The title of the paper is inspired by the book by Gallagher and Marsh (1988).
As part of the process of intra-party-democracy and of internal democratisation, party primaries - whether open or closed - have increased as innovative methods for parties to select their leader or their parliamentary candidates. In order to bypass continuous decline, party dealignment (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002) and collapse in party memberships (van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke 2012), parties have devised strategies to democratise (Kittilson & Scarrow, 2003) and enhance representativeness, hoping to reach out to a wider electorate. In opening up to civil society, parties need to respond to what Lefebvre and Roger call an "injunction to deliberation" (Lefebvre & Roger, 2009). And indeed, primaries appear as a democratising process aiming at opening up the party to the wider community, mobilizing citizens (Gauja, 2012: 642) and offering them a platform for deliberative decision-making, based on the underlying assumption that the ideal type of democracy is to be found in increased citizen engagement (Gauja, 2012: 655) and deliberation.

Though inspired by the US, this device has been progressively extended to Western European countries and subjected to increasing scrutiny (Bille, 2001; Hopkin, 2001; Lefebvre, 2011; Sandri and Seddone, 2012). But, depending on the context, the way in which they operate can challenge the very idea of democratisation. Thus, unlike in US primaries, West European parties regulate their own process in order to keep it under control (Pennings and Hazan, 2001: 269). In Europe, primaries are generally studied as a top-down process driven by party leadership while being perceived as a means of reinvigorating the grassroots and empowering the bases or, as Katz put it, a leadership strategy to "democratise candidate selection in form, while centralising control in practice" (Katz, 2001). Yet, in the UK, it was on the grounds of citizen empowerment but also the need for better representativeness that the Conservative Party introduced open primaries for the selection of parliamentary candidates, thus pioneering a process which is still being considered by other British parties. Prior to the 2010 general election, the Conservative Party had introduced more than a hundred open primaries (Criddle, 2010: 315). But in the run-up to the 2015 general election, the process was followed in fewer constituencies and thus, despite the promise to introduce it on a large scale, the device finally remained a limited experiment.

Based on interviews2, statements and reports provided by party officials, candidates and MPs, and with additional information provided by blogs such as ConservativeHome which, through brief

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2 The author is extremely grateful to Caroline Dinenage MP for Gosport and Andrew Tyrie, MP for Chichester; Nigel Huddleston, Prospective Conservative Candidate (PCC) for Mid-Worcestershire; Mark Isherwood, PCC for Delyn; Rob Loughenbury, PCC for Chorley; Robert McIlveen, PCC for York Central; David Mackintosh, PCC for Northampton South; Paul Scully, PCC for Sutton and Cheam; Anne Marie Trevelyan, PCC for Berwick-upon-Tweed, and those who wished to stay anonymous, for their helpful cooperation and also wishes to thank John Strafford, ex-Chairman of the Beaconsfield Conservative Association and ex-member of the Party's National Union Executive Committee, for his valuable and critical observations.
posted accounts, screened the process in the limited number of constituencies concerned, this paper will assess the experiment of open primaries used by the Conservative Party to select their Prospective Conservative Candidates (PCC). Although theoretical frameworks for the study of open primaries are expanding (Barnea & Rahat, 2007; Rahan & Hazat, 2001; & Rahat, 2010; Cross, 2008; Cross & Katz, 2013), research on British Conservative open primaries is still in its infant stage, being either connected to party organisational reforms in general (Low, 2011) and the agenda of party modernization (Bale, 2010; Bale & Turner 2012) or to other issues relating to candidate selection in the party (Low, 2014b), such as representation in general (Williams & Paun, 2011) and the A-list in particular (McIlveen, 2009; Hill, 2013). Few studies have actually tackled the issue as their main focus of interest (McSweeney, 2010; Gauja, 2012).

Since 2003, two kinds of open primaries have been introduced: all-postal primaries and primary meetings. There were in fact only a small number of Conservatives open primaries and in the run-up to the 2015 general election, our survey can only rely on a limited sample of 17, easily identifiable through the different sources of information mentioned above. The observations which this paper will make, however, can hardly be extended to all situations. In order to avoid the temptation of excessive generalization and because outcomes cannot as yet be assessed (Gauja, 2012: 642), emphasis will be placed rather on the processes themselves than on their outcomes. Indeed, the issue of improved representation arising from the primaries has been addressed elsewhere (Williams & Paun, 2011) while other research has analysed perceptions and the drivers for reform (Gauja, 2012: 643-644).

Along with Katz's thesis of candidate selection, this paper will indeed argue that by creating a direct relation between voters and candidates, open primaries undermine the intermediary role of party organs (Penning & Hazan, 2001; Hazan & Rahat, 2010) and alter the distribution of power, but they also create an illusion of democracy with voters empowered at the expense of party members and party leadership closely controlling the whole process. Thus, the focus here will be on the issue of primaries in terms of party management, showing the continuing centralisation of a process in which central control can be visible at several stages. In spite of their limited scope, open primaries are, in addition, indicative of party intentions regarding organisational democratisation. Open primaries, therefore as part of a party leadership's agenda, allow wider hypotheses about the nature of party management under Cameron. Their limited number in the run-up to the 2015 general election tends to suggest that the whole initiative is failing or will at least remain experimental, and this paper will try to provide tentative explanations for this. Therefore, although tending to limit somewhat the scope of the study, it is necessary to look at primaries solely from the perspective of party motivations in terms of party management (Barnea & Rahat 2007) in order to understand how
open primaries reveal party organisational changes and why their apparent failure may say more about Cameron's style of leadership than about the innovation itself.

