Follow the leader: Testing for 'Presidentialization' in Candidate Selection in the New Zealand Labour Party and the Liberal Party of Australia[1]

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Introduction[2]

It long has been observed that political parties are dominated by elites. Robert Michels, writing in the early part of the 20th century, observed that an elite 'oligarchy' in the party bureaucracy dominates socialist parties. Ever since, many party theorists have observed continuing or growing elite dominance of major political parties in industrialized parliamentary democracies (e.g. Kirchheimer 1966). Recently, many analysts also have observed shifts in intra-party power from extra-parliamentary to parliamentary elites, and, within the parliamentary party, from the caucus/cabinet to the leader/prime minister.[3] Changes in election campaign communications (especially television) are hypothesized to have led to this 'presidentialization' of politics in which leaders dominate their parties, election campaigns, and government (see Poguntke and Webb 2005).[4]

This paper adds to an emerging literature on the 'presidentialization' of political parties by testing Poguntke and Webb's thesis that party leaders have acquired more and more power resources and autonomy over the last several decades. Specifically this work draws on preliminary field research on the New Zealand Labour Party and the Liberal Party of Australia.[5] The time period examined is the 1980s to the present, with particular emphasis on the period in which Helen Clark was Labour leader (1993-2008) and on John Howard's second stint as Liberal leader (1995-2007). These are the two strongest leaders in the recent histories of the two parties, and two leaders who excelled in the transformed media environment. If presidentialization is occurring in New Zealand and Australia, it should be visible during the respective leaderships of these two politicians. Although this research is part of a larger project that tests the extent to which presidentialization is occurring across various components of political parties,[6] this particular paper focuses on candidate selection.

In this paper, I argue that the evidence for presidentialization in candidate selection is mixed. The two leaders appear to have had more influence over candidate selection than their predecessors, but they did not use this authority capriciously, or simply to reward friends and punish enemies as one might expect from a presidential leader. Rather, the leaders used their influence to improve electability and forge party unity. In fact, as I argue in the conclusion, the imperative for party unity is another outcome of the transformed media environment. That unity may increase the party leader's authority over certain matters, but the authority is earned through careful attention to party affairs, adroit media management, and through thorough consultation and fair treatment of colleagues, even those who have differing political perspectives. Thus, these leaders achieved the authority that presidentialization predicts, but not the autonomy.

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[2] The researcher conducted approximately 40 interviews with current and past parliamentarians, political staff, members of the extra-parliamentary organization and activists from the two parties. In this paper, no sources have been identified, including those who spoke for attribution, to protect the anonymity of those who did not.

[3] See, for example, Panebianco (1988) on the shift in power from the extra-parliamentary party to the parliamentary party; see, for example, Farrell and Webb (2000) on the shift within the parliamentary party to the power leader.

[4] The term 'presidentialization' initially was created to describe the autonomous and non-collegial style of strong prime ministers. However, it is label that causes confusion because of the paradox of calling an exceptionally strong prime minister 'presidential', when prime ministers tend to be more powerful within their own systems than presidents. The meaning I attach to this term is the increasing accumulation of power resources and autonomy by the party leader.

[5] This paper mainly draws upon data from elite interviews of key insiders in both parties. Many of the findings of this paper will be tested later against other evidence, including archival documents, biographies, autobiographies, newspaper articles and other media, scholarly sources, and follow-up interviews with current and new participants.

[6] In addition, the Liberal Party of Canada will be added as a case.

The first section provides an overview of the two cases. The second section discusses the independent variable, changes to communication technologies and the media environment. The third section tests for evidence of presidentialization in candidate selection. Finally, there is a conclusion.

Description of cases

The New Zealand Labour Party and the Liberal Party of Australia have governed for extensive periods in their respective countries. New Zealand Labour was created in 1916 as a British-style labour party, and its heyday was the First Labour Government (1935-1949) when it established much of the modern New Zealand welfare state. After its 1949 defeat, New Zealand Labour won one-term victories in 1957 and 1972, back-to-back elections in 1984 and 1987, and three straight elections under Helen Clark's leadership (1999-2007). The Liberal Party's first leader, Sir Robert Menzies, created the centre-right party out of a merger of Australia's non-Labor parties in 1944. The Liberals first won election in 1949, in coalition with the Country Party (now National Party), and governed until 1972. The coalition also governed from 1975 to 1983, and from 1996 to 2008 under John Howard.

