A discussion of the selection of Gordon Brown as Labour leader and the impact of the leadership selection process

Charlotte Taffel

Abstract

Stark's 'Choosing a Leader' has set out the criteria for, and estimated the impact of, party leadership selections from 1963 to 1994. Although Quinn (2010) has applied Stark's methods to leadership contests after 1994 in terms of 'criteria,' the study has not been expanded to include the 'impact' of these leadership selections. The leadership selection of Gordon Brown in 2007 has not been addressed in Quinn's update on Stark's work as no contest took place. Although Brown's emergence as Labour party leader cannot be discussed in terms of leadership criteria (the reasons for which leaders are chosen), or Electoral College votes (explaining the voting system, and votes cast for particular leaders), the impact of his leadership can nevertheless be evaluated. Stark assumes that leadership elections have an immediately positive impact upon the party; this dissertation judges Stark's claim in relation to the selection of Brown in 2007.

Keywords: leadership, elections, Labour, Gordon Brown

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**Introduction**

As Quinn notes, there has been 'growing literature on party leadership selections in Britain,' with Alderman (1999); Punnett (1992); and Quinn (2004, 2005) focusing on the 'institutional rules' of leadership selections, and Alderman and Carter (1991, 2002); Denham and Dorey (2006, 2007); Denham and O'Hara (2008) and Heppell (2008, 2010b) evaluating 'individual contests,' notably candidates, votes, and explanations for success (Quinn 2010: 101). However, Quinn suggests that the issue of criteria by which party members choose leaders has received little attention. Leonard Stark's 'Choosing a Leader' created criteria for assessing leadership contests and applied these to contests up until 1994, with contests after this time having been examined under the same criteria by Quinn (2010). Aside from 'criteria,' what appears to be a further underdeveloped issue in the academic literature surrounding leadership selection is the question of impact; what impact do party selections have on the party? Stark offers a chapter which addresses the issue of 'impact.' According to Stark, the evaluation of poll standing, leadership satisfaction and party unity indicates the 'impact' that leadership selections have on their respective parties. Stark suggests that when there is a change in these three polls from the month before and the month after a leadership contest, which equates to eight percentage points or more, this amounts to 'empirical impact' – an observable impact that correlates directly with the leadership change (1996: 142). Stark has applied this 'impact measure' to all leadership selections since 1963; however Quinn's update of Stark's work has not included applying this 'impact measure' to more recent contests.

The selection of Brown as Labour leader in 2007 has not been analysed in terms of criteria (because no contest took place), nor in terms of 'impact' (as this measure has not been addressed by Quinn). For the same reasons, the Conservative contest of 2003 has also been dismissed from Quinn's work (Quinn 2010: 102). Brown was selected as Labour party leader without opposition, indeed, 'no one else got sufficient support from MPs to force a leadership contest' (Riddell cited in Rush and Giddings 2008: 8). The only plausible opponent, John McDonnell received only 29 nominations, 16 short of the 12.5% of MP nominations needed to participate in the contest. Brown received 313 nominations; thus negating the need to use Stark's selection criteria (Heppell 2010b: 188). However, Stark's 'impact measure' is still useful – the idea that the 'impact' of a new party leader can be measured through statistical analysis. It seems that the transition from Tony Blair to Brown received significant media attention, suggesting there was a perceivable 'impact' on Brown becoming leader. The reasons for the media attention surrounding the leadership transition are threefold; firstly, this
transition marked the first time the Labour party have changed leader whilst in office under the Electoral College. Secondly, the lack of contest may in itself have had an impact on the Labour party. The validity of Brown's leadership was questioned, as well as his mandate to lead the country as Prime Minister without a general election taking place. Lastly, it symbolised the end of a long wait for Brown, following the alleged 'deal' made between himself and Blair (Heppell 2010b: 176; Rawnsley 2010: 61-62). These issues shall be discussed in further detail throughout this dissertation.

To evaluate the 'impact' of Brown becoming leader, this dissertation shall fall into three sections. The first chapter is a literature review of Stark's work, evaluating his hypothesis that leadership elections have a positive, rather than negative impact on the party (1996: 142). The second section uses Stark's 'impact measure' as a model to evaluate the impact of Brown becoming leader. In the last chapter, Stark's approach to assessing 'impact' shall be critiqued as an approach to understanding the impact that Brown's leadership immediately had on the party. This dissertation shall directly challenge the basis of Stark's 'impact measure,' asserting that his framework for measuring impact is flawed; specifically his eight percentage point threshold for 'empirical impact,' as well as his advocated time frame of one month before and one month after a leadership change. Moreover, Stark's 'impact measure' will be critiqued more generally as a sufficient explanation in understanding the 'impact' of new leaders, notably Stark's failure to adequately take context into account. This dissertation thus argues that Stark's 'impact measure' cannot be used in isolation as a sufficient tool to understand the complexities of the 'impact' of leadership selections upon parties. This dissertation shall then suggest how we can further our understanding of the immediate impact Brown had upon the Labour party by reviewing other relevant factors. Therefore, although there are reservations about Stark's 'impact measure,' this dissertation's intention is to use Stark's model, and subsequently expose its limitations by using the 2007 leadership transition as a case study.