Secrecy in the open

In the UK, standard Westminster candidate selection has long been viewed as the "secret garden of politics" (Gallagher and March, 1988) or "a smoke-filled room hidden in secrecy" (Interview of a PCC). Even though the procedure was modified in 1998, candidate selection can be analysed as a fairly standardised multistage process, with screening by a non-selected national party agency, and by a local selected party agency, culminating in a party members' selection meeting (Denver, 1988; Norris and Lovenduski, 1995, Hazan & Rahat, 2010, Rahat, 2013: 138-139). From the outset, the whole process of candidate selection has always been conditional upon the future candidates figuring initially on the "Approved List" before being allowed to start the whole procedure. However, until 2001, local Conservative associations remained autonomous in that they were not forced by the centre to choose from this list and could appoint their own candidates (Williams & Paun, 2011: 14). Even so, the criteria used by the Parliamentary Selection Board (PSB) to approve candidates were already subject to controversy, based as they were on Sandhurst’s army officer training procedure and giving priority to debating skills at the expense of other attributes, thus often favouring men rather than women (Williams & Paun, 2011: 14; McIlveen, 2009). The PSB was then replaced by a Parliamentary Assessment Board (PAB) which uses a list of six criteria to test communication, leadership and motivation skills through a set of five tasks, the idea being to replace the army-style training procedure with an entrepreneurial mode of recruitment (Williams & Paun, 2011: 15-16; Dykes and Sylvester, 2005). Whether these criteria are made fully clear to the aspirants is questionable: "I'm not sure what the criteria are, you'll have to ask the central party" (Interview of a PCC).

However prior to the PAB, a preliminary stage consists in the screening of CVs by the Candidates' Team, often followed by an interview with the Regional Director of the applicant's area. Again, the criteria for this preliminary stage are unknown. As Katie Redmond, PCC for Luton South put it on the Blue Collar blog:

"Applying to the parliamentary candidates list is a multi-stage process, beginning with an initial inquiry to the candidates department at Conservative Campaign Headquarters (CCHQ), sending a CV and covering letter. You may then be invited for an informal interview to decide if it is worth putting in a full application. If the candidates’ team see your potential, they will send you a copy of the application form, which consists of various questions relating to work experience, political involvement and service to the community. Three referees need to be nominated, at least one of which must be your local association chairman or senior party official. Once you send off the application to CCHQ, the candidates department review your responses to decide whether to invite
you for a formal assessment called the Parliamentary Assessment Board (PAB)." More elliptically, as one PCC put it: "If your CV looks good then you get invited to a PAB which is a full-day exercise" (Interview).

This first stage aroused some controversy regarding the lack of transparency with which the pre-selection is organised by a team who "reports to the leader, chooses the candidates they want and determines the rules for the selection of candidates, while being not accountable to anybody other than the leader" (Interview of John Strafford, 27 February 2015). Observers also noted the lack of legitimacy and accountability weighing on both the Candidates' Team in CCHQ and the Parliamentary Assessment Board (PAB) since, in addition to a handful of past and present MPs, the members of this meeting are CCHQ unelected members (Interview of John Strafford, 27 February 2015), a view confirmed by Kelly's analysis of "centrally controlled 'approved lists' of candidates" whose "gatekeepers remained a party vice-chairman appointed by the leader and a clutch of anonymous Central Office officials" (Kelly, 2003: 98).

The secrecy surrounding the whole selection process is still a major concern (Williams & Paun, 2011: 44), together with the excessive centralisation resulting from the organisational reforms introduced by William Hague in 1998 under the title The Fresh Future (Hague, 1997). With a view to democratising party organisation (Hopkin, 2001; Katz, 2001) and to promoting inclusiveness, the reforms included the participation of party members in the leadership contest and the multiplication of focus groups and internal referenda to give them more sway. It also provided the party with a full constitution bringing the three components of the party (parliamentary, professional and volunteer) together under the auspices of a new overarching party board, with only 5 members elected by the National Convention and whose democratic credentials were immediately questioned. Commentators noted how these organisational changes only served to reveal the continuing authority of a hidden oligarchy behind the facade of enhanced democratisation (Kelly, 2003: 102-103), in line with the deeply engrained tradition of a party built around the leader (Ware, 1987; Heppell, 2008) and developing in keeping with the oligarchic model (Michels, 1915, 1968). Others argued further that the 1998 reforms represented a shift in the party’s balance of powers (Bale & Turner, 2012) with the leader propelled to the top of a huge structure codified by the party constitution (Webb, 2000) and the apparent "bottom-up" strategies serving only to galvanise the "top-down" mentality style presiding over the party (Kelly, 2003: 102). Subsequently, the organisational architecture based on the "vertical chain of responsibility" (McKenzie, 1955: 588; Low, 2011) was to run counter to the horizontal process of further democratisation envisaged later

by the "A-list" and open primaries. Along with David Cameron's modernisation plan (Bale, 2009; Alexandre-Collier, 2010), moves towards increased inclusiveness and representativeness were in tune with his "Big Society" aspirations. The introduction of the A-list for more representation, inspired by Andrew Lansley's *Do the Right Thing* pamphlet, published in 2002, recommended an ‘A-list’ of 100 talented candidates, 50% at least of whom were to be women, and including a significant proportion of ethnic minorities. The A-list was viewed as the best way to promote diversity (William & Paun, 2011: 41).

