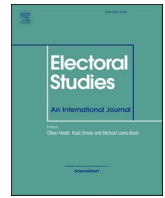




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Membership vote for party leadership changes: Electoral effects and the causal mechanisms behind

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ABSTRACT

Political parties in parliamentary democracies have increasingly democratized their leadership selection processes, incorporating the votes of party members. Despite generating numerous headlines, there has been a relative dearth of cross-national scholarly work on the electoral effects of selectorate expansion and the causal mechanisms behind them. This study fills this gap in the literature. Using observational data from eleven parliamentary democracies, we show that parties using membership selection can expect a polling boost when compared to those using more exclusive mechanisms. However, membership selection does not affect electoral performance. Nevertheless, our crossnational analyses and results from a survey experiment from Australia suggest that incorporating members generates excitement, demonstrates an openness to new ideas, and can be a signal of leader work ethic and a commitment to the democratic process, increasing leader legitimacy. We discuss the disconnect between these positive evaluations and the lack of electoral effects, and suggest possible strategies for parties to improve their electoral standing.

1. Introduction

Given the increasing importance of party leadership and of selecting the best leader (see, e.g., Poguntke and Webb 2005; Mair, 2013; Somer-Topcu, 2016) political parties in recent decades have implemented reforms for how these leaders should be elected to the office (Cross and Blais, 2012; Pilet and Cross 2014; Cross and Pilet 2015). Whether to increase transparency, appeal to democratic legitimacy, or improve the quality of candidates, political parties in advanced democracies are increasingly adopting more inclusive mechanisms of leadership selection by incorporating rank-and-file members in some version of a one member, one vote (OMOV) system (Scarrow et al., 2000; Cross and Pilet 2015). Despite the numerous headlines these contests generate, there has been a relative dearth of cross-national scholarly work on the effects of these leadership contests on party performance. Most scholarship on candidate or leadership selection outside of the United States has focused on a single country (McSweeney 1999; Indriðason and Kristinsson, 2013; Ramiro 2013; Wauters 2013; Mikulska and Scarrow, 2010) or on presidential systems in Latin America (Carey and Polga-Hecimovich, 2006; Aragón 2008, 2013). One important exception is Pedersen and Schumacher (2015) who test both short-term polling effects and long-term electoral effects of party leadership change on

party performance. Yet, they do not test the mechanisms behind their findings. The most comprehensive study on inclusive leadership elections is the recent edited volume by Sandri et al. (2015), who say that their work “is, foremost, an exploratory study, and not enough comparative data are available for developing an inferential approach (...) on the effects of primaries on electoral performance” (18). We fill this gap in the literature.

In this paper, we first test the electoral effects of membership vote across 11 parliamentary democracies by comparing outcomes between those parties which use membership selection and those which use more exclusive leadership selection mechanisms. In addition, and more importantly, we examine the consequences of membership vote for party and individual-level factors using cross-national data on leadership changes and experimental data from Australia.

These factors act as mechanisms via which we can explain how membership vote affects party performance. We argue that there are seven such mechanisms. Two of them are the effects of membership vote on leadership election contests and on a party’s ideological extremism, and may hurt a political party’s performance. Leadership contests, where candidates must appeal to a broader audience of party members, can expose ugly internal divisions, drain resources, alienate losing factions, and damage the ultimate victor (*contestation effect*) (Stewart and

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Carty, 1993; Hazan and Rahat 2010; Greene and Haber 2015). So too, rank-and-file members and party activists may be more radical and more policy-oriented than party elites, and thus may select a party leader that is ideologically extreme and unable to appeal to the median voter (*ideology effect*) (Crotty and Jackson, 1985; Drucker 1987). However, we argue that the incorporation of rank-and-file members into the selection process can be a net positive for political parties due to five reasons. Ultimately, more inclusive leadership elections can help manage rifts in the party by demonstrating a willingness to consider different viewpoints (*deliberation effect*) and can infuse the party with new energy by attracting more members and voters (*enthusiasm effect*). So too, these leadership races can allow for the emergence of stronger candidates (*selection effect*), demonstrate a leadership candidate's work ethic (*incentive effect*), and bring increased legitimacy to the ultimate victor (*legitimacy effect*) (Aragón 2008; Crutzen et al., 2010; Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006). Our analyses of the cross-national observational data suggest that membership vote for party leadership elections indeed increases contestation but does not affect a party's ideological standing. On the other hand, using our experimental data from Australia, we find support for four of the five positive effects of membership vote (all but the selection effect).¹

Our results have important implications for the growing party leadership literature as well as for the strategic party change scholarship. While how membership vote affects party performance has been discussed in the literature with several mechanisms proposed by various scholars regarding legitimacy, excitement, organizational capacity, etc., none of these mechanisms has been directly tested so far. Our observational and experimental results provide the first empirical and experimental evidence for which mechanisms are at work when members are given the chance to vote. In addition, supplementing the cross-national data with experimental data allows us to conduct a more appropriate mechanism test with a careful causal design. Finally, our findings have important implication for political parties as they decide on whether they should expand their leadership selectorate to include rank-and-file members. Overall, membership vote appears to help political parties, but more in the short-term. The question that remains is how political parties can keep benefiting from this boost in the long-term for their electoral performance. We come back to this question in the conclusion section.

We proceed as follows: in the next section, we will review the literature on party leadership change and discuss the mechanisms through which incorporating rank-and-file members into the leadership selection process should bolster support for political parties. Next, we will introduce the observational data and examine the effect of membership selectorate on party performance. Following from that, we will utilize both observational and experimental data to analyze the mechanisms behind this relationship. The last section offers a discussion of the results and concludes the paper.

2. Leadership change and intra-party democracy

Over the last several decades, party politics in Western parliamentary systems has become more candidate focused. This "presidentialization" of politics (Poguntke and Webb 2005) has combined with the increasing democratization of decision-making within political parties. This internal democratization increasingly includes rank-and-file members in critical decisions such as manifesto writing, candidate selection, and leaderships selection (Scarrows et al., 2000; LeDuc 2001; Rahat and Hazan 2001; Kenig 2009b). Thus, a growing literature has developed focusing on the consequences of inclusive decision-making mechanisms (McSweeney 1999; Scarrows et al., 2000; LeDuc 2001; Kenig 2009a; Hazan and Rahat 2010; Indriðason and Kristinsson, 2013;

Ramiro 2013; Wauters 2013; Mikulska and Scarrows, 2010; Pedersen and Schumacher 2015). This literature has confronted two main questions: why have parties increasingly democratized decision-making authority? What are the electoral consequences of inclusive decision-making mechanisms?²

While this study focuses on the latter question of the electoral effects of membership vote, it is important to first document which parties have made this move towards a more inclusive selectorate. Kenig (2009b) offers a typology of party leadership selectorate that ranges from the most exclusive (decision by a single individual, often the previous leader) to the most inclusive (open primaries). Open primaries are rare in Western parliamentary systems. Thus, the most inclusive selectorate in these systems is often by all dues-paying members in some form of a one member, one vote system (OMOV).³ Table 1 shows all parties in our dataset, their current leadership selection mechanism (as of 2018), when the change towards membership vote happened (if the party has never used membership vote, there is no date presented), the total number of leadership changes in that party, and the number of leadership changes by member vote.