**An Appraisal of Leadership Selection Studies**

Stark's 'Choosing a Leader' gives us ways of estimating the procedures and outcomes of leadership selections in Britain (1996: 141-162). As leaders essentially become the 'symbol of their parties,' due to the inherent importance of this leadership role, leadership elections also carry significant weight in a party's 'electoral fate' (Bale 2009: 364; Stark 1996: 2). As Bale
notes, 'contests to elect leaders provide something of a window into the soul of a particular party' (2009: 364). It is therefore vital that a party finds the right leader for the job, to take the party in its chosen direction and retain high levels of leadership satisfaction. As the necessity to choose the right leader is essential in parties' electoral fortunes, the competitive nature of leadership elections can be 'portrayed as a battle between leaders' (Stark 1996: 2).

The Labour party has witnessed a number of internal battles throughout its history, often being so absorbed in these that they failed to address more urgent political matters. During the 1980s, the party was characterised by a 'venomous bout of factional infighting,' with the desire from those on the left to establish an Electoral College in order to increase the accountability of the leader to the wider Labour party (Heppell 2010b: 67). The party was therefore more concerned with the rules of leadership elections, than focusing on the more pressing issues, notably the failure to understand their electoral defeat in 1979 and how to react to what became 'hegemonic' Thatcherism (Driver and Martell 1998: 10). Yet even in periods of inter-party competition, which have often been viewed as disastrous to parties, Stark is keen to note how leadership elections have usually proved to have a positive rather than negative impact (1996: 142). In terms of the 1980 contest, although leadership satisfaction fell, the selection did not hinder the party's poll standing. Moreover, despite the rife arguments occurring between the left and right factions of the party, the election had 'a positive, albeit temporary effect on the unity index' (Stark 1996: 149). The mixed outcome of the 1980 leadership contest suggests that even when a political party is managing its internal disputes poorly, leadership contests can still have a generally positive impact on the party (Stark 1996: 149). Stark observes that since 1963, 'nine of the 16 contests appear to have had positive impacts, while just three have had negative impacts. No party has had more negative impact contests than positive impact ones' (1996: 161). More recent Labour party contests have been pursued quite differently, with the selections of Blair and Brown, as well as Ed Miliband, being carried out with a degree of quiet effectiveness, somewhat inconsistent from the Labour party's recent history. This would suggest that the 'impact' of recent leadership contests and transitions are even more likely to have positive impacts.

Stark's methods have been used and praised by academics, primarily utilising his selection criteria to assess why a specific leader was chosen (Quinn 2010; Heppell 2010a). Stark has three criteria which need to be fulfilled for a candidate to win a leadership contest: acceptability, electability and competence. The three criteria are based on the work of Gunnar
Sjoblom, who argued that the three strategic goals of parties operating in parliamentary political systems are: to remain united, to win elections, and to implement policy (1968, cited in Stark 1996: 125). These three strategic goals are thus useful in determining how leaders are selected, and Stark's hypothesis is that a candidate who fills these criteria of acceptability, electability and competence, is usually the candidate who wins the leadership election. Through Stark's investigations, it is appropriate to say that these strategic goals are important, and therefore a suitable method of evaluating leadership elections. Indeed, in the Labour party, only the 1980 leadership contest goes against Stark's criteria, where Michael Foot won despite Denis Healy being more electable and competent. This suggests that Foot 'was chosen largely because he was expected to have the best chance of restoring party unity;' unity can therefore 'trump' electability (Stark 1996: 132, 149). Stark's model has some success in assessing why candidates are chosen to be leaders, with his model being solid enough to be used as a basis to assess other selections. The goals of remaining united, winning elections, and governing competently however, are not useful in the examination of Brown's becoming leader, because no contest took place. Nevertheless, the 'impact' of this leadership transition can be analysed.