Within the supply and demand analytical model devised by Norris and Lovenduski to explain discrimination present in the candidate selection process (Pippa & Norris, 1995: 14-15), the party debate on representativeness (Gauja, 2012: 653) especially of women and ethnic minorities is to be understood from a demand-side perspective. Though Norris and Lovenduski argued, back in the 1990s, that the under-representation of women and ethnic minorities was not substantiated by any evidence of discrimination and could be more easily justified by supply-side factors, i.e. a limited choice of candidates in the first place (McIlveen, 2009), the response offered by Conservative leadership was to operate effectively within the framework of demand. On the demand-side, with perceptions of selectors necessarily tinged with discrimination, the promotion of the A-List could be viewed as a means of limiting the damage produced by direct (reflecting the attitudes of the selectors) or imputed (reflecting what the selectors perceive to be the attitudes of the electorate) discrimination (Pippa & Norris, 1995: 124). Therefore opening up the process of selection was considered by the leadership as clearly reducing the risk of imputed discrimination since selectors at national and local levels knew that in the end it would be up to voters to decide. However the A-list was open to much criticism, aroused antagonism and was even suspected of blocking candidates in order to favour supporters of Cameron’s modernisation agenda (Williams & Paun, 2011: 18). One PCC recalls that the candidates on the A-list were accused of having been directly parachuted from CCHQ, which local associations denounced as too bossy and interfering (Interview).

**The impetus of open primaries: a party leadership's agenda**

Though presented as an innovation, Fisher et al. point out that the idea of open primaries had already been advocated by Peter Paterson (1967: 183) as early as 1967 (Fisher et al., 2013: 93 note 3). In 2001, the first recommendations concerning the introduction of primaries included the idea that the process could encompass the whole Conservative selectorate (members, supporters and voters) (Tyrie, 2001: 26). At that time, the need for a more representative party was motivated by a second electoral defeat in a row. This ambition, expressed by Andrew Tyrie, a Conservative MP, first materialised in Warrington South in November 2003, one month after the issuing of a report.
from the *Commission on Candidate Selection*, hosted by the Electoral Reform Society and chaired by Peter Riddell, which recommended the use of primaries. Another primary was then held in Reading East where Robert Wilson was selected and subsequently elected MP in 2005 (Gay & Jones, 2009: 4).

While the initiative was praised by the party, it originated from a varied set of people belonging to the party elite, including CCHQ officials and former and current MPs (Gauja, 2012: 655). Gauja also notes the influence of prominent journalists and think tanks (notably the Institute for Government with its publication of the report by Williams and Paun, 2011), organising fringe meetings at the Conservative Party Conference. A clear effort was made by party officials to encourage local associations. One PCC recalls: "I think the local association discussed it with the party officials who said they would prefer if to be a primary but ultimately the decision was with the executive" (Interview of David Mackintosh, PCC, 26 February 2015). Yet, it seemed to be more than simple encouragement. An internal document (entitled *The Conservative Party Primary Pack* and emanating from CCHQ) reveals a series of precise guidelines for local associations and applicants on the organisation of open primaries with the idea that the first stages were the same as in standard candidate selection. Only the final stage, traditionally bringing together local Conservative members, was replaced with a meeting inviting "Conservative Party members entitled to vote within the Association or electors on the register of UK parliamentary electors entitled to vote in the constituency" to participate. In line with the A-list, it was envisaged as a way to counteract the natural tendency of local members to pick their preferred candidates who generally turned out to be men (Williams & Paun, 2011: 41). In fact, the decision to launch open primaries in the form of primary meetings between 2006 and 2009 only slightly affected the outcome of candidate selection in terms of participation and representation as, at the time, primary meetings only concerned local Conservative associations with fewer than 300 members (McSweeney, 2010) and were attended by audiences of 100 to 300 people. Mikulska and Scarrow contend that "procedures which are given inclusive-sounding labels, such as "open primary" may, on closer inspection, actually represent at least as much an increase in centralisation as in inclusiveness" (2010: 313). Yet, though centralisation and inclusiveness are presented as concomitant processes, centralisation was already visible as early as 1998 while strategies for more inclusiveness were implemented after David Cameron's election as party leader in December 2005. This suggests that the late introduction of primaries may have been envisaged as a compensation mechanism to correct the excessive centralisation of party organisation after 1998.

In this respect, the introduction of all-postal open primaries was supposed to provide a radical

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The pdf 10 page-document was initially available on the internet but subsequently removed.
change. It was presented by Conservative leadership as a watershed measure following the MPs' expenses' scandals in May 2009 and as a means of cleansing or detoxifying (not only the "Conservative" brand but) politics in general (Cameron, 2009; Gauja, 2012: 653, McSweeney, 2010: 537-538). David Cameron announced:

“One of the reforms I’m most proud of is the widespread introduction of open primaries for the selection of Conservative parliamentary candidates in recent years. I want to see that continue with much greater use of open primaries for the selection of parliamentary candidates – and not just in the Conservative party, but every party. In time, this will have a transformative effect on our politics, taking power from the party elites and the old boy networks” (Cameron in Politics Home, 26 May 2009, Quoted by Rahat, 2013: 145)

Yet, the so-called watershed moment was eventually reduced, in the run-up to the 2010 general election, to two all-postal primaries in Totnes and Gosport and 116 primary meetings (Criddle, 2010: 315). It then appeared in the coalition agreement as a practical illustration of the principles of responsibility and choice (McSweeney, 2010: 537) with a view to boosting supporters and providing the party with a network of potential candidates.

"We will fund 200 all-postal primaries over this Parliament, targeted at seats which have not changed hands for many years. These funds will be allocated to all political parties with seats in Parliament that they take up, in proportion to the share of their total vote in the general election" (The Coalition: our programme for government, HM Government, Cabinet Office, London, May 2010: 27).

