still provides us with an interesting insight into the problems of modern democratic leadership. That is: if the media and political parties are personalising their electioneering more and more, why is there little or no impact on voters? This conundrum highlights an obvious disconnect between the political class (the media and the politicians) and the electorate. A couple of hypotheses can be generated from this. Namely, that either something is broken in the democratic relationship between Australian voters on the one hand and the political class on the other, or alternatively, that the data on voting intentions does not produce a true picture of what drives individuals to vote the way they do.

Conclusions on the Australian Case

When the evidence is examined from this study, it is apparent that much of it supports many of the claims of Poguntke and Webb (2005) and is largely consistent with the other cases examined in *The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies.* However, the Australian case also highlights some of the conceptual weaknesses of the model and of the presidentialization thesis more broadly. When the cases in the Poguntke and Webb (2005:338–9) volume are examined, it appears that the Australian case most closely resembles the Canadian case. Although a level of caution is required here. First, as we only examined leadership periods from the one party, generalisations about the whole system need to be made with a qualification. Second, in the Poguntke and Webb (2005) volume, the contributors were advised to examine changes only after 1960 and their analysis of each case is less systematic than the level of depth this study has gone to.

What the evidence from the Australian case highlights most strikingly, is that in a comparative sense, the pathology of Australian politics provides a larger than normal capacity for leaders to exert power or authority over the institutions that comprise the body politic. This structural provision for 'strong leadership' manifests itself in a myriad of ways in the Australian political system. For instance, when the perception of strong leadership is not provided, the media, and sometimes the electorate, call for its elevation. This cycle is further perpetuated by the political class as election campaigns are increasingly personalised and leaders attempt to appeal to an independent, rather than a collective mandate (i.e. provided to the party). There also appears to be a central paradox at the core of Australian politics: the electorate want strong leadership as well as robust democratic institutions. This dilemma materialises repeatedly in Australian federal politics. Of course, these things are not incompatible and Lijphart (1999) has implicitly shown how consensus, rather than majoritarian democracies appear to achieve this balance better.[4] Nevertheless, this shows that when using the Poguntke and Webb (2005) model, that each new period of government for the FPLP, shows more evidence of the presidentialization phenomenon. This is also not to say that the presidentialization phenomenon is linear in trajectory and will continue in this direction. However, for the case studies examined, with some minor exceptions, this appears to be the

case (see Appendix: Table 2). Australia naturally has its idiosyncrasies and by focussing on the FPLP, the evidence will be different than if you focussed on the Liberal Party. But by using the Poguntke and Webb (2005) model and by adding in a behavioural focus, the evidence highlights the presidentialized nature of Australian federal politics for at least one of the two major political parties.

Structure and Agency

Central to understanding the presidentialization thesis is deciphering the difference between conditional dominance and structural presidentialization. Often critics will cite one leader or another as an example that presidentialization is not a new phenomenon and is merely symptomatic of differing leadership styles. However, these critiques add very little to the debate. As Lijphart (1971:686) has pointed out, 'it is nevertheless a mistake to reject a hypothesis because one can think pretty quickly of a contrary case'. This remains a truism of political science. Moreover, this is not what Poguntke and Webb (2005) set out to capture in their framework. Poguntke and Webb (2005:6) were explicitly looking for causal factors that shifted systems along the axis of 'partified government' towards their ideal form of presidentialized government. This is an important point to re-emphasise as critics such as Dowding (2012), assume the thesis is about the US model of presidential system. Therefore, while an individual could be extremely dominant, and Rudd is a good example of this, the level of dominance is not an indicator of presidentialization and often more to do with conditional factors.

Although, while Poguntke and Webb's (2005) binary demarcation between conditional and structural factors means that the model is conceptually clear, it does at times also mean that the sources of leader power are fundamentally misdiagnosed. This produces a normatively structuralist account of how the inter-play between elites and institutions actually occurs. But as has been shown throughout this volume, the source of leader power can often be behavioural rather than institutional. One obvious example of this is the capacity of leaders of the FPLP to exert increasingly larger amounts of authority over pre-selections. This fits neither well as a structural enhancement or conditionality. No rules have been amended and only temporary authority was provided. What has really changed is the accepted behaviour for agents within the system,

namely the leader. Using the Poguntke and Webb (2005) framework, this would be classified as a conditional factor. However, if leaders continue to replicate this behaviour without any formal rule change, what really develops is the establishment of a norm. This has perhaps been no more apparent than when one examines the manner in which Rudd and his successor Gillard have involved themselves in pre-selections.[5] For example, in January 2013 in the lead up to the Australian federal election, Gillard chose to use what she described as a 'Captain's pick' to select Nova Perris for pre-selection for the top spot on the Northern Territory Senate ticket for the FPLP. This is despite current Senator, Trish Crossin, wanting to contest top spot on the ticket again (Cullen, 2013). This totally ignores the processes of the party and in one of Crossin's media appearances after the decision was announced, she noted:

> Last night, I was told by the Prime Minister that it was her
> intention to seek the endorsement of the national executive to
> firstly approve the membership of Nova Peris and to let her into
> the party, and then secondly to have her endorsed as the Northern
> Territory ALP Senate candidate (cited in Cullen, 2013).