Stark notes that any previous attempt to examine the immediate impact of leadership selections has been neglected, pointing to two studies which are both limited in the extent to which they examine the issue of impact, and therefore lack sufficient evidence to arrive on a solid, informed judgement about the impact of leadership contests overall (1996: 142). Although Punnett asserts that new leaders have a positive impact on the party, whereas incumbents have a negative impact on the party, Punnett's assertion and investigation is somewhat limited in its scope of evaluation (Stark 1996: 141). Punnett only assesses the 1988 Labour contest in comparison to 1983, with the 'high level of satisfaction with Neil Kinnock as the new leader in contrast to the pronounced dissatisfaction with Michael Foot' (1992: 122). This narrow evaluation is therefore not applicable to a general study of the impact of leadership selections.

Similarly, the article 'The Major Effect: Changes in Party Leadership and Party Popularity' by J.A. Brown attempts to show the short term improvement of parties' poll standing after leadership elections. Whilst also limited in its scope, J.A. Brown's analysis does delve further into the study of 'impact' than Punnett (1992: 556). J.A. Brown states that 'evidence suggests that new Prime Ministers enjoy, to some extent, a 'honeymoon' period of popularity which
initially feeds in to the fortunes of their party but thereafter fades' (1992: 556). Whilst this is seemingly true for most leadership contests (as seen in Stark's work), J.A. Brown's thorough analysis of Major's impact on the Conservative party was not extended to examine other leadership selections in the same way. Although J.A. Brown compares Major's impact against previous Conservative party leaders, as well as against Kinnock, his conclusion, as it stands, is insufficiently supported in terms of assessing the impact leadership elections have overall. Therefore, J.A. Brown's conclusions cannot be used as a premise to understand all leadership selections (1992: 558-560).

More recently, Evans and Anderson have studied the impact of party leaders in a different way (2005). Fieschi states they 'measure the impact of party leaders on the electoral success of their respective parties,' and conclude that 'leaders of each party had a very strong effect and votes are strongly correlated with leadership appraisals' (2007: 485). However, Evans and Anderson's article primarily concerns the impact party leaders have at general elections, noting how a leader's 'decline in popularity lost the Labour Party votes and seats' (2005: 833). As there has been a 'growing worldwide emphasis on leaders rather than parties,' it is important to understand the impact leaders may have on parties at general elections (Evans and Anderson 2005: 821). This relates to the concept of 'valence' issues (Stokes 1963: 373). In contemporary political culture, 'valence' issues are 'evaluations of performance and competence primarily, but not exclusively, expressed around leadership preferences' (Vowles 2010: 6). Bale agrees that in this 'era of valence rather than position politics [...] party leadership is clearly crucial' (2009: 364). While this appears to be a growing trend, and is significant in leadership studies, Evans and Anderson's article does not specifically examine the immediate impact of leadership elections on the respective party, and although relevant, is not particularly useful when assessing impact in terms of Stark's measure (Evans and Anderson 2005: 821).

Stark therefore extends the work of Punnett and J.A. Brown, aiming to create a universal model for evaluating and assessing the impact of leadership contests on parties. Stark's chapter on 'impact' aims to disprove the 'conventional wisdom' that 'elections for party leadership are inherently damaging to parties conducting them' (1996: 141). Stark's examination of every contest from 1963 to 1994 hopes to achieve a more credible model and evaluation of the impact of leadership elections.
Stark's Hypothesis

Stark's 'impact measure' of leadership satisfaction, poll standing and unity indices, suggests that elections for party leaders are not necessarily 'inherently damaging to parties' (1996: 141). Stark instead suggests that 'conventional wisdom has it almost precisely backwards: leadership contests are far more likely to improve a party's fortunes than to damage them,' with contests being 'far more likely to have positive than negative impacts' (1996: 162, 142). Although the term 'impact' is a broad concept, Stark's model is a plausibly attractive model for assessing the changes in perception towards a political party surrounding the time of leadership elections. Stark believes that the changes in voting intention, as well as beliefs surrounding leadership competence and party unity, show the direct impact that leadership selections have on the overall perception of the party (1996: 142). Stark therefore evaluates the changes in voting intention, leader satisfaction and unity index, to reach a conclusion about the overall impact of leadership contests.

Stark uses information from Gallup opinion polls as the basis for his 'impact measure.' Moreover, Stark includes relevant newspaper opinion and qualitative interviews with Members of Parliament, to gain an insight into the intricacies of party leadership selections. Through his investigations, Stark discovers that the 'empirical impact' of leadership contests from 1963 to 1994 have more often than not been positive (1996: 161). Stark states that 'empirical impact' is when any of the measures used in determining impact, (poll standing, leadership satisfaction and unity) change in number from the month before the contest and the month after the contest 'by more than eight percentage points' (1996: 142). Stark states the need for an eight per cent threshold in asserting 'empirical impact' is 'demanded by the laws of statistics.' This acknowledges that a substantial rise or fall in the data is needed to assert any significant impact – that 'changes eight points or less are not statistically significant because they fall within the margin of error of the Gallup polls: plus or minus four' (Stark 1996: 142). If these thresholds were lower, it could suggest that the impact is not substantial, or could be influenced by other factors. By using an eight per cent threshold, Stark advocates that the change in statistics will show a clear increase or decrease in these three measures of poll standing.