With the trend towards more inclusive leadership selectorate, scholars have turned their attention to the question of the electoral impact of an expanded leadership selectorate (Stewart and Carty 1993; McSweeney, 1999; LeDuc 2001; Kenig 2009a; So 2020). Pedersen and Schumacher (2015) provide the most recent and comprehensive cross-national answer to this question. They test both short-term polling effects and long-term electoral effects of party leadership change on party performance. The short-term polling data came from four European democracies, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and the UK, between 2000 and 2012. They show that membership vote increases party polling standing by about 1.5% compared to other selectorate types. They then test the effects on legislative election outcomes using data from 15 parliamentary democracies between 1965 and 2012, and show that there are no long-term electoral effects. Membership vote does not statistically differ from other selectorate types for election outcomes. This is an important study as it represents the first attempt to cross-nationally test the selectorate effects on party performance. There are several questions left open, however: do the short-term results generalize to a broader set of countries and a longer time frame? More importantly, what explains these results? That is, how does party membership vote matter?⁴ Before moving to the analysis of the electoral effects, we first discuss the causal mechanisms behind the effect of leadership selectorate on performance.

2.1. Why should membership vote affect party performance? The mechanisms behind the membership vote effect

We argue that there are *two* reasons for why membership vote may hurt the party's electoral performance and *five* reasons why it should help it. First, we argue that the increased attention and intra-party competition that inevitably result from more inclusive selectorates can be damaging to a party, weakening its competitive position by exposing critical fractures, draining the party of vital energy and resources, decreasing party cohesion, and harming the eventual winner before the

² There is also limited work to understand other consequences of different selectorates, such as the effects on democratic satisfaction (Shomer et al., 2016) or on trust in parties (Shomer et al., 2018).

³ From 1994 to 2015, the UK Labour Party used an electoral college system to choose its party leader, which weighed the votes of MPs, rank-and-file members, and affiliated organizations. Australia's Labor Party and Ireland's Fine Gael use a similar system for leadership selection.

⁴ Similar questions about the electoral consequences of inclusive candidate selection mechanisms have been raised in assessing primary systems the US and Latin America (see e.g., Polsby 1983; Bartels 1988; Atkeson 1998; Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006; Adams and Merrill 2008; Serra 2011; Aragón 2013).

¹ Below we explain why we chose Australia for our experimental design and why the results are likely generalizable.

Table 1
Leadership selection mechanisms.

Country	Party	Period	Current Selection Rule	Date of First Member Inclusion	Number of Leadership Changes	Number of Membership Changes
Australia	Labor Party	1977–2018	Electoral College	October 2013	11	1
	Liberal Party	1977–2018	Parliament Selection		11	0
	National Party	1977–2018	Parliament Selection		8	0
Canada	New Democratic Party	1979–2018	Member Selection	October 1995	5	4
	Liberal Party	1979–2018	Member Selection	November 2003	6	3
	Conservative Party	1979–2018	Member Selection	November 1998	7	3
	Bloc Québécois	1979–2018	Member Selection	March 1997	7	4
Denmark	Socialist People's Party	1979–2018	Member Selection	April 2005	4	2
	Social Democrats	1979–2018	Member Selection	April 2005*	5	1
	Social Liberal Party	1994–2018	Parliament Selection		4	0
	Venstre	1979–2018	Assembly Selection		3	0
	Conservative People's Party	1979–2018	Parliament Selection		9	0
Germany	Danish People's Party	1979–1998	Assembly Selection		3	0
	Social Democratic Party	1976–2018	Membership Selection	June 1993	12	1
	Free Democratic Party	1976–2018	Assembly Selection		7	0
Ireland	Christian Democratic Party	1976–2018	Assembly Selection		3	0
	Labour Party	1977–2018	Member Selection	October 2002	8	4
Ireland	Fine Gael	1977–2018	Electoral College	June 2017	6	1
	Fianna Fáil	1977–2018	Parliament Selection		5	0
	Socialist Party	1977–2018	Parliament Selection		3	0
Netherlands	PvdA	1977–2018	Member Selection	November 2002	7	4
	Democrats 66	1977–2018	Member Selection	November 1982	8	6
	VVD	1977–2018	Member Selection	May 2006	8	1
	Christian Democratic Appeal	1977–2018	Member Selection	May 2012	6	1
New Zealand	Labour Party	1978–2018	Electoral College	August 2013*	9	2
	ACT	1994–2018	Executive Committee		7	0
Norway	National Party	1978–2018	Parliament Selection		8	0
	Socialist Left Party	1977–2018	Assembly Selection		3	0
	Labour Party	1977–2018	Assembly Selection		4	0
	Christian Democratic Party	1977–2018	Assembly Selection		4	0
	Conservative Party	1977–2018	Assembly Selection		7	0
	Centre Party	1977–2018	Assembly Selection		6	0
Spain	Progress Party	1977–2018	Assembly Selection		2	0
	PSOE	1979–2018	Party Supporters	July 2014	6	3
	People's Party	1979–2018	Party Supporters	July 2018	6	1
Sweden	Left Party	1979–2018	Assembly Selection		4	0
	Social Democratic Party	1979–2018	Assembly Selection		5	0
	Liberal Party	1979–2018	Assembly Selection		4	0
	Christian Democratic Party	1979–2018	Assembly Selection		2	0
	Moderate Party	1979–2018	Assembly Selection		6	0
	Centre Party	1979–2018	Assembly Selection		5	0
United Kingdom	Labour Party	1979–2018	Member Selection	July 1994	8	4
	Liberal Democrats	1979–2018	Member Selection	August 1988	6	6
	Conservative Party	1979–2018	Member Selection	September 2001	6	4

Note: *Current leader chosen without an election.

general election even begins, leaving “blood on the floor” (Stewart and Carty, 1993; Djupe and Peterson 2002; Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006; Hazan and Rahat 2010, Pedersen and Schumacher 2015). Recent evidence suggests that exposing intraparty divisions can decrease voters' ratings of a party's policy competencies and diminish their electoral support (Greene and Haber 2015).⁵ Deciding questions of party

⁵ Recent evidence suggests that parties may be more likely to hold leadership ballots when there are intra-party disputes (Astudillo and Detterbeck 2020). Other studies of the US primaries have questioned this contestation effect finding that, when external factors are taken into consideration, divisive primaries have no net effect on election outcomes (Atkeson 1998) and may actually mobilize party supporters (Stone et al. 1992).

leadership behind closed doors, then, can better mask intra-party tensions and can prevent one faction from mobilizing its base against another, helping keep the party united in its efforts to win office and preventing unnecessary damage from being done to the eventual winner during a grueling campaign. Thus, by increasing intra-party competition, expanding the selectorate and opening the process up to public participation can weaken a party relative to more exclusive selection mechanisms, potentially undermining its public support. We call this the *contestation effect*.

Increased contestation is not the only danger parties face when expanding their selectorates. The literature on primary campaigns in the United States and Latin America also finds that inclusive selectorates may be more radical and more policy-oriented than party elites (Polsby 1983; Grofman and Brunell, 2001; Burden 2004; Brady et al. 2007).