After 2010, other government priorities slowed down the whole initiative. So far, at the time of writing this paper, fewer than twenty primary meetings have been organised while all-postal open primaries were ditched altogether (Hannan, 2013) with the exception of one in Rochester and Strood preceding a by-election in 2014 after Mark Reckless’s defection to UKIP. If one excludes this primary, out of a sample of 17 primaries held since February 2013, 9 were safe seats (Boston and Skegness, Croydon South, Louth and Horncastle, Mid Worcestershire, Northampton South, North East Hampshire, South East Cambridgeshire, Tonbridge and Mailing, Wealden), 2 were marginal (Hampstead and Kilburn and West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine), 1 semi-marginal (Berwick-upon-Tweed) and 5 are safe Liberal-Democrat seats (Bath, Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk, Twickenham and Yeovil). With very few marginal seats, open primaries target safe seats: either Conservative, which the party is sure to win, or Labour/Liberal-Democrat, which Conservatives are (almost) certain to lose. The reality is therefore poles apart from the original ambition of open primaries to give "a huge advantage to the party, particularly in marginal seats” (Tyrie, 2011: 26). Open primaries target essentially safe seats where incumbent MPs are retiring. Although applying open primaries to safe Conservative seats is presented as a way of further legitimizing the election of the future long-standing MP, the risk thus taken by party leadership is
"Open primaries make an even greater difference in seats which rarely change political allegiance; where currently a tiny selection committee in effect dictates the MP who will represent the wider electorate, sometimes for decades to come" (Wollaston, 2014).

Thus open primaries appear to MPs as a legitimising instrument with which to ratify their election and a response to voters' growing mistrust of politicians. Wollaston further argues that "as for myself, being elected twice, I have always felt an extra responsibility to be everyone's MP" (Wollaston, 2014). The argument of extra accountability or double legitimacy can only be accepted as a personal impression or feeling but in reality it raises doubts and could even be shown as dangerous evidence for a presumed deficit of legitimacy within the political elite, thus nourishing a populist argument. In addition, the choice of safe seats is a guarantee of long-term success for open primaries insofar as the candidates selected are likely to become future MPs, and so their mode of selection is likely to be remembered as being associated with electoral performance.

Screening and monitoring: centralisation and control

Eventually, the decision to resort to an open primary rests entirely with the local association, whose first responsibility is to inform their Regional Director. From the outset, however, CCHQ is also involved. As stated in Primary Pack,

"If an Association wishes to select using the Primary method, they should liaise as early as possible with their Regional Director to talk through the logistics involved and gain agreement from the Candidates' Team to proceed in this manner" (internal document)

The process then follows different filtering stages, with approximately 100-200 applicants on the Approved List narrowed down to 3 or 4 (Williams and Paun, 2011: 24). Once applicants are on the approved list (Stage 1), five stages can be identified, with the local association, Chairman, Vice Chairman and Treasury sifting the standard CVs of the 100-200 approved applicants (stage 2), who will then meet CCHQ candidate office officials for one day, after which they are narrowed down from 25-30 to 5-10 (stage 3) who are eventually interviewed by 30-40 people from the Local Association Executive Committee (stages 4 and 5) before the actual primary (stage 6) takes place. Thus, as Low argued, "local parties were still restricted to a choice of process from a set menu" (Low, 2011: 5), as in the standard selection process. Hustings meetings between the audience and the applicants are organised, but debates between the applicants are strictly forbidden, on the grounds of equality ("Sitting all applicants together on the stage as a panel is expressly disallowed, as all candidates must be treated individually and equally", as stated in Primary Pack), the measure being intended to limit the risk of intra-party competition and of destabilizing party cohesion.
Although all went smoothly in most constituencies, some dysfunctioning was revealed, exposing the amateurish approach to primary meetings, as in South East Cambridgeshire where, none of the 4 candidates shortlisted got the required 50% and three rounds were needed to declare Lucy Frazer the winner. Voting figures were not released and it eventually turned out that the ballot papers had been miscounted in the first place (Game, 2014).

While the presence of CCHQ is played down by the PCCs interviewed, Low shows its involvement at several stages of the process: all in all, the role of CCHQ was essentially a four-fold one as impetus, screener, monitor and "adjudicator" (Interview of Caroline Dinenage MP for Gosport, 24 February 2015). In addition, CCHQ controlled the timetable ("not less than 21 days before it takes place", Primary Pack). As John Strafford argued, comparing it with the US open primaries: "Campaigns in the United States are usually prolonged, giving everyone plenty of time to investigate the candidates. The campaigns run by the Conservatives are strictly limited in time" (unpublished paper). Lastly, publicity was also tightly controlled by CCHQ. While open primaries are presented as a way of "giving the successful candidate a high public profile" (Primary Pack) and "a good way of promoting the party as well" (Interview of David Mackintosh, PCC, 26 February 2015), CCHQ's need to control the press suggests concern about the applicant's presumed inability to deal with journalists, based on their lack of political experience. Clear recommendations are given both to the local associations and to the applicants: "We advise that media should not be allowed to attend the hustings" (Primary Pack). A further section entitled Media Handling providing advice for applicants stated:

"If Associations are contacted by members of the national media it would help the Press Office in CCHQ to be told of any requests for access to a selection. Often a media outlet may say one thing to an association and another to the Press Office. The media is permitted to attend a public primary event, but should not be granted access to the confidential stages preceding a Primary"
(Primary Pack)