However, the use of statistics is open to criticism in itself. Firstly, Stark's use of an eight per cent threshold to measure 'empirical impact' is somewhat arbitrary. It could be argued that Stark's conclusions drawn from statistical analysis could be open to criticism were a higher or
lower threshold for 'impact' to be adopted. Although Stark suggests that an eight per cent change is needed due to the margin of error in polls, he assumes the right to establish this as 'empirical impact.' However, if utilised in a different way, for example, if 'empirical impact' was reduced to six per cent or raised to ten per cent, the outcomes could be remarkably different. Stark argues that he accounts for the flaws of the eight per cent threshold for 'empirical impact' by comparing 'empirical impact' against a general impact scale. General impact is hence used when there is no identifiable 'empirical impact', where the threshold was too high to include it, yet where there is still a correlation that supports Stark's claim. Stark's use of empirical statistical analysis is therefore questionable, but as this is compared with general impact we can gauge a more general idea of the impact that leadership selections have.

In terms of 'empirical impact', Stark asserts that overall, leadership elections have positive impacts on parties. For the Conservative party, four out of five contests had a positive impact, whilst the other had no 'empirical impact' (1996: 161). The Labour contests on the other hand are not as easily identifiable in terms of positive or negative 'empirical impact'. The impact of leadership selections on the Labour party have differed somewhat; two contests registered positive 'empirical impact,' one had negative 'empirical impact', one was mixed, and three had no 'empirical impact'. Furthermore, out of all the contests which Stark evaluates, eight out of sixteen contests did not register any 'empirical impact'. When this occurs, the general impact is assessed, to see if the impact is positive or negative, despite it not reaching the level needed to establish it as 'empirical' (Stark 1996: 161).

Although there are reservations about the use of statistical analysis, an eight per cent threshold will be used in this dissertation for two reasons. Firstly, the use of a high, but not necessarily eight per cent threshold seems appropriate because a number of different opinion pollsters are used in this dissertation, whereas Stark's are based solely on Gallup Polls. Opinion polls, depending upon who conducts them, have a slight variable in their statistics anyway. Using a high threshold should therefore factor out any slight increase or decrease in the polls, asserting only a notable change. Secondly, the use of an eight per cent threshold ensures that this dissertation follows Stark's methods when evaluating data. To keep measurements in continuance with Stark's, and to deal with any concerns about 'empirical impact', 'empirical impact' will also be compared to the general impact in the polling data. To measure Brown's impact on the party in the aftermath of the leadership transition, this
dissertation will measure both the 'empirical impact', if any, and general impact of Brown becoming leader of the labour party.

Additionally, Stark notes, 'knowing that a party's poll standing improved at the time of leadership contest does not necessarily mean that the contest caused the poll improvement. It is possible that such a contest had a negative casual impact which was overwhelmed by a simultaneous and stronger positive force.' However, it can be assumed that positive 'empirical impact' will be in some way related to the leadership contest, unless there is another substantial event that we can pin point as to why there may have been a significant change in the polls. As Stark goes on to say, 'nevertheless, the fact that leadership contests frequently correlate with improvements in the three measures strongly suggest that contests do not harm party fortunes. The consistent positive correlation makes it unlikely that a negative casual relationship exists' (1996: 226). Whilst this may be the case, contextual occurrences need to be taken into consideration. For example, the leadership change could have been viewed as a moment signalling the end of Blair's leadership, and/or a change in the direction of New Labour, or equally, a changing perception of the Conservative party under Cameron. It needs to be kept in mind that statistical information cannot be used in isolation from contextual occurrences.