Despite their different political orientations, the parties have followed similar trajectories in recent years. Both parties returned to power in the 1990s after long periods in opposition, and after having suffered significant intra-party disunity between the parties' right and left wings in the 1980s. The source of disunity was the collapse of Keynesian economics in the 1970s, and the subsequent debate over neo-liberal economic reforms as the prospective solution to their respective countries' economic woes. New Zealand Labour experienced this disunity in government from 1984-1990, as they implemented a radical neo-liberal programme at odds with the beliefs of many of their supporters, activists and some parliamentarians. Eventually, there was a public split between the prime minister who wanted to pause the furious pace of reform and the finance minister who wanted to forge ahead. For the Australian Liberals, disunity peaked in opposition in the 1980s, when there were frequent leadership contests between Andrew Peacock on the party's left wing and John Howard on the party's right wing.

A rebuilding process followed the periods of disunity in both parties. Unity and purpose were forged, campaign techniques modernized and strong leaders selected. They soon enjoyed long runs in government. In the 1990s, New Zealand Labour repositioned itself as a centre-left party, prepared for the country's first election under a new mixed member proportional electoral system in 1996, and under Helen Clark's leadership (1993-2008), improved media management techniques between and during elections. In the late 1980s, the Australian Liberals began a purposeful modernization of their campaign organization, achieved an economic consensus on the right of the political spectrum in the early 1990s, and united behind John Howard when he returned to the party leadership in 1995.

Clark and Howard, share many similarities. Both served in elected extra-parliamentary posts in the 1970s, and while neither could be described as charismatic, both became very competent in media presentation, and both emerged as their respective parties' greatest media asset. Clark and Howard were practitioners of inclusive politics through frontbench portfolio allocations, candidate selection, and thorough consultation with colleagues. Finally, since both leaders have been described as extremely powerful within their parties, it is appropriate to look

more closely at the presidentialization phenomenon and assess the extent to which it applies to these cases.

Changes to communication technologies and the media environment

The basic presidentialization thesis is that changes to communications technologies have created a political environment that creates incentives for both the media and political parties to emphasize the party leader, and opportunities for the party leader to parlay this emphasis into increased authority and autonomy. In New Zealand and Australia, the advent of television as the medium by which most citizens obtain political news is a profound change. Many interview subjects in both countries identified television as the most important political medium, and one that tends to simplify policy matters and present politics as a contest of personalities.

Television factored into election campaigns in New Zealand and Australia as early as the 1960s. However, the introduction of television was not simply a single transformative event. Over the years, television has become more ubiquitous, supported by faster communications technologies, and its coverage of politics has changed. The increase in television viewership, relative to newspaper readership and radio listenership, creates incentives for political parties to focus their media management efforts toward the television media. In both countries, election campaigns now focus on "the battle of the six o'clock news", with the major parties competing to win each day of the campaign by setting the agenda and addressing issues and attacks promptly and effectively. This is especially crucial in New Zealand, where paid broadcast advertising is not permitted under electoral law.

The average length of each political television news item has decreased, as has the length of the 'sound bite' statements by politicians that fill those stories. The shrinking size of spaces, into which parties must squeeze their messages, creates pressure for political messages to be coordinated, tailored and delivered by a single carrier (i.e. the party leader). As one former senior staffer to John Howard observed: "four minute items have been reduced to two minutes, and a politician's opportunity to communicate a message has been reduced from 30 to 15 to six seconds. If you only have six seconds you don't want many others in the market competing against you" (personal interview).[7] With the increasing speed of other communications technologies (fax machines in the 1980s, and mobile phones and the Internet in the 1990s), the news cycle decreased to 24 hours in the 1990s and put pressure on political parties to respond rapidly to emerging issues. One of the most effective ways to provide rapid media responses is to centralize media relations as much as possible in the leader's office, and it appears that the two parties have done this.

