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Hidden Treasure or Sinking Ship? Diagnosing the Study of Political Leadership

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Abstract:

The study of leadership leads a rather languishing life in the discipline of political science. In this article, we explore the literature on political leadership in order to 1) identify the obstacles that have prevented this literature from a more extensive dialogue with related fields in political science, and 2) explore whether this literature contains hidden treasures that could contribute to leadership-analyses in the discipline. We suggest that the tendency to characterize the study of leadership primarily as an art (rather than a science) might have prevented conversations with other sub-fields; however, we argue that the literature contains useful theoretical insights for the analysis of both broader societal transformations and specific political outcomes.

Keywords: political leadership, transformational, transactional, charismatic, legitimacy.

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“One of the most universal cravings of our time is a hunger
for compelling and creative leadership” (Burns 1979:1)

It is noteworthy that the introducing sentence of James MacGregor Burns’ seminal study *Leadership* – authored thirty years ago – seems to apply today as well. There are just as frequent requests for leadership in order to facilitate democracy, curb corruption, combat climate change and promote nuclear disarmament – just to give a few examples. Nevertheless, a constant urge for political leadership does not necessarily mean that political leaders really make a difference. Are their deeds of significance? In search for an affirmative answer, the literature dedicated to studying political leadership is an obvious place to start. The tendency to single out for analysis individuals with a reputation to have shaped the course of history, such as Gandhi, Roosevelt, Hitler and Stalin, contribute to the boosting of political leaders in this literature (Jones 1989; Elcock 2001; Grint 2000). Yet the literature is broadly grouped on the basis of assumptions concerning structural constraints on agency – but there would of course not be much point in focusing analytic attention on a phenomenon thought of as insignificant to begin with. The claim of leadership significance is however shared by fields in political science and other primary objects of study. To illustrate, *Foreign Policy Analysis* (FPA) explores state leaders’ impact on foreign policy outcomes, *Negotiation-Theory* takes into consideration the capacity of individual state representatives to set the course of a bargaining-process, even approaches with more structural focus, such as *The New Institutionalism*, point to the importance of single key-individuals at specific moments in sequences of societal transformation. It is therefore somewhat peculiar that the literature of political leadership, rather than being frequently consulted by these other fields, leads a somewhat languishing life within the discipline. In fact, leadership analysis is rather carried out within the field of organization-studies, in dialogue with sociology and psychology (Yukl 2008; Rost 1989). The tendency in political science during the past decades to privilege structural explanations at the expense of political actors is one potential explanation for this neglect of leadership-analysis. To clarify, there has been a rather excessive focus on institutions, along with increased attention to other social facts and structural phenomena, such as collective identities, regimes and norms in the

discipline. In parallel to this general structural tendency, the analytic attention paid to actors has been much synonymous with rational choice. An approach that, in fact, gives rather limited room for individual agency beyond the core assumption of actors' capacity and attempts to strategic utility-maximizing. However, another potential reason to the neglect of this literature is that it may suffer from analytical weaknesses which prevent fruitful dialogue with other fields in the discipline. Regardless of reasons for the current state, the exciting thought is that this literature might accommodate intriguing and useful insights that can be enriching for political science. Thus, the overarching aim of this article is further exploration of this topic. More precisely, we investigate the study of political leadership, both as integrated in other fields of political science and as a separate object of study. By doing that we seek to 1) illuminate what characteristics of this literature that might be the obstacles that prevent dialogue with related fields in political science, and, 2) look for potential hidden treasures to the analysis of the role of political leaders. The article is divided into two parts. The first part of the article defines political leadership, and addresses leadership-analysis integrated in other fields of political science. The second part of the article provides an overview of the development and current state of the study of political leadership as a separate multidisciplinary academic field. The concluding section summarizes the findings of the conducted overview, which leads to a number of suggestions for the future analysis of leadership in political science.

Defining Political Leadership

Broadly, political leadership is described as a collective feature separable into two categories: formal and informal leadership (Weber 1994; Burns 1978, 2003; Seligman 1950; Möller 2009; Nye 2008). A political leadership is either individuals that possess authority through a formal position on a high level in society, or individuals considered leaders even in the absence of legally ascribed positions in society. Informal leaders gain their authority on the basis of sources of legitimacy other than the legal. The literature identifies two alternative grounds of legitimate ruling: tradition and charisma. There are contemporary conceptualizations (Burns 1978, 2003; Möller 2009), but hardly as vigorous as the earlier descriptions offered by sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920). Traditional rule is, according to Weber: "the authority of 'the eternal past', of custom,