These more ideologically extreme voices may then choose a party leader who is perceived to be too radical and thus unable to appeal to the median voter (Crotty and Jackson 1985; Drucker 1987). Recent evidence suggests that extreme positions harm party performance (Johns and Kölln 2019). Thus, choosing a new leader through a more inclusive selectorate may ultimately damage the public's perception of the party's electability and ability to govern, decreasing its public support. We call this the *ideology effect*. Due to the possible contestation and ideological effects, parties that incorporate the membership into the leadership selection process may emerge from an open and expansive leadership race in a weaker competitive position than those in which leaders are selected by elite cadres or by acclamation (Stewart and Carty 1993).⁶

However, there are important reasons to believe that expanding the selectorate can actually boost a party's competitive advantage. To start, scholars have yet to find concrete evidence for the members' extreme ideology effects (Van Holsteyn et al., 2017). So too, scholars have noted the potential positive effects of the increased popular attention produced by inclusive leadership contests (Pedersen and Schumacher 2015). Inclusive leadership contests promote transparency and accountability and provide a democratic seal of approval; thus, they may increase the legitimacy of the outcome in the eyes of party supporters and the larger public (*legitimacy effect*) (Scarrow et al., 2000; Poguntke and Webb 2005; Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006; Ramiro 2013).⁷ Enhancing legitimacy may be particularly important in an era where citizens are increasingly skeptical of political parties, seeking new ways to participate in the political arena (Tierney 2012; Mair, 2013; Ignazi 2014). Thus, a leader who emerges from a public contest may be seen to have a stronger democratic mandate, which could bolster her support as her party seeks to enter government.

The need to appeal to a larger and more diverse audience also provides important information about candidate quality. In making a successful bid for the party leadership position through an inclusive process, candidates must develop and command an expansive and effective campaign organization in order to reach, persuade, and mobilize party members. In doing so, a party leader can demonstrate that she has the critical campaign skills necessary to help the party contest and win a general election. Not only can these skills impress party insiders, an effective leadership campaign can also demonstrate competence to the wider public, a necessary trait for a potential prime minister. Thus, inclusive contests may have a *selection effect*, choosing stronger candidates for the subsequent election (Adams and Merrill 2008; Crutzen et al., 2010; Serra 2011; Aragón 2013).

Following this logic, asking aspiring party leaders to compete for the votes of party members may also have an *incentive effect*. Not only must candidates in inclusive races develop and maintain strong campaign organizations, they must also make an effective electoral pitch to the party membership. Thus, competing for the votes of party members could encourage leadership candidates to expend more effort developing stronger and more appealing electoral platforms and proposing innovative policy solutions in order to attract and persuade as many members as possible (Caillaud and Tirole, 2002; Crutzen et al., 2010; Aragón 2013). Thus, selection by a more inclusive mechanism may be a signal of a leadership candidate's work ethic and commitment to the party organization.

Though these are the main effects discussed in the literature on the impact of party primaries on candidate and leadership selection, there

are two additional positive effects that need be included in any discussion of leadership change. First, inclusive selectorates can help manage factionalism within the party by providing competing factions with the opportunity to have their message heard and debated (McSweeney 1999). Providing competing factions with a significant platform to make their case could mollify rival activists and ultimately lead to attempts by leadership candidates to incorporate alternative visions into their campaign agenda.⁸ Thus, inclusive selectorates may signal that a party is willing to consider multiple viewpoints, helping to unify the party in the aftermath of a competitive leadership race so long as the race is not overly bitter and the party moves to incorporate the losing faction back into the coalition. We call this the *deliberation effect*.

Finally, the inclusion of party members can generate renewed enthusiasm for a party, as candidates must make their appeal to a wider audience. By building a campaign organization and attracting increased media attention, a party can activate more supporters and potentially persuade new voters. By providing more powers and responsibilities within the organization, parties can attract new members, building and expanding the party organization and generating excitement in the lead up to a general election (Indriðason and Kristinsson 2013).⁹ Attracting new members is especially important in a time where party membership is historically low and decreasing (Mair, 2013; van Biezen and Poguntke 2014). We call this the *enthusiasm effect*.

The above stated mechanisms lead us to the hypotheses that inclusive leadership selection mechanisms that incorporate party members will be a net positive for political parties both in the short-term (*Hypothesis 1: Polling Effects*) and in the long-term for the next legislative election (*Hypothesis 2: Electoral Effects*).

3. Study 1: electoral consequences of party leadership change

To begin, we use observational data to analyze the electoral effects of expanding leadership selectorate to the rank-and-file members by comparing outcomes between those parties which use membership selection and those which use more exclusive leadership selection mechanisms. A summary of the electoral effects hypotheses described above can be found in Table 2.

To test the impact of member inclusivity on political performance, we utilize an original dataset we collected that captures information on party leadership change in eleven advanced parliamentary democracies. The dataset includes all leadership changes for parties that received at least a 5 percent vote share in at least two elections in Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway,

Table 2
Study 1 hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Polling Effects	Choosing a leader through a vote of party members will increase a party's polling performance.
Hypothesis 2: Electoral Effects	Choosing a leader through a vote of party members will increase a party's electoral performance.

⁸ For example, after the fierce 2016 primary contest in the United States, Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton worked with rival Bernie Sanders to incorporate elements of his campaign platform into the party's manifesto.

⁹ It should be noted, however, that some new members may simply be opportunistic, joining for a limited time or in a limited capacity in order to select their preferred candidate or leader, without any intention of being an active member or even voting for the party in the general election if their preferred candidate is not chosen (Rahat and Hazan 2007). In this case, the party may increase its membership, but member quality and participation may be low.

⁶ This argument is similar to May's Law of Curvilinear Disparity (1973), which argues that subleaders (i.e., active members who vote in the leadership elections in our case) have more extreme ideological preferences than party leadership and the broader category of party supporters.

⁷ Here the literature focuses on procedural legitimacy, or legitimacy derived from the selection having been made through the proper process, rather than substantive legitimacy, or legitimacy derived from the qualities of the leader herself (see Lind and Taylor 1988; Clayton et al., 2018).

Table 3
Study 1 results.

	Membership Selection (GJRM)	Δ Poll (GJRM)	Election (OLS)
Ideology	0.03* (0.01)		
Decade	0.69* (0.19)		
Members _{t-1}	1.10* (0.39)		
Member Select		3.65* (0.72)	0.90 (1.21)
Vote	0.02 (0.03)	0.04 (0.05)	0.01 (0.09)
Government	0.02 (0.54)	1.04 (0.74)	1.12 (1.42)
Poll _{t-2}		0.04 (0.02)	0.01 (0.05)
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	133	133	93
θ	6.38	(11.2, 2.13)	
T	0.53	(0.69, 0.22)	
R ²			0.38
Adjusted R ²			0.26

Note: *p < .05.