Interviewees reported that both Clark and Howard learned from past failures in their dealings with the media, and explicitly set out to address their limitations. A five-member group of MPs "fronted" Helen Clark prior to the 1996 election with the message that she was unelectable and that the party was facing annihilation under her leadership.[8] One member of five-member group described Clark's response as the hallmark her leadership: she rallied support in the party organization and in parliament, promoted the five challengers (one of them was elected deputy leader), and she worked harder on her media skills and became more open with the media (personal interview). In early 1996, Clark recruited chief press secretary Mike Munro, who is credited with humanizing her (one frequent media criticism was that she was a

[7] Another interviewee observed similar trends in New Zealand since media deregulation in the 1980s: the conflict-driven and sensationalized news stories are about two minutes, and the sound bites 8-10 seconds (personal interview).

[8] Several months before the election Clark was languishing at 3 per cent in the preferred prime minister poll and the party was at only 15 per cent (Rudd 87).

cold person because she did not have children). The media team built a media program around Clark that had her appear in soft media (e.g. breakfast television shows) and engage with senior journalists at dinner parties, and the team ensured that the media were aware of her hiking hobby. The strategy succeeded in showing "a warm beating heart behind the cold exterior" (personal interview). She also worked on her television presentation skills by hiring media trainers for the 1996 election and subsequent elections (Rudd 88).

Although Labour lost the 1996 election, Clark was credited with an effective media performance, especially in the televised leaders' debate, and quickly became perceived as the party's greatest asset. In government, one senior journalist described Clark as media savvy and a micro-manager: she brought back post cabinet press conferences that were abolished by a previous National Party prime minister; she explained government actions (to the extent that she personally telephoned journalists); and, on Mondays, she did a radio interview, a breakfast television interview, and press conferences to set the weekly agenda (personal interview).

John Howard also did not enjoy a warm media image when he assumed the leadership. One senior staffer reported that Howard came to the leadership the second time with the knowledge that he had to handle the media well (personal interview). His strategy was to appeal to the electorate over the heads of the press gallery through talk back radio and other local media, and he spent more time on media as the media-cycle shortened. Another former senior staffer reported that Howard would frequently do "long, tough press conferences to outlast the reporters. By doing this, he demonstrated his resiliency and his primacy as the government spokesperson" (personal interview). Howard did not perform well in television debates, but he compensated by ensuring that debates were held early in the campaign (personal interview). He then earned a reputation as a formidable campaigner, coming from behind to win several elections.

Although neither Howard nor Clark were perceived as charismatic leaders, and although they both initially faced problems in their dealings with the media, through personal effort, discipline, and hired professional expertise, they were both able to display high competence in the media that few members of their respective parties could rival. This competence was reinforced by the media desire to increasingly focus reporting on the major party leaders due to budgetary cutbacks to media organizations as well as the perception, if not the reality, that it is appropriate to focus on the leaders because that is where power lies.[9] Several interviewees observed that frontbench politicians play a much less visible and important role in election campaigns, especially since the 1980s.

High quality media presentation and media management now requires professionals with specialized skill-sets.[10] If the leader is able to accumulate professional expertise of this type, relative to his or her colleagues and other sections of the party, this can increase the leader's power and autonomy. The number of media professionals working for the leader has increased in both parties, and, in the Labour Party particularly, the quality of those media professionals has improved dramatically. In the 1960s and 1970s, no press editor would let an employee work for Labour and return, so the caliber of press officers was not high (when they

[9] Even in New Zealand, where one might assume that there would be an increased focus on smaller party leaders with the introduction of a Mixed Member Proportional electoral system, there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that in fact the media is increasingly focused on the two contenders for the prime minister role at the expense of the smaller party leaders. For example, in the 2008 election, the leaders of the two major parties (after back channel negotiations [personal interview]) refused to appear on a television debate with the leaders of the smaller parties, and the television station agreed to exclude the other leaders.

[10] This applies to other important political skills such as high quality quantitative and qualitative political research, advertising, and electronic database management (see Panebianco [1988] on professionalization and the electoral-professional party).

had them) (personal interview). Another interviewee reported that journalists used to look down on doing media work for political parties, but that in the 1980s and 1990s the work became sanitized (personal interview). Thus, it appears that leaders have benefited from an increase in the quality and quantity of media personnel serving the interests of the leader, especially over the past 10 years. The reach of the leader's media professionals has increased, as demonstrated by a dramatic strengthening of the leader's media surveillance of colleagues and message discipline during the Clark and Howard governments (numerous personal interviews).