hallowed by the fact that it has held sway from time immemorial and by a habitual predisposition to preserve it” (Weber 1994:311). Yet there is also “the authority of the exceptional, personal ‘gift of grace’, or charisma, the entirely personal devotion to, and personal trust in, revelations, heroism, or other qualities of leadership in an individual” (Weber 1994:311). Typical illustrations of a traditional leadership are the patriarch or the monarch. A legal political leadership is of course connected to formal positions, such as being prime minister, president or party leader. The charismatic leadership, gaining authority through this “gift of grace”, could both contest and reinforce the legal fundamentals of a political order. The leader of a nationalist movement claiming independence does the former. Illustrative of the latter is the circumstance that an individual with certain skills could have a more formal position than an individual less fit for the job. Political leadership is also commonly described as a relational process between the leading individual(s) and the following crowd; the leadership tries to motivate, mobilize and influence the followers in a certain direction (Burns 1978:18-23; Möller 2009: 26; Rost 1991:102f). As leadership analyst Ronald Heifetz (1994) points out: “Rather than define leadership either as a position of authority in a social structure or as a personal set of characteristics, we may find it a great deal more useful to define leadership as an activity” (Heifetz 1994:20). In sum, political leadership tends to be defined as a collective feature, or an institution, rather than a unitary actor with power, and as an activity and a relational process between leaders and followers, rather than a static position. As we shall see, however, leadership analyses struggle to live up to these nowadays rather widely agreed upon conceptualizations. Critical self-evaluations typically concern the tendency to focus too narrowly on the characteristics and skills of single individuals.

Leadership Analysis within Political Science

A wide range of research in political science addresses the impact of political leadership, but research with leadership as the main question of concern is scarce. Thus focus on political leadership is generally a by-product of research conducted for other purposes. (Möller 2009:7-9; Nye 2008:xi-xii). The coming sections analyze fields that pay some attention to political actors, namely new institutional theory, negotiations-theory and

foreign policy analysis. The overview serves the purpose of revealing gaps where the literature of political leadership could make a contribution.

The New Institutionalism: When Leadership Matters

Through the notion of formative moments, or critical junctures, the new institutionalism conceptualizes the fundamentally important insight that individuals at certain points may significantly shape the course of history. A formative moment is a breach of path dependency that unfolds the opportunity of long-term impact of individuals by reformulating conditions and rules of a new institutional order (March & Olsen 1989; Hall & Taylor 1996; Peters 2005; Peters, Pierre & King 2005). In that sense, this approach answers to when political leaders matter. During such formative stages, research suggests increased likelihood of ideational impact and emphasizes agents as carriers of ideas (Berman 1999; Goldstein & Keohane 1993; Peters 2005; Peters, Pierre & King 2001). Sheri Berman's comparative study of the social democratic parties in Sweden and Germany illustrates the usefulness of this approach. Her analysis illuminates how different programmatic beliefs held by the leadership influenced how these parties responded to key challenges of democratization and depression in the 20th century (Berman 1999). Yet the key-point in institutional theory is the significance of political institutions. To illustrate, Stanley G. Payne's (2006) studies the breakdown of the Spanish Republic and the outbreak of the Spanish civil war. Payne examines the actions and inactions of key actors; the internal rifts within the different political parties and movements, and the failure of the political leadership to control the leading parties. The implementation of political reforms was badly handled from the beginning, generating hostility among elite groups (military, church) that were not originally hostile to the Republic (Payne 2006:347). Payne's results point to the necessity of consensus about the basic rules and basic agreements among elites, such as the rule of law. In the Spanish case, the political leadership and elite constantly interfered with the very same constitutional arrangement they had introduced (Payne 2006) Thus, Payne's study illuminates the impact of political institutions on societal changes, and "quality of government" (QoG). The shortcoming of this institutional focus is that leadership tends to be narrowed down to the body of formal rulers, and citizens' urges and demands play a

minor role, especially during periods of “business as usual”. Leadership defined as a position of authority in a social structure, with position meaning the result of institutional arrangements, risks turning leadership into a by-product of the current structure in the shape of a certain institutional setting (See Charron & Lapuente 2009:8). This limitation of agency is in fact a tendency also within the version of institutionalism with the most outspoken emphasis on agents, namely rational institutionalism (For an overview, see Hall & Taylor 1996; Peters 2005). To illustrate, Miller (1992), argues that “the solution to coordination problem involves the personal characteristics and shared perceptions of the actors involved, the political skills of organizational leaders, and the constitutional resolution of the ultimate political problems of power sharing in organizations” (Miller 1992:232-233). He applies the framework of repeated games in order to demonstrate that sustainable cooperation among rational individuals is one of many logic possibilities, and highlights how the leaders are forced to reorganize and redefine their self-interest. Illuminating a shift in actors’ interest deviates from the general rationalist assumption of preferences exogenous to the model. Yet also within rationalist institutionalism, even though actors may redefine their preferences, it remains less clear in what way different kinds of leadership have an impact on institutions and political outcomes. As mentioned already in the introduction, the rationalist approach also restricts individual agency to the conduct of strategic utility-maximizing. The analysis of the mutual relationship between individual actors and a political structure tends to privilege structure in the sense that institutional settings form leaders and not vice versa. Thereby, institutional theory has problems with defining leadership as a reciprocal and relational phenomenon.