Sweden, Spain, and the United Kingdom from the last legislative election in the 1970s to 2018.¹⁰ Who is perceived as the party leader varies from country to country and even across parties within the same country. For instance, while the extra-parliamentary party chairperson is identified as the party leader for the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats in Germany, the parliamentary leader is coded as the head of the party for the German Liberal Democrats (FDP). The decision on who we should code as the leader of each party is taken based on an extensive reading of the literature and in consultation with country experts.¹¹

The unit of analysis for this study is party-leadership election. In total, we examine 133 leadership changes for which monthly polling information and data on all independent variables are available. Full descriptive statistics for the variables discussed below can be found in [Appendix 1](#). There are two dependent variables for this analysis. First, to test the polling effects, we analyze the change in a party's polling performance after the selection of a new leader (*Poll*). This variable is

¹⁰ The country selection is driven by the data availability. One may be concerned that having Norway and Sweden in the sample, two countries without any membership election, might be problematic. In [Appendix 2.1](#), we ran our models by dropping Norway and Sweden from the data and the results stay the same.

¹¹ The dataset is limited to the selection of a new leader and does not include contests in which an incumbent leader was challenged and emerged victorious because of resource limitations. Data collected on leadership reselections in all countries except the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden demonstrate that competitive leadership reselections are rare and do not alter the results presented below. The data also do not include parties with shared or dual leadership and excludes interim leaders. Finally, in the analyses below we exclude the leadership changes where the current prime minister (PM) in office was replaced. The reason is that regardless of the selectorate, there is empirical evidence that leaders who replace PMs do not succeed in office ([Horiuchi, Laing, and 't Hart 2015](#)), and overall, we know that governing parties are likely to lose votes across parliamentary democracies (see the extensive negative incumbency literature, e.g., [Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000](#)) and are less likely to benefit from an expanded selectorate ([Serra 2011](#))).

measured as the difference between a party's monthly polling average in the month following the leadership selection and the polling average the month prior to the leadership selection.¹² Polling data come from [Jennings and Wlezien \(2016\)](#) and were supplemented from online sources for the most recent years. Higher values indicate a party gained support in the polls after the selection of a new leader. Next, to test our hypotheses about the parliamentary election effects, we analyze the change between a party's polling performance in the month prior to the leadership change and the party's performance in the subsequent parliamentary election (*Election*). Any leader who did not contest a general election while serving in the position was dropped from this analysis for this latter model.

The key independent variable is dichotomous and captures whether a party selected its new leader through a vote of party members or a different mechanism.¹³ To test the effects of membership selection we coded the *Member Select* variable 1 for leadership elections by rank-and-file membership or party supporters, and 0 for all other selection mechanisms, whether it is appointment by the previous leader, party executive committee, parliamentary delegation, or delegates at the party conference/council.¹⁴

A control variable was also included for all models to capture the party's polling performance two months prior to the leadership selection (*Poll_{t-2}*) to ensure the results are not driven by a party's current polling trend. We also added a *Government* variable, coded 1 for the parties that were in the government at the time of the leadership change. The data for the government variable came from the ParlGov dataset ([Döring and Manow 2019](#)). Finally, a control variable was added to capture the party's performance in the election prior to the leadership selection (*Vote*). This variable was included to capture whether the party either gained or lost votes between the previous two elections. Losing a past election can facilitate the need for a leadership change as well as a change in leadership selection rules, thus this variable likely has an impact on a party's current polling performance and trajectory ([LeDuc 2001](#)). All models also include country fixed-effects in order to control for other country specific effects not captured by the variables mentioned above.

One may argue that the leader selection rule is endogenous to party, country, and decade level factors. There are many reasons a party may choose to incorporate party members into the leadership selection process. Inclusive selectorates are more prevalent in left-leaning parties and have grown in popularity over the past several decades. So too, a party may choose to expand its selectorate after losing a previous election and this change is likely to endure ([LeDuc 2001](#)). To address this endogeneity concern, we ran the models with a Generalized Joint Regression Model (GJRM) that allows us to jointly model the choice to expand the leadership selectorate and the effect the expanded selectorate has on a party's polling performance. The GJRM was chosen because it allows us to model the effects of a binary endogenous variable better than two-stage least squares. In a GJRM, different marginal distributions can be set for each model. While initial GJRM tests demonstrated endogeneity was a concern with regard to the polling model, no

¹² Our results are robust if we measure the variable as the difference between the polling rate one month after the leadership change and the month of the leadership change (see [Appendix 2.4](#)).

¹³ Models with desegregated selectorate variables for exclusive, parliamentary, and delegate selection effects can be found in [Appendix section 2.3](#).

¹⁴ The UK Labour Party, the Australian Labor Party, and Ireland's Fine Gael have used hybrid systems that give members, members of parliament, and/or affiliated organizations a say in the leadership selection process. When this is the case, they are coded as Member Select. Our results do not change if we code these systems 0 for membership vote (see [Appendix 2.2](#)).

endogeneity was found with regard to the election model. Thus, below we present the results of our polling analysis using the GJRM (Models 1 and 2) and election analysis using OLS (Model 3).

To implement the polling GJRM, we estimate two models, one which models the decision to expand the selectorate (Model 1) and one which models the effects of the expanded selectorate (Model 2). Models 1 and 2 are jointly estimated to analyze the effect of membership selection on a party's short term polling performance (Hypothesis 1). Thus, *Member Select* is the dependent variable in the first model and *Poll* is the dependent variable in the second model. The first stage model (Model 1) includes the party's *ideology*, measured by their most recent manifesto position at the time of the leadership selection. Manifesto scores were collected from the Comparative Manifesto Project and range from -100 (extreme left) to +100 (extreme right). As stated above, left-leaning parties are more likely than right-leaning parties to expand their selectorates (Astudillo and Detterbeck 2020). We also include a *Decade* variable as parties have been more likely to expand their selectorates in recent years. This variable ranges from 1 (1960s) to 6 (2010s). Since leadership selection rules tend to be relatively durable over time (LeDuc 2001), we include a variable to capture the use of membership selection in the previous leadership contest ($Members_{t-1}$). Finally, parties are more likely to expand their selectorates after losing a general election. Thus, we also include the *Vote* variable in this model. The marginal distributions for the models are probit and normal respectively and Frank's copula was chosen for the joint model as it produced the lowest AIC and BIC scores. In the models, the copula describes the correlation of the error terms of the dependent variables. For more on this modeling strategy, see Braumoeller et al. (2018).

To estimate the long-term parliamentary election effects of an expanded leadership selectorate, we ran an OLS model with *Election* as the dependent variable. As with the polling analysis, *Member Select* is the dependent variable, where the number of cases drops to 93 due to some new leaders who did not survive until the new election being dropped.

We see that membership selection is positive and statistically significant in Model 2 and show support for H_1 . Membership inclusion provides a short-term political benefit to political parties, increasing their polling performance by 3.65% ($p < .001$). This result is substantively stronger than what Pedersen and Schumacher (2015) found with their analyses of all parties in four European countries between 2000 and 2012. In multi-party systems where elections can be decided on the margins, 3–4 percentage points can be very significant. For example, in the 2019 Danish general election, the top two parties were separated by 2.5% of the vote and in the 2020 Irish election, the top two parties were separated by just 2.3% of first round preference votes.