In sum, the 1990s featured the development of increasing media demands on politicians in terms of the development of the 24-hour news cycle, the shortening of sound bites and greater focus on party leaders at the expense of their senior colleagues. Through expert help and discipline Helen Clark and John Howard each emerged as the biggest media asset for their respective parties. The question, to which we now turn, is the extent to which these developments fueled an increase in the party leader's autonomy and authority with respect to candidate selection.

Candidate Selection

The available evidence suggests that in both countries, media focus on leaders has increased over time at the expense of their political colleagues. If a leader is able to thrive in this environment, and to establish himself or herself as the party's best asset, then we should expect that the leader would use the increased authority that comes with indispensability to influence candidate selection. We might expect formal rule changes that benefit the leader, or successful informal efforts to install supporters in winnable seats. In both parties the parliamentary party solely has the responsibility of selecting and removing the party leader and it is thus to the advantage of the party leader to have as many supporters in the room as possible. Clearly, John Howard and Helen Clark thrived in the new political environment, so it is reasonable to predict that they would use their authority in this way. Thus, we may posit the following hypothesis:

H1. The more a leader is able to excel in the changed media environment (described above), the more we can expect leaders to exert control over candidate selection to reward supporters and punish enemies

We may test this hypothesis by assessing the extent to which the party leader gained or utilized increased power over candidate selection through formal rule changes and informal means of persuasion. By all accounts, Helen Clark was a more consistent media performer than her predecessors Moore (1990-1993), Palmer (1989-1990) and Rowling (1975-1983), and she managed to do this in a media environment that focuses more attention on the leader than before. David Lange, (1983-1989) was more of a star media performer than Clark, but he was an outsider to the party and had little interest in candidate selection. So, we should expect that Clark had greater authority over candidate selection than all these leaders.

To assess the Labour Party leader's authority, we may first analyze formal rule changes. Selection for House candidates was initially by a vote of all eligible local party members, but in 1951 constitutional changes established *ad hoc* selection committees that consisted of three members appointed by the New Zealand Executive; usually the party president, the general secretary and a party vice-president (generally referred to as 'head office' representatives); and three members selected by the local party (Gustafson 45). The current composition of selection

committees remains similar: three 'head office' representatives; one or two representatives of the local executive (depending on local membership size and activity); one member elected from the floor of the selection meeting; and one vote determined by a preferential ballot at the selection meeting (these straw polls began in 1979). Another major change to candidate selection came in 1990, with a new rule framework developed to address accusations of branch stacking and undue union influence through their block vote. Under the new rules, eligible voters must be long-term members that participate in monthly meetings, and the union block vote was abolished so that affiliated members would cast individual ballots (Rudd 85).

Thus, new formal powers over electorate candidate selection have not accrued to the party leader since 1951. In fact, the parliamentary party's attempt to acquire more say over candidate selection was soundly rejected at the party's 1990 conference ("Labour Party members vent anger on MPs"). However, when the relationship between the party leader and the extra-parliamentary party is strong, the leader may exert considerable informal influence through the three head office representatives. In addition, the elimination of the union block vote and the restrictions on branch stacking make it exceedingly difficult for an upstart prospective candidate to overcome opposition from the head office representatives and entrenched interests in the local party through effective organizing and recruitment of new party members, or through powerful union backing.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the parliamentary party and the party organization were divided, the Labour Party leader had very little influence over candidate selection. In fact, some interviewees reported that in 1993, the party president and her allies deliberately influenced candidate selection to move the ideological orientation of caucus to the left and to replace the incumbent leader (which is how Clark came to the leadership in 1993). However, under Helen Clark's leadership, during which time the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary wings were far more united, many interviewees reported that she did influence many electorate selections. It is difficult to quantify her influence because these interventions were rarely public and her rate of success is therefore unknown. The institutional framework was such that all she had to do was communicate her preferences to the three head office representatives to have some influence. It is not clear how often these representatives took her advice, but many in the party believe it to have been frequent. However, she did not always get her way. One interviewee reported that he was not Clark's preferred candidate when he initially sought the nomination, but that he won nevertheless.