Furthermore, the whole process reveals complex relationships between the various components of party organisation in particular local associations and the centre. The centre's attitude to its sub-units is somewhat ambivalent, encouraging as it does open primaries and monitoring the process while giving local associations leeway to organise the event. The relationship can be understood in terms of continuous negotiation and renegotiation between the centre and local associations (Bale & Turner, 2012: 9). One PCC recalls that his local association was given a choice: either the future candidate could be selected quickly (in July), if the local association agreed to let the Candidates' Team in CCHQ provide the shortlist of the final four candidates, or the local association would see to it and, in that case, selection would only take place in September. The local association finally chose the second option (Interview).
Low places the reform of the primaries within the framework of Mair’s (1994) stratarchical model because it is in line with the "franchise party model" (Carty, 2004), suggesting a fixed contract or a "stratarchical bargain" between party units, that is CCHQ and local associations (Low, 2011: 4). But while each of the different sub-units has considerable autonomy, the main shortcoming is that intra-party relationships are fluid and may not be genuinely democratic (Carty, 2013, p. 25) but they are destabilized by the direct relationship existing between voters and candidates (Pennings & Hazan, 2001: 271). Thus, a closer look at the guidelines in *Primary Pack* suggests, rather than a leadership approach, a managerial implication imposing constraining rules on the local association. This type of management turns out to be risk-sensitive as the constituencies where primaries are held are generally safe and bound to deliver results.

**Primary campaigning**

Campaigning for open primary elections for candidate selection entails a risk of intra-party competition as applicants need to go public (McSweeney, 2010: 539) and devise offensive campaigning strategies while their direct opponents are members of their own party. The major risk is to display a disunited front which could be even more perilous than the failure to reach out to a wider selectorate. As already said, this risk was anticipated and once again reduced by CCHQ through the decision to avoid competition on the stage in public between the final three or four applicants who were interviewed individually. For postal primaries, the whole campaign was orchestrated by CCHQ which could thus control the way applicants were presented to the public and officially ensure equality of treatment:

"It was an expensive process because the ballot paper and the CVs of each of the four of us were sent in a booklet to every single household. And we had postage paid envelopes" (Interview of Caroline Dinenage, MP, 24 February 2015)

The risk of intra-party competition leading to division was also limited financially by CCHQ, as applicants were requested to limit their electoral expenses to 200£, paid by themselves individually. This small amount generally forced them to be creative (Williams & Paun, 2011: 23):

"The leaflet I had printed was just a small post-card sized thing so that people could put it in the kitchen as a sort of aide-mémoire and the reason that made it work is the email address that was on it. I still get emails sent to me today".

(Interview of Caroline Dinenage, MP, 24 February 2015)

Methods were thus similar to traditional campaigning methods and included canvassing, leafleting or appearing at the local market. But there were also bolder initiatives like attending the local half marathon or holding surgery in a pub (McSweeney, 2010: 539):
"The 5 candidates chose different methods: Sam Giymah who is now an MP, he stood by the side of the road every morning, by a very bad congested road, with a sign on a stick. I didn’t know any of the three candidates before we started. I did a lot of campaigning in the market places in high street, I had some leaflets printed, I calculated the areas that were most likely to vote in the primary and I leafleted, because I didn’t have a budget to leaflet everybody, so I just leafleted some targeted small areas. I had an understanding of the area, I figured out in my head which areas would be most likely to vote"
(Interview of Caroline Dinenage, MP, 24 February 2015)

The use of social media did make a difference, but only in addition to traditional campaigning which remained more efficient, along with the applicants' ability to react quickly:

"A lot of people said one of the reasons I won was because I got to work very very early. I had the reply on Friday night and by the end of the week end, I had a website, I had a Facebook site, I had a leaflet that had gone to print and then that leaflet went out early on the following week".
(Interview of Caroline Dinenage, MP, 24 February 2015)

If coaching by CCHQ was officially available to unexperienced applicants, it was arguably only provided to centrally-preferred applicants (Low, 2011: 9).

In some constituencies, the risk of intra-competition was further contained by the decision not to campaign all together, which also suggested that local associations found it sometimes difficult to wrestle with the unprecedented and exceptional context of the open primary.

As one PCC recalled: "The person who was chairing the whole meeting made it very clear to us that once you get the call saying you're in the final four (a former MP and he chaired the final meeting) there should be no over-campaigning, no handing out leaflets. You couldn't campaign. it was all down to the speeches and the Q & A (...) Two reasons: one is I had a full time job, I was working, and all of a sudden, you're told that you've got two weeks. Well you can't afford to drop work. Plus maybe another candidate had more money than I had, so it created a level playing field because otherwise it would just benefit wealthy individuals, those with the strong local connections and those with time available"
(Interview)

Further research would be needed to examine the actual impact of local connections, as has been studied earlier by seminal works on candidate selection (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995). Again, it is impossible to draw general conclusions from such a small sample, though it seems clear that in the three postal ballots (Totnes, Gosport and Rochester and Strood), local connections were considered essential to reach out to the wider community, since voters who could not attend the hustings meetings relied on this criterion (McSweeney, 2010: 540). Whatever loose definition may be attached to the notion of local connections, such as having been born and bred in the area or simply working there, all three candidates in postal ballots in Totnes, Gosport and Rochester and Strood (Sarah Wollaston, Caroline Dinenage and Kelly Tolhurst) capitalised on them.

"Dismembering" effects
With the notable exception of Rochester and Strood (7.6%, i.e. 5,688 votes), turnout was high in postal primaries in 2009 (24.5% in Totnes, i.e. 16,497 votes / 17.8% in Gosport, i.e. 12,659 votes), meaning 35-50 times the participation in traditional candidate selection by party members (McSweeney, 2010: 539), while in primary meetings, turnout was limited on average to 0.4% (Gauja, 2012: 648), ranging from around 100 to more than 600. The argument that open primaries have a positive effect on party membership (Gauja, 2012: 652) should be further substantiated. It was held that following the primary in Totnes, the number of party members increased by 10% (William & Paun, 2011: 26) but this would need to be confirmed by actual research.