Negotiation Theory: How Leadership Matters

Leadership is considered an important ingredient in the study of multilateral negotiations and institutional bargaining (Young 1991; Hampson & Hart 1995; Tallberg 2008). Through categorizations of the type of leadership that a political actor can carry out in the context of bargaining, negotiation-theory broadly answers the question of how leadership matters. Given the complexity and uncertainty that characterizes the enterprise of institutional bargaining, leadership is considered a potential requisite to success; the many obstacles in institutional bargaining “set the stage for the emergence of leadership”

(Young 1991:285; Gupta & Ringius 2001; Hampson & Hart 1995). Even if leadership cannot guarantee positive results on its own, it is assumed to raise the probability of reaching a widely accepted agreement. The study of negotiations contains useful conceptual specifications of types of leaderships conducted in the context of institutional bargaining. To illustrate, structural leadership stems from material resources, entrepreneurial leadership rests on negotiation skills and intellectual leadership is carried out on the basis of ideas (Young 1991; Banerjee 1998; Gupta & Ringius 2001). A related framework makes the distinction between structural, directional and instrumental leadership. While the meaning of structural leadership is similar between frameworks and instrumental leadership is much similar to entrepreneurial leadership, directional leadership is about demonstrating feasibility or setting an example through efficient and ambitious implementation of an agreement. Applying these different types of leadership as an analytical framework has guided studies of the leadership strategies carried out by the European Union in the climate negotiations (Gupta & Ringius 2001). Negotiation-studies also inherit the ambition to analyze impact from actors other than the states, such as groups of expertise and individual scientists. The epistemic community-approach has become the most influential; it suggests that science in the shape of “consensual knowledge” may have a more profound impact on policy through the capacity to transform interests (Lidskog & Sundqvist 2002). Science is, when organized in an epistemic community, of crucial importance for successful environmental cooperation. The epistemic community is “a knowledge-based transnational network of professionals holding political power by cognitive authority.” (Haas 1992:3; Lidskog & Sundqvist 2002:82). Applying consensual knowledge in the policy process serves as an engine for institutional learning in an environmental friendly-direction. Thus, in the epistemic community-approach, scientists play a role very similar to that of intellectual leadership. While explorations of the impact various actors may concern collective agents, like states vs. scientists, there is also focus on individual representatives. In fact Young (1991) argues that leadership should be treated as carried out by individuals, heads of states, negotiators, chairs of conferences, rather than collective entities, like states or international organizations. Yet since these individuals in leadership roles in bargaining-processes for the most part represent collective entities, Young also requests further

exploration of the relationship between these individuals and their respective collective entity. Tallberg (2008) explores the power of the chair through a rationalist theory of formal leadership and demonstrates it with case studies of EU negotiations. His study focuses on the rotating Presidency of the EU, but concerns the more general phenomenon of chairmanship in international negotiations. The empirical analysis provides empirical evidence in favor of the Presidency office as a platform of political influence.

Foreign Policy Analysis: Why Leaders Matters

Through the overarching interest in explaining foreign policy outcomes, the vast attention Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) pays to political leaders might be taken as a broad answer to why they matter. The opportunity to take decisive decisions of war and peace makes them potential shapers of the history of international relations. Complementary, as well as in competition to the structurally oriented field of International Relations-theory (IR), Foreign Policy Analysis is occupied with actor-specific theory, including efforts to specify leadership effects on decision-making and policy outcomes. The history of this field inherits the ambition to theorize the mind of the foreign policy maker; how beliefs, attitudes, values, emotions, experiences and conceptions of self and nation impact action (Hudson 1995). Snyder, Buck and Sapin (1962) is a foundational study that formulates initial points of departures, including the necessity to focus on a decisional unit and to view decision-making as a process. FPA includes studies of political decision-making that not necessarily rests on the rationalist model. Indeed, one of the qualities of Graham Allison's seminal study *Essence of Decision* (1971) of the Cuban missile crisis reveals the limitations of applying the rational model to foreign policy. Point is proven by using two additional analytical lenses on this political event: an organizational process model and a governmental politics model. The latter model focuses on the negotiation between top politicians that foregoes decisions, takes into account how a leader's power is constituted through personality and skills of persuasion, and underlines the necessity of reaching consensus for effective leadership. Moreover, the model reveals the risk of inefficient or unfortunate decision due to miscommunications and misunderstandings (Allison 1971; Ekengren & Brommesson 2007; Eriksson 2009). Studies in FPA also seek to explore how the characteristics of a society – such as culture, ideology, geography and

history – translate into the microcosm of the decider’s mind (Hudson & Vore 1995). The relationship between the international environment and agent properties is considered crucial. This relationship is for instance elucidated through framework distinction between an intentional, dispositional and structural dimension of foreign policy actions. The dispositional dimension links structural circumstances and the intentions of an agent in the sense that it is the broader view that makes a given objective seem desirable, yet stems from actual structural circumstances. To illustrate, in order for an actual negative shift in a state’s geopolitical environment (structural dimension) to translate into attempts to counter such a shift (intentional dimension), it has to be known and interpreted as a threat to national security (dispositional dimension) (Carlsnaes 2008:97f in Smith, Hadfield, Dunne (eds.)). Cognitive parts of decision-making have also been captured through the concept operational code. Frameworks based on this concept aims at capturing leaders’ political beliefs regarding conflicts in the world, their own capacity to change events, and preferred means and styles in pursuing goals (Holsti 1970; Hudson & Vore 1995; Shannon & Keller 2007). In a similar vein, there are analytic attempts to reveal the impact of individual leaders’ personal characteristics on their leadership performance, and ultimately on crucial foreign policy outcomes (Herman 1980; Hudson & Vore 1995). Margaret Herman argues for a view on the impact of leader personality on foreign policy also beyond the most obviously crucial decisions (such as those of war and peace). A conceptual scheme including characteristics that represent personal types with regard to beliefs, motives, decision style and interpersonal style, guides a study to explore the relationship between leader personality and foreign policy more broadly (Herman 1980). In more recent studies, the constructivist turn is visible for instance through focus on norms and identities, as well as attention on the constructed components of significant events. To illustrate, Weldes (1999) re-examines the Cuban Missile Crisis on the basis of the conceptualization of the national interest as a social construction, emerging out of certain imaginations of security and state representations. Shannon and Keller (2007) address the problem of states’ norm violation by examining the US invasion of Iraq. The analysis of the Bush administration is carried out through a framework based on leadership style, separated into 1) sensitivity to the political context, and 2) views of the political universe. Hyman’s (2006) study of France, Australia, Argentina and India