Model 3, on the other hand, shows that there is no longer-term electoral effect. While the effect is positive, the polling boost does not survive until the next election. There may be two contrasting reasons for this lack of effect. First, one may argue that the election effect likely depends on the time left to the next election. Given that leadership changes attract media and voter attention (Fernandez-Vazquez and Somer-Topcu, 2019), we may expect leadership changes close to the next legislative election to have the highest boost on party performance. This would suggest that if we interact membership selection variable with the number of months left to the election following the leadership change, we should see a positive and significant effect of membership selection that disappears over time. At the same time, one may argue that those leadership elections briefly before an election may project an image of internal turmoil and division to voters, and more negatively affect party performance (Greene and Haber 2015). Hence, the relationship might be quadratic. Leadership changes that happen too early in the electoral cycle may lose their significance and those very close to the next election may be seen destabilizing, while those that are close

but not too close to the next election should have positive effects.¹⁵ We test these possibilities in the Appendix Table 2.6.1. The directions of the coefficients support the quadratic effect argument (that is, the effect is negative close to the upcoming election, becomes positive for leadership elections a few years before the election but then the positive effect weakens as time passes) but none of the models produce statistically significant effects. Overall, we conclude that membership selection has a short-term polling boost but does not affect election outcomes.¹⁶

Model 1 also demonstrates that left-leaning parties are more likely to expand their selectorate and that past use of an expanded selectorate increases the likelihood of using this mechanism again for the next leadership race, as expected. Finally, the results show that parties are more likely to incorporate members into the leadership race in more recent decades.

4. Study 2: mechanism analysis

In the observational analysis presented above, we found that parties using membership selection can expect a polling boost when compared to those using more exclusive mechanisms. However, membership selection does not affect electoral performance. The important question then is: what explains these effects (or lack thereof)? Based on the theorized mechanisms presented above, we derive seven hypotheses, which can be found in Table 4. The last column shows the expected effect of the specific mechanism on party performance. We analyze hypotheses 3 and 4 using observational data and hypotheses 5 through 9 using experimental data.¹⁷

4.1. Observational analysis: contestation and ideological effects

We first analyze whether an expanded selectorate increases the level of leadership contestation. To do so, we ran three models that utilize different measures of contestation as the dependent variable and the membership selectorate as the independent variable. In the models, *Candidates* captures the number of party candidates who entered the

¹⁵ Of the 93 leadership changes analyzed in Model 3, only 13 (just under 14%) occur within 6 months of the election.

¹⁶ Additional models presented in Appendix section 2.4 demonstrate that the results hold when control variables are removed from the models. We also ran both the polling and election models replacing the *Member Select* variable with a dichotomous variable that captures whether a party was the only party in the system to use membership selection to choose their new leader (*Only Party*). In their study of candidate selection mechanisms, Astudillo and Lago (2020) found that electoral effects of inclusive selection methods can be conditional on the procedures of other parties within the system. Thus, they argue that a party is more likely to receive an electoral benefit when they are the only party in the system to use an inclusive procedure. The results of this robustness check are similar to the findings presented above and can be found in Appendix 2.5. Unfortunately, since we are looking at leadership selection at the national level, there are only 17 such observations in our dataset and thus more data is needed to thoroughly test this claim. We also ran a model dropping any first use of membership selection by a party to ensure our results aren't driven by the novelty of this mechanism. The results are similar to those presented above and can be found in Appendix 2.5.

¹⁷ We chose to take advantage of two different research strategies for two reasons. First, financial constraints limited us to only one experiment. Since, as will be shown below, contestation moderates the polling effect found in Study 1, we chose to hold contestation constant in the experiment so that we could more fully analyze the positive causal mechanisms. It would not have been possible to vary both the level of contestation and the leadership selection mechanism within the same experiment. Second, the legitimacy, selection, incentive, deliberative, and enthusiasm effects are directly about respondents' perceptions of the elected leader, while contestation and ideological extremism are at the party-level (i.e., whether the leadership election becomes more competitive and whether the party becomes more ideologically extreme, respectively).

Table 4
Study 2 hypotheses.

	Effect	Hypothesis	Direction
Hypothesis 3	Contestation Effect	More inclusive mechanisms of leadership selection will increase intra-party contestation.	Negative
Hypothesis 4	Ideological Effect	More inclusive mechanisms of leadership selection will increase ideological extremism in the party.	Negative
Hypothesis 5	Legitimacy Effect	More inclusive mechanisms of leadership selection will increase the perceived legitimacy of the new leader.	Positive
Hypothesis 6	Selection Effect	More inclusive mechanisms of leadership selection will increase the perceived competitiveness of the party and the new leader.	Positive
Hypothesis 7	Incentive Effect	More inclusive mechanisms of leadership selection will increase perceptions of the new leader's ability to work on behalf of the party.	Positive
Hypothesis 8	Deliberative Effect	More inclusive mechanisms of leadership selection will increase perceptions the party is open to new ideas.	Positive
Hypothesis 9	Enthusiasm Effect	More inclusive mechanisms of leadership selection will increase enthusiasm for the party.	Positive

leadership race and participated in the first round of voting, *First Round* captures the vote share of the winning candidate in the first round, and *Vote Difference* captures the absolute vote difference between the first and second candidates.¹⁸ If the contestation effect hypothesis has any merit, we should see member selection increase the number of candidates (a positive coefficient), decrease the first round of votes for the top candidate (a negative coefficient), and decrease the vote difference between the top two candidates (a negative coefficient).¹⁹ Controls were added to capture the party's performance in the election preceding the leadership change (*Vote*) and the party's polling performance the month before the selection of its new leader ($Poll_{t-1}$) as both could impact the degree of competition in the race and the decision to expand the selectorate. Descriptive statistics for these variables can be found in Appendix section 1. All models include country fixed-effects and robust standard

Table 5
Contestation effect results.

	DV: Candidates	DV: First Round	DV: Vote Difference
Member Select	1.44* (0.47)	0.22* (0.05)	0.34* (0.09)
$Poll_{t-1}$	0.04* (0.02)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.003)
Vote	0.01 (0.03)	0.001 (0.004)	0.001 (0.01)
Government	0.38 (0.27)	0.05 (0.04)	0.07 (0.08)
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
N/R ²	129/0.77	119/0.95	119/0.83

Note: *p < .05.

¹⁸ If there were multiple rounds of elections, we used the first round vote difference for this measure. For the leaders that won the election unanimously (regardless of whether there is a second candidate or not), the vote difference variable is coded 1.

¹⁹ An additional model in Appendix 3.1 demonstrates that membership selection significantly decreases the probability of unanimous selection.

Table 6
Membership selection ACDE.

DV:	ΔPoll
Member Select	1.96* (0.67)
$Poll_{t-1}$	0.02 (0.02)
ΔVote	0.06 (0.05)
Government	1.13 (0.73)
Country FE	Yes
N	119

Note: *p < .05.

errors clustered by party.²⁰ In Table 5 we report the results using simple OLS regression.²¹

These models provide evidence that choosing a leader through a vote of party members increases contestation relative to more exclusive selection mechanisms. Expanding the selectorate is associated with between one and two additional candidates in the leadership contest and a 23% reduction in the first round vote share of the winning candidate. These results are significant at the $p < .01$ level. Membership selection also reduces the vote difference between the first and second candidates in the first round. Overall, these results provide sufficient support for H_3 , suggesting that the polling boost political parties can expect to receive from an expanded selectorate may be reduced due to the increase in internal competition (Stewart and Carty, 1993; Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006; Hazan and Rahat 2010).