The side-effect of the primaries' wider outreach is that members are inevitably deprived of their main prerogative, that is candidate selection, although they are expected to confirm the vote after the primary. Overall, organisational reforms have generated tensions among party members, with inclusiveness being detrimental to members or distorting the "chain of delegation" (Rahat, 2013: 148). Members' disempowerment has been widely studied elsewhere, with scholars resorting to colourful images of "decapitation" (Katz, 2001 cited in Scarrow, 2005: 5) or "emasculcation" (Webb, 2000). As members had never been consulted about changes in local procedures (Low, 2011: 7), it is easy to imagine the extent of potential resentment among them. Members do have the final say in a confirmation meeting after the primary and yet, as Low suggested, "this was necessarily diluted, as it would have been politically explosive to overturn a decision that involved local voters" (Low, 2011: 6). Furthermore, voting was public:

"If people were members of the party, they were given a card. And people with the card were asked to stay behind for the vote. They took the mood of the crowd. If there had been outcry, they could have done it through secret ballot" (Interview of David Mackintosh PCC, 26 February 2015),

In reality, members' voting by secret ballot to ratify the result of the open primary rarely happened. As argued by John Strafford, ex-Chairman of the Beaconsfield Conservative Association,

"The vote on the final adopting of the selected candidate by Conservative Party members is done by a show of hands (or raising a coloured voting slip, as noted in Primary Pack5), rather than by secret ballot, which can be intimidating, and which the Conservative government made illegal in the Trade Unions in the 1980s" (John Strafford, unpublished paper).

There were however exceptions in Bethnal Green and Bow, or Plymouth Sutton in 2006 where Conservatives failed to ratify a candidate because of his 'feisty' style (Sam Smallridge, ConservativeHome6).

Low demonstrated the de-skilling (Low, 2011: 8) and shrinking of activists’ responsibilities and a

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5 My comment
simplification of their role (Low, 2014). Aiming as they do to reach out to a wider selectorate, open primaries are bound to extend the party's agenda beyond the values which generally tie members together and, in doing so, they inevitably "dilute the values of party membership" (E-mail interview of Rob Loughenbury PCC). By contagion, the process entails a depoliticisation of members which is in line with the devaluation of the party as object, the party being thus "hollowed out" (Gauja, 2015: 92), as anticipated by Katz and Mair in their cartel party thesis, and forced, as a result, to mobilise other human resources.

**Networking**

In the run-up to the 2010 general election, parties had already invested in the strengthening of supporters as a new and major form of activism (Fisher et al. 2013; Low 2014a). In local associations, supporters had appeared as engaged in activities similar to those of members such as delivering leaflets and staffing polling stations, thus complementing members'.

Supporters did not only provide help but also represented a pool for candidate selection, as illustrated by very recent membership among members of the A-list (Fisher et al. 2013: 79). Open Primaries provide key opportunities to rely on external supporters (McIlveen, 2009: 156): "An open primary has a real prospect for attracting new support and activists" (e-mail interview of Paul Scully, 5 March 2015)

"I'll be working hard to energise my supporters" explained Anne Marie Trevelyan in the local newspaper (Berwick Advertiser, 19 January 2013), even suggesting that their involvement could be more significant than that of Conservative members. And indeed she went on to specify that "95% in the room (of the primary meeting) were local residents" (Interview of Anne Marie Trevelyan 10 February 2015).

With the help of their local association which, in most cases, keep lists of supporters easily identifiable through questionnaires and surveys conducted in the constituency (interview with a PCC), candidates were thus willing to cultivate their support network after the primary bearing in mind the general election campaign to come:

"And actually several people who were at the open primary, who were not Conservative supporters are now activists for me, they're not Tory party members, they're not Conservative activists, they're not even Conservative party supporters but they liked me on the evening and they helped me hand out the leaflets completely voluntarily and again that speaks to the open primary. They came up to me and emailed me up to say "don't assume that I'll vote Conservative but I'm backing you and I'll tell all my friends as well". That's another plus for the party: we're reaching out to the people whom otherwise we would have never got. They're not just supporters, they're delivering activists now." (Interview of Nigel Huddleston, 26 February 2015)

The party leadership was quite ready to acknowledge the importance of supporters' networks and
even to institutionalise their status online. Several online initiatives were seen, such as Conservative support (conservativesupport.com: "the free resource helping British Conservatives win vote"). But the main initiative came from the Chairman of the Party, Grant Shapps, when he set up Team2015 (https://www.conservatives.com/volunteer.aspx), a network of volunteers to encourage their mobilisation especially in marginal seats during the campaign. Team2015 has a full webpage on the Conservative Party website (https://www.conservatives.com/volunteer.aspx), a Facebook Page and a Twitter account, as well as links on most local associations' websites.

The Conservative Party is by no means alone in this initiative. Supporters' networks are clearly among the main organisational evolutions initiated by party leaders, accounting for the cartel-like tendencies (Bolleyer, 2009) identified not only in the UK but in many European parties. Parties have moved towards greater individualisation, especially in candidate selection, whereby party leaders engineer strategic devices to communicate directly with the electorate and reach out beyond membership (Gauja, 2015: 92-93). The setting up of Team2015 by the party chairman illustrates this top-down development with the institutionalisation of a supporter status on the party website. Primaries thus contribute to loosening the relationship between leadership and members while strengthening and even institutionalising the connection with supporters, demonstrating finally the transformation of the party as object into a network proper, as suggested by Katz and Mair (2009: 763).