explains state leaders' decisions to either abstain from or choose to "go nuclear" by their national identity conceptions. It is state leaders with an "oppositional nationalist" identity conception that are likely to "go for the bomb", whereas leaders with a "sportsmanlike subaltern" identity conception are unlikely to have preferences in the direction of nuclear armament. Grove (2007) advances a framework of leaders' strategies for gaining support, departing from the insight that state leaders operate in a nexus between foreign and domestic policy, constituting an "intermestic" policy process of framing. The empirical study reveals how leaders not only interpret but also often manipulate the situation in which they find themselves.

Concluding Remarks Part One: When, How and Why

The conducted overview of the three separate fields in political science has made the ambition clear to account for the importance of political leaders and elite within the discipline. As an overarching summary conclusion, the fields overviewed seem to provide answers to different questions about political leadership: the new institutionalism point to when, negotiation-theory to how, and foreign policy analysis to why political leadership matters. The new institutionalism privileges structure at the expense of agents and risks using key-individuals for ad hoc explanations at times when institutional factors cannot account for a certain outcome. Negotiation-theory offers analytical descriptions of different types of leadership – more than actual explanations that account for leadership impact. Foreign-policy analysis, although clearly the most varied and advanced on the topic, is nevertheless limited to the study of a specific type of political leadership, defined through position and restricted to a certain policy. The relational dimension between leaders and followers is largely absent in all these fields. Specified answers to the questions of in what way and to what extent political leadership matters are however short in supply. In that regard, we argue that the knowledge and understanding of the significance of political leadership suffers from a limitation in terms of specified causal mechanisms. In search of more detailed hypothetical explanations – that could potentially enrich the discipline of political science – we now turn to the literature dedicated to the study of political leadership. Guided by the conceptualizations made in the previous

section, we could expect that this literature contains insights for the contextual interplay of leadership as well as the relational dimension of this activity.

Political Leadership Analysis: Historical Roots and Early Modern Work

Realism and Elites. The study of political leadership, it could be claimed, goes as far back in history as do the attempts to analyze the pursuit of power in the shape of politics, diplomacy and military conduct. There is a shared legacy with the realist perspective in the field of international relations. Founding philosophers and theorists, like Thucydides, Kautilya and Machiavelli, emphasize the importance of strategic conduct in the pursuit of power, and point to the necessity to set common morals aside for the sake of successful ruling. Thus there is a tradition to study political leaders on the basis of realist assumptions and to ascribe, and even recommend, the logic of real-politics to rulers (Elcock 2001; Möller 2007 in Ekengren & Brommesson (eds)). In a vein similar to realism, classical elite theorists conduct analyses based on the assumptions that 1) elites are formed on the basis of certain psychological-personal resources and skills, and 2) power stems from the authority constituted through positions in political and economic institutions. Robert Michels' "Iron Law of Oligarchy", developed through a study of European social-democratic parties in the early 20th century, is a theoretical model based on the latter assumption, whereas Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca rather had focused on the intellectual superiority of the elite. (Möller 2009:41f; Elcock 201:38).

Heroes and Biographies. Thomas Carlyle's *Lectures on Heroes and Hero-worship* (1841) addresses the question of the resources and skills of leaders. Evidently, Carlyle argues for the necessity of certain figures acquiring a more elevated place in history (heroes), and for the necessity of accepting and respecting these figures (hero-worship). Thus Carlyle represents an early version of the much emphasized and analyzed relationship between leaders and followers. Moreover, the moral elevation of political leaders (turning them into heroes) is another feature of the leadership literature, perhaps most evident in the writing of political biographies. The biographical description and analysis do not necessarily have to make the mistake of revealing only the preferable qualities of its subject; nevertheless it typically entertains the ambition to illuminate the significance of single individuals in progressive societal transformations. (Seligman

1950; Elcock 2001:43) There is also an obvious idealist selection bias in the writings of political biographies, in the sense that they tend to concern political leaders acknowledged as good-doers, rather than those with a more clouded historical record.¹ It is noteworthy that the tension between the ambition to identify the pathways to a good leadership on the one hand, and the attempt to analytically distinct what would be most efficient leadership on the other, is present also in the contemporary literature. Analysis of the impact of political elites on basis of their psychological capacity and personal skills is still an active approach, although it has endured a vast amount of critique over the years. In fact, the so called trait approach is the typical “straw man” that researchers tend to use to motivate their own theoretical arguments (See for instance Seligman 1950; Grint 2000; Nye 2008; Möller 2009). Other distinguishable approaches, which we shall look into in some depth, include the contingency, the situational and the constitutive approach (Grint 2000; Möller 2009).