One may ask, however, whether contestation truly harms a party. Pedersen and Schumacher (2015) argue that contestation may work both ways. While it may highlight party divisions, increased media attention to competitive races may also help the party. If competition hurts the party as we argue, then when we fix the level of competition, we should see a higher coefficient for the membership vote variable for its effect on party performance. To test this concern, we analyzed the average controlled direct effect (ACDE) of membership selection on a party's polling performance by implementing a sequential g-estimation strategy (Acharya et al., 2016). This approach allows us to control for intermediate confounders and mediators without conditioning on post-treatment variables. Thus, we can use this model to test the effect of membership selection while holding the level of contestation constant. To do so, we specified *Member Select* as the treatment variable and *Poll* as the outcome variable. $Poll_{t-1}$ and *Vote* were included in the model as pre-treatment variables. *First Round* was selected as the mediating contestation variable as it is shaped by both the *Member Select* and *Candidates* variables. Thus, the *Candidates* variable was used as an intermediate confounder in the model. Results of this analysis can be found in Table 6.²²

Using this approach, we find that when competition is fixed, membership selection increases a party's polling performance by 1.96%, 0.4% higher than a baseline OLS model.²³ This means that the increased competition that results from membership selection reduces the

²⁰ Full models without fixed-effects can be found in Appendix section 3.1.

²¹ GJRM analyses suggest that endogeneity is not a concern for the second and third models in Table 5 and all models are extremely sensitive to the chosen copula. Therefore, we report the OLS results in Table 5.

²² The mediation analysis does not allow us to run a Generalized Joint Regression Model. We expect that, if we could, the coefficient for *Member Select* would be larger than what is reported in Table 6. This is because a comparison of the GJRM results from Table 3 and the OLS results from Appendix 2.7 for the same model show that GJRM produces a stronger effect of membership vote on polling results when endogeneity is taken into account.

²³ A baseline OLS model can be found in Appendix 2.7. In this model, membership selection was associated with a 1.56% polling increase.

Table 7
Ideology effect results.

	DV:	Δ Manifesto
Member Select	3.22 (4.51)	0.10 (6.05)
Poll _{t-1}	0.04 (0.16)	0.04 (0.18)
Vote	0.30 (0.37)	0.27 (0.32)
Government	5.71 (4.94)	6.00 (4.12)
Months to Election		0.08 (0.14)
Members*Months		0.11 (0.19)
Country FE	Yes	Yes
N/R ²	101/0.15	101/0.16

Note: * $p < .05$.

expected benefit of membership selection by nearly 23%. This finding provides support for the contestation effect described above and does suggest a potential, though substantively small, risk of incorporating party members into the leadership selection process.²⁴

In assessing the ideological effect (H_4), we analyzed whether expanding the party leader selectorate to rank-and-file membership pushes a party to take a more extreme ideological position. Since data on the ideological positions of party leaders are sparse, we analyze the change in a party's manifesto positioning after the selection of the new leader as a proxy. Though we cannot directly measure leader ideology, manifestos reflect a party's ideological position and are an area where a new leader might attempt to leave her mark. Thus, the dependent variable in the models is *Manifesto*. Manifesto ideology scores were sourced from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) and range from -100 (far left) to $+100$ (far right) (Volkens et al., 2019). To measure our dependent variable, we first calculated the absolute value of the change in a party's manifesto ideology from the election prior to the leadership selection to the election after the new leader was selected. We then multiplied those values by $+1$ if a left-leaning party moved to the left or a right-leaning party moved to the right and -1 if a left-leaning party moved to the right or a right-leaning party moved to the left. We used party family information from the CMP dataset to identify political parties as left versus right. If a party is moderating, their *Manifesto* score will be negative, and if they are moving to the extreme, their score will be positive. Ultimately, this variable captures both the magnitude of change and whether a party is moderating or moving towards their ideological extreme. Descriptive statistics for these variables can be found in Appendix section 1.

All models were run using OLS with country-fixed effects and robust standard errors clustered by party. Party leaders who did not contest a general election were dropped from this analysis. In the first model, we examine the relationship between membership selection and manifesto change controlling for $Poll_{t-1}$ and *Vote*. Losing an election or performing poorly in the polls can spark a desire to re-evaluate the party's ideological stance and can trigger a leadership change, thus necessitating its inclusion in the model. The second model interacts the membership selection variable with the number of months between the leadership selection and the subsequent election. Since it may take time for a leader to fully take command of the party apparatus, she may be more effective in shifting the party's platform if there is more time between her selection and the next election.

The results of this analysis fail to provide sufficient support for H_4 . Expanding the selectorate to include a vote of party members is not associated with more extreme changes to party manifestos. While the

coefficient for the member select variable is positive in Model 1 (as expected), it failed to reach a conventional statistical significance level. Similarly, time effects are as expected, but not statistically significant. Thus, we fail to find evidence that parties risk becoming too ideologically extreme when they expand the selectorate, thus dampening any political benefit they may receive when party voters are included in the decision-making process.

4.2. Experimental analysis

Hypotheses 5 through 9 are about the subjective evaluations of membership vote for party leadership by voters. Absent any survey data asking respondents about these subjective evaluations, the only way forward to test these hypotheses is with a survey experiment. Hence, we implemented a vignette-based survey experiment in Australia.

Australia was chosen for several key reasons. To start, Australia is a federal country with sub-national party system variation. We leverage this variation in our experimental design by discussing a fictitious political party, "Australia Together," which the participants were told competes in one of the Australian states, New South Wales (NSW). Additionally, the Senate's proportional electoral system allows smaller parties to gain federal representation from each state (Gauja 2010). This ensures that, while our party is fictitious, participants from the states we ran this survey experiment (i.e., all states except NSW) likely do not know every small party running in every other state, increasing the validity of our experimental vignette. Regarding the leader selection rules, Australian parties and political history have important properties. Most major Australian parties choose their leader based on the votes of their parliamentary faction or through an electoral college system. Nevertheless, the participants are likely familiar with the one-member-one-vote system as parties in Australia have recently engaged in a robust debate regarding the role of party members in internal decision-making (Cross and Gauja 2014a). In addition, parties use a wide variety of inclusive and exclusive selection mechanisms to choose candidates for federal office at the state level (Cross and Gauja 2014b). In 2013, the Australian Labor Party brought party members into the national-level leadership selection process for the first time, with the vote of party members and the vote of the parliamentary faction weighted equally (Cross and Gauja 2014a). However, attempts to further devolve powers to party members or to increase their role in selecting party leaders and candidates at the national-level have stalled (Gordon 2014; Milligan 2014), and the Liberal Party has rejected such a selectorate expansion (Cross and Gauja 2014a). Finally, the 2016 collapse of the Australian Democrats, the most member-inclusive party in Australia, highlights the perils of relying too heavily on intra-party democracy to make critical decisions (Gauja 2010).²⁵ Hence, we can argue that while Australians do not experience much membership involvement in party politics at the federal level (as opposed to the UK, for instance), they are still familiar with the process, which is important

²⁵ After successfully gaining representation in the Australian Senate with some leverage over policy-making from the late 1980s through the early 2000s, support for the Australian Democrats collapsed as the party struggled to manage internal conflicts and struggled to present voters with a coherent ideological vision. Though party members had a significant say in party affairs, including the party's policy proposals, participation in membership polls was typically very low. Thus, the inclusion of party members in the Australian Democratic party went beyond leadership and candidate selection, which may have contributed to their collapse (Gauja 2005, 2010). In addition, if our participants developed any negative perceptions of membership participation as a result of the recent collapse of the Australian Democrats, then we can argue that our results are conservative estimates of the positive effects of membership vote.