**Why are primaries failing?**

As a very limited experiment in time and space (McSweeney, 2010: 542), open primaries cannot be seen as one of the Conservative Party's most important achievements. From a comparative perspective, the temporary nature of these open primaries is a feature which can also be observed in other national cases. Studying the primaries of the Italian centre-left, Corbetta and Vignati described them as simple trend, but a successful one, which nevertheless did not lead to their "definitive institutionalisation" (Corbetta & Vignati, 2013). In the case of the British Conservative Party, the argument of a "temporary success" is even questionable. Their effects and implications for the types of candidates selected and the MPs elected fall short of the party’s initial expectations in terms of representativeness and participation. True enough, the party has gained greater inclusiveness in terms of gender and ethnicity but it is doubtful that this progress actually results from open primaries. In terms of the representativeness of Conservative parliamentary candidates at the 2015 general election, no thorough research has yet been conducted but a few observations can be made. Out of the small sample of 17 local associations resorting to open primaries since February 2013, 5 (29.4%) candidates were women, and 2 (11.7%) were Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME),
whose classification, as Criddle points out, is however problematic (Criddle, 2010: 320). At the time of writing, in early March 2015, a closer look at the Conservative party webpage (https://www.conservatives.com/OurTeam/Prospective_Parliamentary_Candidates.aspx) indicates that 253 PCC have been selected. Of these 253, 80 are women and 34 BAME, which represents respectively 31.6% and 11.8% of the PCC listed. The similarity between these figures and those of 2013 is striking and demonstrates clearly that in terms of inclusiveness, open primaries do not make any difference. However, there is no doubt that the face of the party has changed since the 2010 general election, particularly as regards women and BAME: in 2010, 24% were female and 6% of various ethnic origins (Criddle, 2010: 319-320).

Postal primaries also failed to confirm the assumption that they might produce a new kind of MP who would be emancipated from party loyalty, as illustrated for example by Sarah Wollaston, MP for Totnes, who had joined the Conservative Party only three years before the primary. The assumption that MPs selected by a primary will be more independent and less disciplined as "the winner has few obligations to or constraints imposed by party organisation" (McSweeney, 2010: 542; Pennings & Hazan, 2001: 271) is not supported by facts. Although further research would be needed to examine the voting record of 2010 MPs who had been selected through primary meetings, the rates of rebellion of Caroline Dinenage and Sarah Wollaston are respectively 1% and 3.9%, according to www.publicwhip.org, and are very low rates compared with the other Conservative MPS whose rates of rebellion range from 0.1% to 19.9%. Although it is again difficult to draw any acceptable conclusion from the observation of only 2 MPs, their rates of rebellion might well indicate that, on the contrary, they are more compliant, a consequence perhaps of their lack of political experience.

One major hypothesis which could be put forward to explain the failure of open primaries is the lack of rationalisation in terms of time and money. Taken together, open primaries, whether postal or primary meeting, project the image of a patchy set of diverse experiments, ranging from massive, over-publicised and professionally organised events to amateurish meetings with a limited audience (around 100 people). While the process was tightly controlled at the outset, its follow-up was somewhat informal in the case of primary meetings. Leadership was more deeply involved in postal primaries by which the party could raise its profile. Time was a major concern as open primaries could be seen as slowing down the whole process of candidate selection, already constrained by the various boundary changes that parties have to face at each election. That said, the key reason for abandoning all-postal primaries was their cost. Each of them was estimated as having cost between 30,000 and 40,000£, CCHQ having orchestrated the whole campaign and with each registered voter receiving a voting bulletin with a pre-paid envelope. So the objective of 200 all-postal primaries
would have cost 8 million pounds, while the estimated cost of a primary meeting was supposedly around 10,000£ (Gay & Jones, 2009: 4; Williams and Paun, 2011: 23). Though envisaged by some commentators, the idea of publicly-funded primaries, shifting the burden from parties to the people (Gauja, 2012: 648) touches upon the sensitive issue of party funding in the UK and is therefore generally excluded by Conservative MPs and candidates.

Finally, another reason for failure touches again on risk-aversion, or what one candidate called the "fear factor" (interview of David Mackintosh, PCC, 26 February 2015). Based on a cost-benefit assessment, risk-aversion includes personal/internal motivations ("It might deter some of the ablest would-be candidates who would not want to risk their existing careers by engaging in a prolonged primary process", Tyrie, 2001: 26) or political/external ones like the risks of "entryism" (Tyrie, 2001: 26) or "raiding", i.e. supporters of other parties seeking to select the weakest candidate in order to sabotage Conservative electoral prospects (McSweeney, 2010: 541) as occurred in Totnes: "One neighbouring MP called on his party's supporters to sabotage the primary by voting for the person he judged would be least likely to win; it backfired as this undemocratic intervention was resented and the turnout was higher than expected" (Wollaston, 2014).

To some extent, political/external dangers, though not really proven in the majority of open primaries, might indeed explain the extreme caution of CCHQ and the reluctance of most local associations to engage in the process at all.