Weber and Political Authority. The most evident sign of his legacy in political science might be the naming of a bureaucracy-model – yet sociologist Max Weber’s work is also the point of departure in the study of political leadership. His analysis of the conditions for political leadership differs from the realist and elite-theoretical approaches. Weber departs from the question “What are the legitimate grounds for claiming and exercising authority?” As already indicated in the definitional section, he separates between three pure types of legitimacy connected to three types of leadership: legal, charismatic and traditional. He also distinguishes between transactional and transformational environments in which political leaders can operate. Weber argues that leaders rely on different sources of legitimacy depending on the situation in which they operate. For instance, the charismatic leadership is carried out during transformational circumstances, such as a revolution of society, whereas leadership at times of transactional – ordinary, ordered – circumstances is carried out on the basis of a legal authority. Moreover, he admits that the three pure types of legitimacy are hardly ever found in reality, but suggests instead that they appear in combinations and “extremely intricate variants” (Weber 1994:312). To illustrate, pure charismatic authority exists only early on, eventually to be either rationalized or traditionalized. Thus, the charismatic leadership, if carried out successfully, is transitioned into a formal (or traditional) position of authority,

which enables the establishment of patterns and routines for the sake of political and administrative order (Weber 1994). He distinguishes between the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility as virtues that could guide political leaders. The ethics of responsibility ascribes meaning to an action only as the cause of an effect, whereas the ethics of conviction opens for the creation of a purpose as virtuous (Weber 1994; SEP 2007; Calhoun 2002; Möller 2009). As already indicated, Weber's theoretical model of political leaders, their authority and relationship to bureaucracy, is an early reference also in the study of political leadership. Also the normative dimension of Weber's work has had an impact (Weber 1994; SEP 2007; Calhoun 2002; Möller 2009). We will return to the use of Weber's theoretical model and normative approach in the coming sections.

Early Empirical Studies & Definitions. The conduct of political biographies represents early empirical analysis of leadership. In his overview article, political scientist Lester G. Seligman (1950) points at "lack of criteria and conceptualization" as a major shortcoming of this tradition. As already mentioned, early empirical studies of political leaders are typically described as having been carried out within the so-called trait-approach that adopts an essentialist and instrumental view of leadership (Grint 2000; Nye 2008; Möller 2009). Essentialist in the sense that becoming a leader is considered the consequence of a "genetic make-up", rather than something that has to do with contextual factors, such as societal circumstances or education. Instrumental in the sense that leadership is treated as a trait that can be theorized and predicted (Grint 2000; Nye 2008; Möller 2009). Thus the trait approach singles out the political leader from his or her contextual situation as a unitary object of study. While this categorization might apply to the earliest work, it appears a somewhat bolder simplification to bulk most modern work into this category. To illustrate, Seligman's definition – made as early as 1950 – is quite far from describing a solitary ruler. In fact, he is eager to point out the shortcomings of a trait approach, questioning the conception of leadership "posited upon the existence of a peculiar substance possessed only by some" (Seligman, 1950:912). He emphasizes leadership as a relational phenomenon arguing for putting the political leader in a specific context, and in connection with followers. To clarify, the representational role of leadership is a function of acceptance by followers, and who is chosen a leader is related to the conditions of a particular situation (Seligman 1950:913). Seligman offers a categorization of leadership

studies: “Leadership as a social status-position” exploring patterns in the composition of political leadership; “Leadership in types of social structure” including experimental studies of changes in leadership and group morale; “Leadership in organizational function and institutional position” acknowledging studies revealing informal structures of a formal organization; and, “Leadership as personality type” holds the most obvious significance for the understanding of political leadership, according to Seligman. He mentions the concept character structure as promising and as the basis for a typology of political types, such as “agitator”, ”theorist” and ”bureaucrat”. Studies including more than one case and structured comparisons between different political leaderships are more recent – and still rather rare – enterprises (Herman 1980; Abshire 2001; Steinberg 2008). Seligman finds it paradoxical that the acknowledgement of political personality in (American) historiography has not generated more of analytical literature. On the basis of the object of study, however, US Presidential Studies represents an early, well-defined sub-category of leadership-analysis, with an academic belonging in history and political science. Analyses through case studies are quite common in this field; some studies include all available cases (See Abshire 2001) even though single or fewer cases as structured comparisons are more common (See Greenstein 2006). Moreover, presidential studies have a clear kinship with foreign policy analysis, both through theoretical points of departure and a shared interest in foreign policy (See for instance Martin 2005; Taylor 2007). As we shall see later on, Presidential Studies is also still a vibrant field of study. While Seligman’s definition of leadership must be described as dynamic and relational, rather than static, the step from a workable conceptualization to a robust theory is a rather long one. Seligman’s overview article highlights that the study of political leadership at this point may be separated into different categories on the basis of problems addressed and questions raised, but also reveals the absence of coherent theoretical frameworks.