Where Clark did take an active and direct role was in the creation of the party list, which was used in the first MMP election in 1996. The party organization created a process for list selection whereby regional committees would rank candidates that would be forwarded to a 'moderating committee' for the final vetting and ordering. According to the party's constitution, there are 36 members of the moderating committee, only three of which are parliamentarians (the party leader, deputy leader, and someone elected by caucus). The rest represent the various elements of the party (party executives, sector councils representing various demographic groups and trade unions, and regional representatives). Despite (or perhaps because of) this disparate membership, Clark was widely reported to have taken a strong hand in the ranking process. Some interviewees reported that her influence stemmed from the respect the other committee members had for her judgment. One member of the moderating committee for three elections described Clark's influence this away: Helen Clark's opinion "was sought and always acted upon. If one slot didn't reflect her preference, the next one would (and this only happened twice in three elections)" (personal interview).[11] The same interviewee

[11] Not all interviewees described Clark's strength on the moderating committee to be this high. However, nearly everyone agreed that her influence over the final ordering of the list was very significant.

noted that Clark did not simply use this influence to reward supporters and punish enemies. She was active in promoting balance in terms of ethnicity, age and other factors.

Like Clark, Howard was very competent in the transformed media environment, and he was certainly more consistent and better at message discipline than past leaders, Alexander Downer (1994-1995), John Hewson (1990-1994), Andrew Peacock (1983-1985, 1989-1990), and Howard himself in his first incarnation as leader (1985-1989). Candidate selection rules in the Liberal Party vary among the states and over time, and these rules are contentious and frequently contested. The common theme, however, is that candidate selection is a prerogative jealously guarded by the divisions, and that the pre-selection decision is generally shared between local activists and state executives. Until recently, the dominant method of lower house selection was a preselection conference. One interviewee described his own first preselection from about two decades ago as follows: there were about 30 branches in the electorate that elected delegates to a convention. The state executive sent representatives as well: the balance is about 60 per cent local and 40 per cent state for a total of 120 people. The candidates gave speeches and took questions and then there was a vote (personal interview). Senate selections follow similar procedures, with state-wide delegates and a share of state executive delegates of a certain proportion, but the process tends to be controlled by the state executive more so than in House selections.[12] Both lower and upper house pre-selection processes have featured numerous controversies over the years with allegations of 'branch stacking' and undue factionalism that have occasionally brought the party into disrepute. Many of the divisions are now moving toward 'open plebiscites', in which all financial members can cast direct ballots instead of electing branch delegates.

In March 2009, the federal wing of the party achieved a substantive rule change that provides it with significant influence over candidate selection for the first time. Essentially, the rule allows the federal executive to take immediate action during a federal election campaign to remove a problem candidate by a two-thirds majority vote. Although this change nominally increases the only federal executive's power (though the leader sits on the executive), we may speculate that it effectively increases the leader's power because during elections campaigns, the leader and the federal secretary (who acts as a campaign manager) tend to have absolute authority over party matters (personal interview).

Several interviewees identified the Pauline Hanson 'incident' as the rationale for this rule change. In the 1996 election, Hanson, a Liberal Party lower house candidate in Queensland, made radical and politically embarrassing statements that put political pressure on Howard to disendorse her. The federal organization had to "lean on" the Queensland organization, to remove her as a Liberal Party candidate.[13] The 2009 rule change allows the federal organization to do this directly and to avoid situations in which the division refuses to disendorse, or in which there is a lengthy appeal process once they do. Although this rule change occurred after Howard's 2007 retirement, it is a reflection of his legacy because it was perceived as a long overdue change. It should be noted, however, that this change falls short of changes the federal wing of the Liberal Party was considering, according to at least one newspaper article in which a Liberal source suggested that they would introduce a rule change that would allow the federal leader and federal executive to appoint candidates to specific seats (as is done in the Australian Labor Party) (Coorey, 6).

Although the disendorsement mechanism is the only example of a formal rule change that appears to accrue significant power to the leader, many interviewees reported examples of

[12] See Johns (2000) for more details on the candidate selection procedures in Australia that vary by party, and within parties by state.
[13] Hanson won the election as an independent, and went on to found the right-wing and populist One Nation party.