Conclusions

Despite the limitations and experimental nature of open primaries, a number of lessons can be drawn before further research is conducted. As already posited, Conservative open primaries fit in with Katz's thesis of candidate selection as applied to the cartel party model (Katz & Mair, 1995, 1997, 2009). By creating a direct relation between voters and candidates, they undermine the influence of sub-units such as local party associations, alter the distribution of power but also create an illusion of democracy with voters empowered at the expense of party members and party leadership closely controlling the whole process. The Conservative experience of leadership control together with participation and support beyond the scope of traditional membership confirms the existence of a depoliticisation process (Lefebvre, 2011: 11; Low, 2011: 10). Katz and Mair had already anticipated this with their model of the cartel party by suggesting that boundaries between members and non-members would be inevitably and progressively blurred. Arguably, open primaries may even indicate the devaluation of the party entity to the advantage of deliberative spaces (Lefebvre & Roger, 2009: 17) seeking to connect leaders directly with voters.

Open primaries should be understood in the broader framework of the Intra-Party Democracy (IPD)
agenda (Childs, 2013: 91-92), which in candidate selection is perceived in terms of "an inclusive participatory process and a representative outcome" (Rahat, 2013) and posits plebiscitary democracy as a mode of internal party decision, with the erosion of the boundary between formal members and supporters, the use of direct votes, and unmediated communication between the centre and the grassroots (Katz & Mair, 2009: 761). But if internal democratisation is a party response to social and environmental pressures (Bale & Turner, 2012), what are these pressures? The experiment of open primaries creates the need to broaden the picture of IPD and examine the external stimuli which trigger this party response. As a tentative conclusion, this paper would argue that these environmental factors are both institutional and ideological.

First, recent changes in the British constitutional and institutional framework have pointed to the growing personalisation of politics, favouring a new more "presidential" style of leadership with David Cameron shown for example as being prepared to invest his personal political capital (Low, 2011: 9: Poguntke & Webb, 2007), including meeting with applicants and local agents in the three constituencies where all-postal primaries were held (Williams & Paun, 2011: 23). This practice was much resented by party members (Low, 2014b: 421) as "an extension of the centre's outlook of announcing change by edict and then trying to persuade the localities to accept" (Low, 2011: 9).

Secondly, as argued in the introduction to this paper, open primaries are based on the underlying assumption that the ideal type of democracy is to be found in increasing citizen engagement (Gauja, 2012: 655) and deliberation. In other words, while the experiment of open primaries triggers a debate on democracy, recent constitutional and political changes in Britain have generated a new political and ideological environment which may in return explain the party leadership's responsiveness to these changes. While Blondiaux suggests that open primaries and deliberative democracy are indicative of "a new democratic spirit" (Blondiaux, 2009), Lefebvre denounces the "illusion" that primaries actually generate (Lefebvre, 2011: 105) since the whole process is regulated and controlled by the centre. All in all, the debate centres around fluctuating interpretations of democracy which are attuned to the changing constitutional context in the UK, and have had a major impact on the leadership's management of open primaries. Thus the recurrent use of referendums, with direct democracy making more and more inroads into the British parliamentary democratic landscape, constitutes a new cycle, initiated by Tony Blair in 1997, and which the coalition government has been keen to continue (Alexandre-Collier, 2015), by consulting the people on AV in May 2011, on Scottish independence in September 2014 and promising another referendum on British membership of the EU by 2017. This new practice of government has certainly been a major element in Cameron's vision of a post-bureaucratic era in which power should be redistributed from the elite to the people (Cameron, 2009). In addition, the leadership's
responsiveness to surrounding factors such as the spread of a new form of populism (Mudde, 2007; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012), illustrated by the rise of parties like UKIP (Lynch & Whitaker, 2013; Ford & Goodwin, 2014), could be indicative of Cameron's new "populism-sensitive" style of leadership (Higgins, 2013; Alexandre-Collier, 2015) which is more vulnerable to grassroots pressure. An illustration of this was the decision to hold all-postal open primaries in Rochester and Strood to counter UKIP's offensive after Mark Reckless's defection.

Thirdly, open primaries should be examined in terms of risk-taking in order to truly assess the nature of party management. This paper has tried to show that, in the end, risks have been limited. As already seen, one reason can be found in the cautious negotiations launched by the centre with local associations. With the notable exception of all-postal open primaries which were fully piloted by the centre, local associations were free in their use of the process and no explicit incentive was provided by CCHQ in the form of supplementary resources. Just like the A-list, which stopped in the summer of 2009, postal primaries have been interrupted altogether and primary meetings have remained exceptions, only being carried out in the safest seats. Under these circumstances, risks have been extremely limited, as has been the destabilising impact of open primaries on party organisation (Pennings & Hazan, 2001: 271). All in all, the whole experiment reveals a new style of party management which is more sensitive to risk but also, consequently, weaker in decision-making. In initiating open primaries, David Cameron may have initially appeared as a risk-taker, enhancing his reputation as a bold moderniser. However, with the exception of all-postal primaries which were held in only three constituencies, both the process (centralisation) and its outcome (in terms of representativeness and participation), made no radical difference in comparison with the standard candidate selection process. The analysis of the relative failure of open primaries showed that the leadership's management of them, based on an extra-cautious cost-benefit assessment, proved on the contrary to be risk-sensitive.

In a nutshell, considering the standardisation of the first stages of candidate selection and monitoring of further stages, open primaries are illustrative of the centralisation of party organisation. Continuous control seems to run counter to the idea of democratisation contained in the notion. As the party leadership's agenda, primaries revealed Cameron’s style of party management as both revolving around the decisions made by a limited team and porous to grassroots’ pressure. Combined with constitutional and ideological environmental factors, it can be viewed as a risk-sensitive type of management. Furthermore, as populism represents a major ideological pressure today, not only in the UK but in many other European countries, it could be further argued that the main lesson to be drawn from open primaries is that this new pressure has come to permeate both the Conservative party's agenda and management.
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