MacGregor Burns & A Theory of Leadership. Through his seminal study *Leadership* (1978) James MacGregor Burns attempted to overcome the prevailing situation of theoretical scarcity by specifying a more general theoretical approach. Along with this outspoken explanatory ambition, there is also a rather distinct normative component in his approach to political leadership. As important points of departures, Burns makes a distinction between studying leaders and leadership; the former being occupied with

characteristics of individuals whereas the latter may be used as a frame for analyzing social change. He underlines the relational dimension of leadership, in the sense that there can be no such thing as a political leadership without followers (Burns 1978; 2003). In terms of explanation, he identifies three building-blocks for a general theory; leadership as collective purpose, leadership as causation and leadership as change. Leadership and change address the visible result of the causal influence of political leadership. Burns describes real change as “the creation of new conditions that will generate their own changes in motivations, new goals, and continuing change.”(Burns 1978:441). In that sense, there is no final stage, but a continuous process. Burns argues that it is possible to analyze the impact of leadership through an emphasis of motivational drives. Purpose can be identified and “measured, and the intended result may be compared to the “real change”. With regard to his normative argument, Burns makes a distinction between different values – modal values and end values – connected to the two different types of leadership. A transforming leadership, he argues, is concerned with end-values, such as security, order, liberty, equity and justice. Transactional leadership results in the realization of individual goals and depends on modal values, such as honesty, responsibility and fairness. It seems important to notice also that the very conduct of a transforming leadership concerns values and meaning, while transacting leadership is restricted to self-interest. Within the latter, leadership is viewed primarily as a means of controlling followers’ behaviors and the elimination of problems by using corrective transactions between leader and subordinate. In contrast, transformational leaders communicate a collective vision and inspire followers to look beyond their self-interest. Thus, the previously pointed out argument in more recent research (Heifetz 1994), to view leadership as an activity rather than a position, clearly permeates Burns approach. It is also noteworthy that Burns builds on the distinction between transformational and transactional made by Weber, but turns them into qualities of a leadership, rather than specifications of the environment in which the political leader operates. The emphasis and differences between modal and end values signify the idealist component in Burns’ approach and may also be seen in the light of Weber’s distinction between ethics, one more virtuous and the other more instrumental. Burns argues that leadership has a normative connotation in the sense that it takes more than actual impact

on political outcomes to be considered a political leader. In consequence, Burns concludes that Hitler was a ruler but not a political leader, because he doubtlessly transformed history but failed to pursue the ethical values, such as liberty and equality ascribed to his conceptualization of a transformational leadership (Burns 1978; 2003).

Political Leadership Analysis: Today

James MacGregor Burns' approach represents a key-reference to the contemporary study of leadership. Especially the distinction between two different types of leadership - transformational and transactional – is a crucial point of reference (Bass 1985; Möller 2008; Nye 2008; Yukl 2009; Jones 1989; Rost 1993). The study of leadership is multidisciplinary in character, and much leadership analysis is also conducted in the intersection between academy and education on the one hand and business and politics on the other. There is a rather clear ambition within most research to identify what factors account for success and avoids failure in various ways, and to reveal leadership strategies to organizational or political effectiveness and goal attainment. Burns suggests that the impact of leadership could be measured by comparing the initial intention with the actual acquired reform. To measure the success and failure of a given leadership is an outspoken ambition of contemporary empirical research. It is also a distinct empirical research task to evaluate the presence of transformational and transactional leaderships in organizations (Bass 1985; Yukl 2009). Theories are therefore developed both for the sake of explanation and in order to be used as roadmaps. This dual purpose of analysis gives rise to a self-reflective discussion regarding the true and appropriate nature of the enterprise. Moreover, as the definitional section and the overview conducted thus far has illuminated, there is an ambition to study political leadership as an activity that is contextually situated with a strong relational component. We will broadly structure the overview in this section along the lines of “contextual” and “relational”. As a final part of this section we address the ongoing discussion of whether leadership-analysis is to be treated as “science” or “art”.

The trait-approach as straw man. One of the main contemporary critiques of the literature on leadership is – in Fairhurst's terms – that the “dominant views of leadership have been shaped by a traditional psychological view of the world where, in a figure-

ground arrangement, the individual is figure, the system is background” (Fairhurst 2001:383, see also Barker 2001). The new generation of political leadership studies stresses that political leadership should be studied as being situated in a rich and dynamic context and thereby subjected to constraints as well as opportunities. However, as the previous section demonstrated, requests to escape the essentialist view of the trait approach to leadership are not recent phenomena. Yet, the study of personal skills and leadership style is an active and evolving approach. To illustrate, empirical research in the organization literature has operationalized political skills as a discrete subset of behaviors that can enhance effectiveness and account for career success (Moss 2005; Yukl 2008). Exploring the significance of style remains an important research task also within US Presidential Studies (See Greenstein 2006). In addition, Steinberg (2008) represents a recent comparative case study with focus on personal traits and skills. The framework that guides the empirical analysis conceptualizes, make operational, and links, personality profile and leadership style. The study is carried out as a case-comparison of three female Prime Ministers: Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir and Margret Thatcher. Steinberg offers a rich analysis, but general objections against the trait approach are valid. Institutional circumstances, interactions with other crucial political agents and significant events are interpreted from the psychological view, as experiences that potentially shape and reinforce certain characteristics of personality, such as distrusting tendencies, of the single leader.