This serves to highlight a few things. First, it reveals the conceptual weakness in simply differentiating between structural and conditional factors in this way. Greater conceptual clarity needs to be inserted into the presidentialization debate as some of the logic underpinning it is at present ambiguous. Second, it demonstrates the authority that the leader is wielding in relation to the national executive which is particularly difficult to obtain information on. Third, it also provides a stark contrast to how far things have changed since the beginning of the Whitlam leadership period in 1967; further substantiating the argument that the pathology of Australian politics manifests itself in strong leadership.

Another variable that is under-played in the Poguntke and Webb (2005) presidentialization concept is the role of agency in driving some of these changes. Undoubtedly, Marx was correct when he argued that 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please ... but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past' (cited in Callinicos, 1983: 81). However, in three of the periods examined and one specifically, agency played some role in key changes. During the Whitlam period, as the old social cleavages were breaking

down, the calls for the party to be the 'delegates of the working class' were being swamped by calls for accountability and for the parliamentarians, not the 'faceless men' to control party policy. Whitlam obviously did not act alone through this process, but he was central to the campaign to alter the make-up of the conference and the executive despite fierce opposition from within the party. Would the changes have been made without Whitlam? Most likely considering the criticism the FPLP had received over the 'faceless men' for decades. However, it may not have happened when it did. The primary changes to the party during the Whitlam period happened before he became prime minister, so electoral success alone was not a strong enough justification for the changes. In the later periods this was more important. During the Hawke leadership period, conference resolutions were ignored, the platform re-written and the 'Left' faction marginalised. These changes to the leader-party relationship through a greater national rather than federal focus proceeded directly on the back of electoral success. The Rudd period shares many similarities with the Hawke leadership period, yet some differences as well. The most obvious similarity being that the relationship with the party was altered on the back of Rudd's electoral success. However, by this stage, unlike Hawke, Rudd was not required to build a power base within the party, cultivated over years and years before he attempted to change the fabric. Rudd's elevation was solely about his electoral popularity and the way he so easily changed components of the leader-party relationship leaves many questions unanswered. For instance, would the changes to the party that happened during the Hawke and Rudd periods have occurred without the presence of these leaders? It would appear they may not have. Questions of this nature remain prescient to debates about why institutions change and this highlights once again, a central issue in the current conceptual parameters of the model.

The Presidentialization Thesis

The presidentialization thesis continues to divide the academic community. The thesis has been criticised for being too broad, for failing to adequately understand the complexities of the core executive, for over-stating the changes, for being the same as the personalisation thesis and for being superficial (see Karvonen, 2010; Dowding 2012, 2013a, 2013b; Rhodes, Wanna and Weller, 2009 as examples). These

criticisms will undoubtedly continue but many of them obscure what the thesis is truly about; most notably, whether leaders have more power resources than previously and what they can actually achieve with this increase. What *All Hail the Leaders* demonstrates is that the best use of the model is in long-run, in-depth analyses. This can then be compared to the comparative literature which already exists. By holding one of the variables constant, this will allow for detailed analysis within the party face, which considering the central focus on the relationship between the leader and party in the model, should receive much more attention in the literature than it so far has. Furthermore, this will allow for the less obvious, exogenous changes in power dynamics to be explored more than the Poguntke and Webb (2005) framework currently allows. In addition, as Poguntke and Webb (2005:7) explained, the three faces of presidentialization 'revolve around the tension between political parties and individual leaders'. Increasing the weighting given to this central relationship, should also mean that the presidentialization thesis can tie into broader debates about changes to the nature of political parties as well as to political leadership (for example the work of Michels, 1962; Schumpeter, 1961 and Weber, 1978).