Howard's informal influence in candidate selection. There was consensus among the interviewees that Howard used this informal influence mainly to protect incumbents. He would even protect ideological rivals and those whose competence he questioned. Although this is at odds with our hypothesis, which predicts his support for friends and opposition to rivals, it should be noted that he did not support incumbents 100 per cent of the time. As one former cabinet minister put it, he would sometimes let incumbents "not in his camp go to the wolves" (personal interview). Howard also took an interest in open contests for winnable seats, though he would not do this openly because "he had to work with" whomever won (personal interview).

There were several avenues through which Howard exercised his influence. First, Howard would write reference letters for preferred candidates. Prospective candidates are required to provide reference letters as part of the recruitment process and Howard would write letters for incumbents almost all of the time. In at least one case, Howard's reference letter for a former staffer contesting an open nomination was reproduced and distributed to eligible voters by the former staffer's campaign (Wiseman 7). Second, Howard would exercise influence through the leader's representative who was to vote at selection meetings. One of the interviewees once faced an incumbent challenge and Howard sent the senior minister from the state as his representative to the selection meeting, which sent the message that the leader strongly supported the incumbent (personal interview). In open contests, the other voters would be especially interested in how Howard's representative was planning to vote. Third, Howard would make phone calls to and meet with key power brokers (i.e. state delegates or those who were in a position to influence delegates) in an attempt to influence the outcome. Finally, from time to time he would make public statements in support of a particular candidate.[14] However, Howard's power in this regard was not absolute. More than one interviewee argued that Howard had far more influence in his home state of New South Wales than in other states. If he were to intervene directly in a contest in Victoria, for example, it might have a perverse effect. In addition, he was not always successful in his attempts to influence contests in New South Wales.

Although both Clark and Howard used their authority as leader to influence candidate selection, and that this influence was used to reward friends and punish enemies from time to time, this is not the entire story. In Clark's case, she also appears to have used her influence to augment the party's electoral chances. For example, she tried to ensure that those demographic groups shown by Labour polling research to be likely Labour supporters be represented high on the party list. As several interviewees reported, one of the party's strategies under MMP was to focus on the party vote (as opposed to the electorate vote), which determines the total allocation of seats. The most efficient way for Labour to increase the party vote was to increase the turnout of enrolled non-voters in their strongholds of Auckland and other urban centres through the targeting of key demographic groups (e.g. Pacific Islanders, Maori, certain ethnic communities, etc.). Helen Clark used much of her influence on the moderating committee to ensure that representatives of such groups were ranked high on the party list.

Incumbent challenges were far more frequent and far more divisive in the Australian Liberals than in New Zealand Labour, and Howard thus faced more of a political problem in this regard than did Clark. Howard's general support for incumbents is instructive. There are three main advantages to discouraging incumbent challenges. First, incumbency is an advantage in elections because of name recognition. The party is more likely to win a local seat if the

[14] Future research may use newspaper reports to track public interventions by Clark and Howard in candidate selection and compare their success rate in effecting desired outcomes with past leaders.

candidate is an incumbent rather than a newcomer. Second, challenges tend to be distracting and irritating for incumbents, which can damage morale in parliament. Third, incumbent challenges tend to fan the flames of factionalism with accusations, counter accusations, and media attention focused squarely on these high profile intra-party battles. According to one of Howard's senior staffers, the one-time factional warrior of the 1980s grew to 'hate' factions in government (personal interview), and made at least one public statement lamenting the party's factionalism, and identified factionalism as an obstacle to Liberal electoral success at the state level (Grubel).

Although Clark and Howard were similar leaders in terms of being their respective parties' greatest media assets in the electorate, and although they enjoyed the strong support of the bulk of the grassroots and party organization, it is clear that Clark exercised far more influence than Howard over candidate selection. This can be attributed to several factors: 1) the tradition of collectivism in labour parties makes it more acceptable for selection rules that are heavily weighted toward the party centre than in the Liberal Party which emphasizes individual rights; 2) the Liberal Party's federal structure (that mirrors Australia's) creates an additional barrier for the leader and federal secretariat to overcome since the divisions jealously guard their prerogative over candidate selection; 3) New Zealand's small size makes it much easier for the 'head office' representatives to participate in nearly all selection contests than would be the case in a larger country like Australia; 4) the introduction of MMP in New Zealand provided the leader with an opportunity to exercise her authority as the focal point of a large and unwieldy committee.