Contextual Dimensions. Leadership analysis within the contingency and situational approaches acknowledges the importance of taking the context into consideration. Similar to the trait approach, however, they too have received their share of critique. To illustrate, both approaches are criticized for a mechanistic relationship between leadership style and context, as suggested by notions such as “matching and fit” (Morrell & Hartley 2006: 492). The contingency approach is argued to underplay the importance of leaders’ interdependence and the fact that leaders act in a rich, dynamic context that is subjected to structural constrains and opportunities (Morrell & Hartley 2006, 492; Yukl 1989; 2008). In the situational approach, the context is said rather to determine which style is appropriate, meaning that the model accused of overlooking the ways in which leader and context may be interdependent (see Vroom & Yetton 1973, Hersey &

Blanchard 1988; Grint 2000). Yet there seems to be an agreement within the field that the interplay between political leaders and the contextual circumstances needs to be explored. Although restricted to a specific leadership defined through formal position, US Presidential Studies contains a variety of research, much of it with the ambition to analyze the interconnectedness and relationship of the presidency with the surrounding formal institutions, such as the federal bureaucracy or the press (Rockman 2009; Kumar 2009). Through the notion of “political time”, Skowronek (2008) offers a somewhat different approach to analysis of presidential style and agency. Instead of trying to decide the extent to which other institutions restrict the presidency, he elaborates on the presumption that presidential history is episodic rather than evolutionary. Skowronek’s approach points to the fact that similarities of presidents’ leaderships are not determined by their closeness in historical time, but through the political orders in which they are bound to operate: “Presidents intervene in – and their leadership is mediated by – the generation and degeneration of political orders.” (2008: 77). In general, recent leadership analysis also includes the ambition to develop theoretical frameworks that reveal the contextual dimension of leadership. For instance, in their ambition to study political leadership in local governments, the framework by Morrell and Hartley (2006) includes the notion “contextual filter” and thereby seeks to capture features that shape the domains within and across those boundaries politicians work, such as the organizational environment and the authorizing environment (2006:488-491). In addition, Joseph Nye (2008) elaborates on a number of different contextual circumstances like culture, distribution of power resources in a group, followers’ needs and demands, crisis and information flows. Nye points at the necessity for leaders and followers to understand how to expand and adapt their repertoires to different situations. Thus he argues that leaders need “contextual intelligence”, which requires using the flow of events to implement a strategy. It allows leaders to adjust their style to the situation and to their followers’ needs. (Nye 2008:21). However, Nye’s analysis also adheres to the idea of leadership as a set of skills. Nye argues that effective leadership in practice requires a mixture of soft and hard power skills, which he refers to as “smart power”. He then defines a number of skills important for soft power (emotional intelligence, communications and visions), as well as hard power (organizational and political) (Nye

2008:69-84). The most effective leaders are those who combine hard and soft power skills in proportions that vary with different situations (Nye 2008:43).

Relational Leadership. Similar to the emphasis on contextual circumstances, the literature is conceptually in agreement with the importance of a relational component to the study of political leadership. There are leadership theories in the organizational behavior literature with the relationship between leader and followers as the primary focus. To illustrate, Leader - Member Exchange Theory (LMX) identifies a number of parameters, such as locus of control, need for power and self-esteem, in order to determine the quality of the leader – follower interaction. The overarching aim is to account for the capacity of an organization to create a positive relationship between leader and followers (or supervisors and subordinates) (Yukl 2008; Harris, Harris & Eplion 2007). More clearly related to political leaders – rather than business leaders – Joseph Nye’s notion of contextual intelligence accounts for the capacity and necessity of capturing followers’ needs, in order to reach leadership success. In fact, recent literature seems to be in agreement that followers are even becoming increasingly important, at the expense of leaders (Grint 2000; MacGregor Burns 2003; Möller 2009; Kellerman 2008). Kellerman (2008) advances this approach of a transformation of power from leaders to followers. Her analysis of “followership” offers a theoretical distinction for different types of followers including “Isolates”, “Bystanders”, “Participants”, “Activists”, and “Diehards”. Several of the recent studies that explore the connection between leaders and followers are conducted within the constitutive approach, making use of the constructivist analytical toolkit. Concepts such as “narrative” and “identity” seem advantageous for exploring the relationship between leaders and followers, in the sense that they enable analytic focus on the construction of meaning, and thereby the glue to this relationship. To illustrate, Shamir et al. (2005) examine autobiographies of leaders from the perspective that a narrative of leadership is constructed throughout the text; a life-story that facilitates the task of leadership by making it appear appropriate. They therefore suggest that such a life story is one potential source of a leader’s influence. Their analysis generates four proto-typical life stories: leadership development as a natural process, leadership development as coping with difficulties, leadership development as a learning process, and leadership development as finding a cause. Grint (2000) launches an