²⁴ A sensitivity analysis plot for the sequential-g model can be found in Appendix 3.2.

Table 8

Dependent variables.

DV	Questions	Response Options
Legitimacy	1. Thinking of the leadership selection method, how fair is the decision-making process? 2. This process can be trusted to make decisions that are right for the party. 3. I would encourage the use of this decision-making process in the party I support.	4 point Fair/Unfair, 4 point Agree/Disagree
Enthusiasm	1. Australia Together is likely to attract new members. 2. Thinking of the next election, how likely would you be to support Australia Together if they were running in your district?	4 point Agree/Disagree 5 point likelihood
Incentive	1. Andrew Watson has earned his new position. 2. Andrew Watson will work hard on behalf of the party.	4 point Agree/Disagree
Deliberative Selection	1. Australia Together considers multiple viewpoints when making a leadership decision. 1. Andrew Watson is a strong Senate candidate. 2. Australia Together is likely to win seats in the Senate.	4 point Agree/Disagree 4 point Agree/Disagree

for our experimental design.²⁶

To begin the experiment, participants were given a very brief, one sentence explanation of each type of leadership selection mechanism in order to ensure each participant is aware of the four mechanisms that are generally involved in leadership selection. The text reads as follows: “Traditionally, there are four ways a political party can change its leader. 1. Executive Committee: The new leader is chosen by a vote of the central party committee. 2. Parliamentary Faction: The new leader is chosen by a vote of the party’s delegation in a national or regional parliament. 4. Party Assembly: The new leader is chosen by a vote of the delegates gathered at a party assembly or convention. 5. Party Membership: The new leader is chosen by a vote of all registered party members.”²⁷ After reading this text, participants were randomly assigned into one of five groups associated with the different treatment conditions as well as a control condition. Each participant then received a brief excerpt that replicated a local newspaper article detailing the selection of a new leader for the fictitious “Australia Together” party, which they were told competes in New South Wales (NSW).²⁸ Participants from NSW were excluded from the study. The name “Australia Together” was chosen because it lacked any connection to a currently existing or previously organized political party in Australia and was seen as relatively centrist.²⁹ In so far as changes made to party leadership at the state level are likely to have a lower salience, the results presented in this study will be more conservative than if participants were evaluating a leadership change in a party that has a history of competing at the national level. While the control condition contained no selectorate information, the four treatment conditions reflected the four leadership selection mechanisms outlined above, briefly describing the process through which the new leader was chosen. Prompts avoided any evaluation of the new leader, “Andrew Watson,” with just a brief description of his occupational background (he was presented as a Sydney solicitor

and philanthropist). Finally, the experimental vignettes held the level of contestation constant, with all participants being told that the selection came after “a multi-candidate leadership contest.”³⁰ The full text of these vignettes can be found in Appendix section 3.3. After reading the vignette, participants were asked a series of questions that correspond with the five mechanisms described above. These questions and their response options can be found in Table 8.³¹ In the analysis presented below responses to the questions are added together for each dependent variable and normalized by dividing by the highest possible score.³²

The experiment was fielded via Qualtrics from December 13 to December 19, 2019. Overall, 1578 participants completed the survey.³³ In our sample, 36.3% identified as a Liberal supporter, 29% Labor, 14.7% Green, and 4.1% identified as a supporter of the National Party. 47.9% of the sample were female and 51.9% were male. The average age was 58, the average income was \$30,000 - \$70,000, and the average education level was a bachelor’s degree. Finally, the average level of political interest was 2.48 out of 5 and the average participant scored a 2.56 out of 5 on a political knowledge battery. Multinomial regression analysis demonstrated that treatment groups were balanced on key demographic variables with the exception of age. OLS regression analysis was thus conducted for all dependent variables controlling for age, demonstrating that the substantive results presented below are not substantially altered. These results can be found in Appendix section 3.6.

The results of the experimental analysis for each theorized mechanism are presented below. While this analysis consists of ANOVA and t-tests due to the successful randomization, all results are confirmed using regression analysis controlling for political knowledge, gender, country of origin, age, education, income, political interest, and ideological distance between the voter and fictitious party (based on a self-assessment of the party’s ideology). All regression results can be found

³⁰ Contestation is kept constant in the experiment to eliminate the conditioning effect found above (see Tables 5 and 6).

³¹ Questions for the Legitimacy Effect DV were adapted from Clayton et al. (2018) and focus on procedural legitimacy rather than substantive legitimacy (see footnote 4).

³² For the Legitimacy DV, Cronbach’s alpha scores were tabulated and were found to be above 0.75. Thus, these questions could be reliably aggregated.

³³ The manipulation check asked participants to choose which mechanism the party used to pick the new leader. This question came after the questions used to generate the dependent variables to avoid any additional priming effects. Out of the 1578 participants, 823 successfully passed a manipulation check. This is a large drop but not surprising given that the respondent had to answer the manipulation question after answering 19 questions following the experimental condition. Since the control group was not exposed to a selection mechanism, all participants in this group were included in the subset. Demographically, the subset was no different than the full sample and was largely representative of Australia as a whole. Detailed demographic information for both the full sample and the subset as well as a comparison to the demographics of Australia can be found in Appendix section 3.4. With the exception of age, our sample largely reflects the demography of Australia as a whole. Age was controlled for in subsequent regression models.

²⁶ Financial constraints limit us to replicate the experiment in other countries. However, we are confident that our results from this experimental design are generalizable to other parliamentary systems even though Australia is a federal country and uses a different electoral system than the other countries in our cross-national analyses. The important factors that facilitate the generalizability of the results are whether there are political parties that use or have discussed to use membership vote for leadership elections and the importance of party leaders in politics, the factors that are common across all our parliamentary democracies in.

²⁷ Though providing this information does indeed generate a priming concern, the goal of this study is to have participants implicitly compare different leadership selection mechanisms. Thus, providing this information helps ensure that all participants are engaging in similar comparisons.

²⁸ New South Wales was chosen intentionally. It is the most populous state in Australia yet ideologically more centrists/diverse compared to Queensland or Victoria, ensuring that we do not prime respondents in any ideological direction.

²⁹ Participants rated the party’s ideology as a 5.7 on a 10 point left/rights scale, very slightly right of center.

in Appendix section 3.6. To be consistent with our models so far, we will focus on comparing the membership selection treatment group with the control group and an exclusive group, comprised of those participants who received the executive, parliamentary, and assembly selection treatments. Comparisons between all treatment groups can be found in Appendix section 3.5.