The presidentialization thesis, despite its many critics, will remain central to leadership debates in the literature for the foreseeable future. This is for a few central reasons. Most notable would be that even critics of the thesis concede that much of the empirical data is accurate (see Dowding, 2012:15–6; Rhodes, Wanna and Weller, 2009:86–97).[6] Although, whether any changes should be viewed under the one umbrella, using a label such as presidentialization is still hotly debated. Often these debates about the changing modes of political leadership in liberal democracies have become bogged down in semantics and in what Bennister (2012:24) has called the 'definitional minefield'. Therefore, advocates of the presidentialization thesis, if they still want to use this label, need to further clarify and stretch the model of Poguntke and Webb (2005). Otherwise the debates will remain about adjectives rather than actual changes to the body politic.

Postscript

After I had submitted my Doctoral thesis which *All Hail the Leaders* emerges from, Australian federal politics was once again rocked by the leadership

struggle between Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard and in June 2013 the FPLP changed leaders again. After a sustained campaign and after a vote of the ALP caucus, on 27 June Rudd was returned to the leadership of the party defeating Gillard 57 votes to 45. Shortly after returning to the leadership, Rudd once again demonstrated his opportunistic nature, arguing that he wanted to make two changes to party processes. The first change was to the way the party selected the leader of the federal parliamentary party. The reforms included a benchmark of 75 per cent of caucus wanting a leadership spill while in government and 60 per cent while in opposition. The reforms which were unanimously endorsed by caucus, despite reports of deep opposition to the changes, were agreed to with the federal election only months away.[7] The second change Rudd was publicly promoting was a return to 'local democratic ballots' (cited in Ireland, 2013). Commenting specifically on the removal of Trish Crossin for Nova Perris, Rudd (cited in Harrison, 2013) claimed 'The bottom line is this: I don't like the way in which it was handled, that's the truth'. In spite of the rhetoric Rudd was using publicly, in private he was once again working with the National Executive to impose candidates for a number of electorates across the country. This included seats that had already conducted local pre-selection ballots. In the seat of Forde in the state of Queensland, Labor's pre-selection process was complete before Rudd announced on 4 August that the election would be held on 7 September. On 8 August, however, it was announced that the democratically elected candidate had been replaced by former Queensland state premier Peter Beattie. This was not the only case where intervention from the parliamentary leadership and the National Executive were apparent though. According to numerous reports, Rudd and his supporters had also unsuccessfully been attempting to parachute a Department of Foreign Affairs official into the safe Labor seat of Lalor in Victoria as Julia Gillard was retiring from politics (Crook, 2013; Millar and Willingham, 2013). Moreover, two party officials asserted that Rudd had initially planned to intervene in five seats in Queensland alone, replacing candidates who had also already been pre-selected (Interview with Party Official B; Interview with Party Official C).

While a lack of time is often used as justification for the National Executive intervening in pre-selections, the evidence suggests that this alone does not explain the number or the reason interventions have occurred more frequently in recent times (see Cavalier, 2010: 185;

Faulkner, 2011: 8). The opportunism displayed by both leaders, combined with ambiguity over who holds the final authority over pre-selections also contributed to a re-shaping of institutional authority. The initial push in 2007 can logically be explained as contextual in that the ALP had their best chance of electoral victory since before they lost office in 1996.[8] Also, in the lead up to the 2010 election, a possible explanation could be that after winning office, the party was prepared to provide an electorally popular prime minister some leeway. Where political context has less explanatory power is in what followed. In the months leading up to Gillard's decision to promote Perris over Crossin, the polls were very unfavourable. Most polls were showing the ALP well behind on a two party preferred basis when the decision was made.[9] Therefore, if we can exclude electoral popularity as a key variable that empowered Gillard, what is left is the relationship Gillard has with her colleagues and what they deemed to be acceptable behaviour. While Rudd's actions could be inferred as him acting as the norm entrepreneur in this situation, Gillard exercised her own version of agency by openly advocating the removal of a sitting senator, reinforcing the norm that expanded the sphere of influence the party leader held.[10] Upon Rudd's return, this agential power-base that he had helped shape remained an institutionalised source of authority for the leadership.

Ultimately, Rudd's push for changes to the process for selecting the leader of the federal parliamentary party, while easy to criticise as self indulgent, may have some positive effects on the party after all.[11] If the way Labor supporters embraced the poll between Bill Shorten and Anthony Albanese is anything to go by, the process may have the capacity to reduce some of the ill-will much of the rank and file feel towards the machine and the party elites. Whether these changes are merely superficial window-dressing, however, is yet to be determined.

In terms of the Poguntke and Webb (2005) framework, if anything, I believe that developments inside the ALP since June 2013, have only further strengthened some of the claims they made about changes to democratic politics, and to the central tenets of the arguments I have made here about Australian politics.