Despite these institutional differences, according to several interviewees, Clark and Howard each were able to exert more influence over candidate selection than previous party leaders over the past 25 years or so, and in some cases they appear to have used this influence to reward supporters and/or punish enemies. Thus, the evidence does provide some support for the hypothesis that excelling in the transformed media environment is associated with authority over candidate selection. However, several qualifications must be added. First, it appears that length in government is another independent variable for authority that needs to be controlled in future research by measuring whether increases and decreases in influence over candidate selection are associated with the ebbs and flows of the leader's media performance and popularity, or if authority over candidate selection simply grows stronger over the length of the premiership.[15] Second, Clark and Howard were both products of the organization, and as such, took an interest in and respected party procedures, and who knew how to leverage these procedures. Not all leaders, even 'presidential' ones, would have that advantage. Finally, as discussed in the conclusion, many of their interventions were intended to make the party more unified and electable – not simply to shore up their own position within the party. In this way, they both appeared to be taking the long view of how to build up leadership authority because they understood that strength of leadership is significantly correlated with the proximity of an electoral win.

Conclusion: strength in unity

Presidentialization refers to both the accumulation of power resources and autonomy by the party leader or prime minister. And when one conjures up the image of a 'presidential'

[15] Also, in Clark's case, her public image improved dramatically from the first election she waged as opposition leader (1996) to the second (1999), which she won. It would be interesting to test the extent to which her influence over candidate selection was greater in 1999 than in 1996.

prime minister, it tends to be a Tony Blair or a Margaret Thatcher: larger than life, and using a personal connection with the electorate to do things that are at odds with the beliefs of many of core party supporters. Although Helen Clark and John Howard were certainly powerful party leaders and prime ministers, they do not fit this presidential caricature. Rather, these are leaders who grounded themselves in their parties. Clark secured her base by repositioning Labour as a centre-left party and creating a programme of modest and achievable social democratic goals, and delivering on what she promised. She contributed to party unity by promoting critics and consulting thoroughly and widely. Similarly, John Howard's legendary talk back radio appearances were designed not to appeal to the electorate-at-large, but to consolidate support among the shows' conservative listeners, often to reassure those who were concerned that his government was not conservative enough. Like Clark, he consulted widely (including senior 'moderates' in his party) and used what Liberals call a 'broad church' approach to candidate and frontbench selections so that the moderate and conservative wings were well represented.

Both Clark and Howard were also extremely competent performers in media and parliament and derived considerable authority from being their parties' biggest assets in this regard. However, much of their authority also derived from old fashioned party management and balancing of interests. As much as the instinct to attend to party affairs likely came naturally to these two politicians, each of whom initially rose through the party organization, the careful attention to party management is also a response to changes in communications technologies and the media environment as discussed in this paper. One theme that emerged from numerous interviews is that one of the greatest effects of the new media environment is a growing unity imperative. The frenetic 24-hour media cycle requires political parties to make rapid, clear and unambiguous responses to emerging issues. Such responses are not possible in a divided party. No longer can politicians of the same party deliver contrasting messages to different audiences without being noticed, due to the reach and speed of communications technologies. The media increasingly feeds on controversy and the easiest way for an MP to get media attention is to criticize the party leadership. So, it is now both more important than ever, and (in some ways) more difficult than ever, to achieve party unity. As one senior political staffer put it, "there is nothing more damaging to the credibility of a leader than disunity" (personal interview). Therefore, to be successful in the modern political environment, party leaders must continually strive for absolute party unity. Unless the various elements of the party are content, clear and unambiguous political messages will be difficult to deliver, and electoral success extremely hard to achieve.

It is in this context that we must interpret these leaders' approaches to candidate selection. For both leaders, influence over candidate selection reflected hard earned authority through media performance and adroit party management. This influence was frequently used to reinforce party unity by balancing the parties' disparate and sometimes competing elements. When supporters were rewarded and enemies punished, it was usually done as carefully and as quietly as possible. The experiences of Helen Clark and John Howard suggest that political media stardom is not necessary (nor, perhaps is it sufficient) for sustained political success in New Zealand and Australia. Instead, party leaders must be very competent media performers (preferably superior to their parliamentary colleagues) and media managers, and they must continually forge party unity through the drudgery of managing personalities and attending to party affairs so that their political messages are unsullied by unseemly divisions.

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