To begin, ANOVA tests were conducted for all dependent variables. Each of these tests demonstrated significant between-group variation (p-values ranged from 0.09 to < 0.001). To analyze this variation, we conducted a series of pairwise t-tests comparing the mean score of the membership selection treatment group with those of the exclusive and control groups for each dependent variable. The results of these tests are depicted in Figs. 1 and 2, respectively.

When compared to both the control and exclusive selection, selecting a new leader through a vote of party members increases the perceived legitimacy of the outcome ($p < .01$) and increases the perception that a party considers multiple viewpoints when making a critical decision ($p < .05$). Not only does choosing a new leader through a vote of the party

Membership have these benefits, this selection mechanism also generates more enthusiasm for the party ($p < .001$), increasing the number of participants who felt the party could attract more members and who indicated that they would consider voting for the party in the next federal election.³⁴ So too, selection by party members increases the perception of the new leader's work ethic ($p < .01$), with more participants in this treatment group indicating that Andrew Watson had earned his new position and would work hard on behalf of the party. However, we do not find that membership selection increases the perception that the party chose the strongest leader for the next election, *ceteris paribus*.³⁵

Overall, the results provide support for hypotheses 5, 7, 8 and 9 while failing to provide concrete support for hypothesis 6. Thus, we conclude that expanding the selectorate to incorporate the voices of rank-and-file members can improve the image of a party in the eyes of the voters, boosting their polling performance, at least in the short term.

5. Conclusion and discussion

Through the use of observational data, we found that parties that have expanded the leadership selectorate to include a vote of party members can expect a significant short-term polling increase when compared to parties that use more exclusive selection mechanisms. Though we do not find evidence that this effect lasts until the subsequent election, such a polling increase can build a sense of momentum that parties can build on as they compete for office. We then sought to analyze the mechanisms behind this performance effect. Here, our results validate many of the proposed mechanisms in the literature. To start, we found that incorporating party members into the selectorate does increase intra-party contestation. However, contrary to expectations, we do not find that inclusive selectorates push parties to adopt more ideologically extreme positions. While increased competition has a modest negative effect on a party's polling performance, expanding the selectorate provides several important benefits for political parties and is shown to be net-beneficial. Our experimental analysis demonstrates that incorporating members increases perceptions of procedural legitimacy and bolsters perceptions of the new leader's work ethic, demonstrating to voters that the leader has earned the position and will work hard on behalf of the party. Our results also demonstrate that an

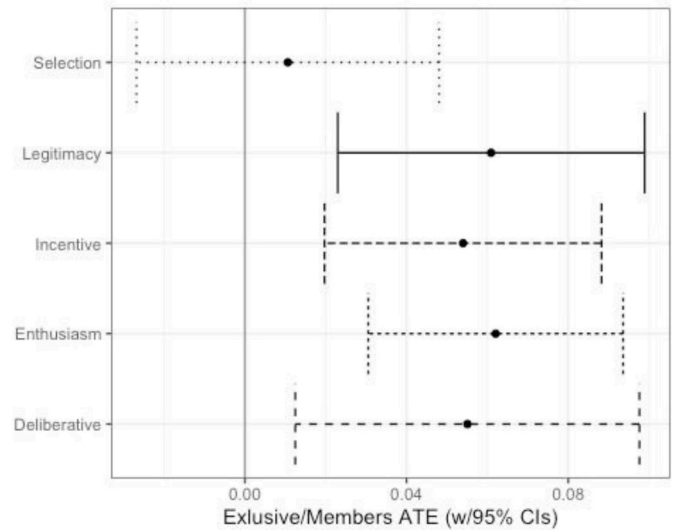


Fig. 1. Membership vote effect in comparison to other leadership selection Mechanisms.

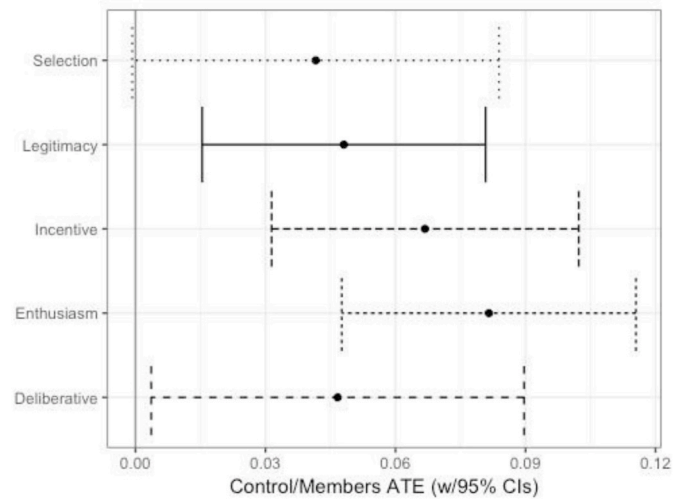


Fig. 2. Membership vote effect in comparison to the control group.

expanded selectorate can increase enthusiasm for the party, increasing the likelihood of attracting new members and new voters. Additionally, taking advantage of an inclusive selectorate can demonstrate to voters that the party considers multiple viewpoints when making decisions.

The results of our experiment thus find that an expanded selectorate may also generate positive enthusiasm and deliberative effects, boosting support for a party. These findings are particularly important in a time when voters have little faith in representative institutions and are seeking new avenues for political participation (Tierney, 2012; Mair, 2013; Ignazi 2014). Though the polling boost may be modest, improving the party's image in the eyes of voters in such a fashion can be incredibly beneficial to a party, particularly after an electoral defeat or scandal. This study thus contributes to the growing literature on leadership change and intra-party democracy in Western parliamentary systems, demonstrated that incorporating rank-and-file members into the leadership selection process can produce positive short-term effect for political parties.

These results leave us with an important question. Despite all the positive effects of membership selection of party leaders on voter evaluations of the leader and the party, there is only a short-term boost in

³⁴ It is important to note that the participants were told about the selection after it occurred, mitigating some of the concern regarding opportunistic membership highlighted above (Rahat and Hazan 2007).

³⁵ The experimental setting allowed us to explore whether the winning candidate was perceived to be a stronger leader for the next election but could not assess whether these mechanisms actually do choose stronger general election leaders.

parties' polling results. What should political parties do to ensure that the effects are long-lasting enough for electoral benefits? Changing the leader close to the next election would not help, as we discussed above. How can then the parties should keep the positive momentum from membership vote to last longer? One way to do this may be emphasizing these positive effects during the election campaign. Possibly more effective strategy might be giving party membership more roles for the election preparations and campaigns. This can be achieved by giving more voice to the members in drafting party programs and running the campaign events. If the positive effects of membership vote (regarding evaluations of legitimacy, incentives, deliberation, enthusiasm) generalize to all party decision-making via membership involvement, then we may be able to see an electoral boost for these parties. We, however, also note that it is important to examine the limits of intra-party democratization. It is possible that incorporating members in more mundane, day-to-day decisions may diminish party flexibility, increase intra-party tensions, and muddle party ideology, as was the case for the Australian Democrats (Gauja 2010). Thus, it is important for future scholars to analyze the limits of the effect found in this study to understand if this trend provides both political parties and voters with the benefits they are seeking.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102326>.

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