analytical framework that illuminates four central features of leadership: the invention of an identity, the formulation of a strategic vision, the construction of organizational tactics, and the development of persuasive mechanisms to ensure that followers actually follow. He addresses four questions: 1) The who question: construction of identity and construction of truth. 2) The what question: strategic vision and the invention of leadership. 3) The how question: organizational tactics and the indeterminacy of leadership. 4) The why question: communication and the irony of leadership. In each of the four features the constructivist perspective is central; leadership is a dynamic process in a setting under construction and reconstruction. Grint applies the analytical framework on two different types of cases: “parallel leadership situations” and “situating extreme leaders”. While the former one includes studies of contemporary business leaders, the later one includes studies of political leaders like Adolf Hitler and Martin Luther King. In sum, analytical and empirical explorations of the relationship between leader(s) and followers remain important within the study of leadership, and research points in the direction of a shift in power from political leaders to their followers. Moreover, the constructivist analytical toolkit has contributed to a further exploration, focusing on meaning, and potentially revealing “in what way” this relationship matters. As mentioned earlier, the current leadership literature is also indulged in discussions about its academic status. Researchers with as diverging positions as Joseph Nye (2008) and Keith Grint (2000) reach a similar conclusion: leadership analysis is not a truly scientific enterprise, and Grint chooses to label leadership analysis as an “art”. We find this categorization somewhat peculiar and in fact even a potential reason to the somewhat neglected status of the study of political leadership in political science. To clarify, the co-existence of explanatory and normative problems is not restricted to the study of political leadership, but characteristic to a variety of academic fields in the social sciences. Rather than to abstain from defining one’s analytic efforts as an integrated part of a scientific enterprise, the standard solution is to keep aims separate, through parallel sets of analytic questions etc, and to distinguish between descriptive and prescriptive problems and theories.

Concluding Remarks Part Two: Still in search of *the* Theory of Political Leadership!

In spite of the three passed decades since James MacGregor Burns formulated the ambition to escape the study of leaders – with focus on personal traits and skills of single leaders – in favor of establishing a study of leadership – as a frame for social change – no such distinct academic field exists. The contemporary literature on political leadership has moved in the direction of a greater awareness about the importance of situating political leadership in contextual circumstances. Apart from more advanced analysis within the trait approach, research with a more explicit ambition to study leadership rather than leaders is common. Yet we also see a tendency that the literature keeps rediscovering the same shortcomings, challenges and ambitions. Contemporary studies echo MacGregor Burns' request for a comprehensive theory, yet the conclusion of a general lack of adequate analytic tools is also repeated. This article is no exception in the sense that we, similarly to Seligman (1950), Burns (1978); Grint (2000) and Nye (2008), underline the importance of not restricting the study of leadership to the analysis of individual personalities. We also point at the necessity of addressing the contextual circumstances, as well as the importance of a relational conceptualization that takes followers into account. We would, however, also like to add a diagnosis in terms of two potential reasons for why this literature keeps returning to the same problems and fails to indulge in a fruitful dialogue with other fields within political science. The concluding section clarifies our view.

Concluding Discussion

Rightfully, Burns is a key reference in the literature on leadership, both due to the outspoken ambition to study leadership rather than leaders and due to his conceptualization of different types of leadership. Arguably, however, Burns' approach also represents and might even have contributed to reinforce both the unfortunate tendency to treat leadership analysis as an art rather than science and the remaining difficulties to escape the focus on characteristics of single leaders. To make it clear, both of these tendencies seem to be consequences of how Burns elaborates Weber's model about political authority. In parallel to Carlyle's early attempts to single out "true heroes" Burns too seeks to identify "true leaders" on the basis of certain competences, but whether they perform in accordance with his transformational ideal. Thereby, Burns'

explanatory ambition of leadership turns into an assessment of leadership art, rather than an analysis of in what ways and to what extent political leadership impacts societal change and political outcomes. It is noteworthy also that in Weber's original model the notions of transformational and transactional were meant to capture societal circumstances, whereas Burns turns them into his conceptualization of leadership styles. In doing so, the literature seems to have lost a broad yet clarifying distinction of various contexts in which leaders may operate. Thus we would argue that Weber's model on political authority is the real hidden treasure of this literature. This model is not loaded with the attempt to reveal what political leadership is the inherently adequate one, but rather seeks to specify the various conditions for different types of leadership. Despite the widely acknowledged status of Weber's work, not much analysis of political leadership has recognized the usefulness of examining the *sources of legitimacy* upon which a political leadership gain authority. Arguably, an analysis of political leadership needs to take into account, not necessarily personal skills, and not necessarily all contextual circumstances, but the sources that condition any given political leadership authority. To illustrate, this approach could be useful in studies about democratic transition. It would suggest analysis not only of the power struggle between political elites, but also of the delicate balance through which political leaders seek to institutionalize the source of legitimacy for authority during the initial transformational circumstances so that it becomes part also of the transactional order that will come as democracy is gradually being consolidated.

¹ To illustrate this point: On Google, searching for "political biography" with either "Mahatma Gandhi" or "Nelson Mandela" gives 133 000 and 126 000 links, while replacing them with either "Josef Stalin" or "Adolf Hitler" gives 46 200 and 56 900 each.

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