Whilst Stark's model of evaluating impact is used in this dissertation, Stark's methods still need to be viewed critically, as no political hypothesis is without its flaws. As Quinn notes, there have been some drawbacks to Stark's work. While much of Stark's work is quantitative, the elements of his work which are qualitative, such as elite interviews, may produce some not necessarily sound conclusions (2010: 101). However with more accessible and extensive political pollsters, substantial quantitative information is more readily come by. These polls can now help us disprove such hypotheses about party politics. Pollsters now 'conduct in-depth surveys of party members during leadership contests, data that are freely available to researchers,' which will be valuable in assessing the impact of party leaders (Quinn 2010: 102). In addition to contemporary opinion polling data being more accessible, frequent, and ranging from a variety of pollsters and political viewpoints, opinion polling data is now able to provide a broader view of a given topic. In terms of the impact of the leader, the three measures – poll standing, leadership satisfaction and unity index - can now be evaluated alongside other opinion polls which give a further insight into leadership studies. Further opinion polling data which may prove helpful to assessing leadership contests concern
general public perceptions of Brown, his character and personality, as well as views on him becoming leader without a contest, and becoming Prime Minister without a general election occurring. These polls should help to create a more substantial and informative view of the immediate impact Brown had in becoming leader of the Labour party. Moreover, Quinn notes that Stark's book is 'dated,' and therefore it is valuable to update his work, reusing his methods with more up to date quantitative and qualitative research methods (2010: 101).

The 2007 Leadership Transition

Stark's calculations have all been made about contests which were competitive, and what remains to be examined is the impact of a new leader when there is no contest. What is the impact of a leader who assumes not only this position, but also 'assumes the mantle of Prime Minister,' with no leadership contest or general election? (Jones 2007a) Whilst party elections are somewhat a novelty in the UK, it is convention that party leaders are chosen by their parties, and the party is then chosen or rejected by the public in a general election, with the leader of the party becoming Prime Minister. In 2007, Brown was not fully endorsed by the party. Although this process has not been mandatory for Labour party contests until recently, the Electoral College (EC) was established in 1981 to 'make the leader accountable to the entire party' – the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP), Constituency Labour parties (CLP), and Labour affiliated trade unions (Quinn 2004: 346, 333). Therefore, Brown becoming leader with no contest brought a number of issues to the fore: firstly, the questioning of his legitimacy, and secondly; the Blair-Brown deal.

In relation to the first issue, media and opinion polls have suggested that Brown assuming the position of Labour party leader and hence, Prime Minister, had high resonance with the public. While this was also due to this transition being the first time the Labour party had changed its leader whilst in office under the EC, the 'non-election' subsequently damaged Brown's credibility, having been viewed by some as illegitimate. As Kettell and Kerr argue, Brown faced a host of difficulties once he became Prime Minister, which primarily came from his inability to 'construct' himself parallel to the 'discourses of Westminsterism' and 'modernity'. In relation to 'Westminsterism,' Kettell and Kerr argue that Brown's failure to portray himself as having qualities of 'strength, resolve, courage, and decisiveness,' and instead, being widely viewed as a 'weak and indecisive leader [...] primarily hinges on his fateful decision not to call an early election' (2008: 491). Brown's decision not to call an
election thus had considerable influence on his premiership; concerns which were aired in the media. In 2006, Ken Livingstone said that 'Mr Brown would face claims that he did not have a mandate for his plans unless he went to the polls soon after succeeding Tony Blair,' and that his advice would be to 'go for the immediate general election, renew our mandate, because the media is so negative and so destructive that there would be about a 48-hour honeymoon' (BBC 2006a). Furthermore, the Telegraph reported that 'election fever has been increased dramatically by a leaked memo advising Gordon Brown to hold an early election to capitalise on his honeymoon as Prime Minister' (2007).

Moreover, opinion polls conducted in July 2007 suggested 'most people in Britain believe Gordon Brown should earn a real mandate to govern, according to a poll by YouGov published in the Daily Telegraph. 54% of respondents think the prime minister should call an early general election' (AngusReid 2007h). In August 2007, the same pollster noted that '30% of respondents would like a general election to take place this year, while 40% would like this to happen sometime in 2008' (Angus Reid 2007e). These beliefs suggested that the desire for Brown to call an election to secure a mandate existed within the media and the public.

However, insufficient competition within the party established Brown as the only candidate suitable for the role, and despite lack of popular support for Blair towards the end of his leadership, Labour remained in power. Labour won the election in 2005, thus retaining the Prime Minister's right to choose when to call the next general election within five years. Although there was public criticism of Brown becoming leader, and a public belief he should call a general election soon to confirm his position, the leadership transition from Blair to Brown was unconventional, but not illegitimate. As Fieschi states, 'Blair was never elected PM but, rather, leader of the Labour Party and that, yes, that does mean that Brown can, in fact, just take over if he is (s)elected as leader without much popular assent and without much further 'official' scrutiny' (2007: 482). As Seldon and Lodge state, 'Brown did not want to fight one and lose it. Even before he became PM in late June, there had been press speculation that he would try to call an election to win the mandate that he was lacking. His response was an emphatic 'no early election,' and that a new prime minister does not need a new mandate' (2010b: 34). So, although a legitimate move in terms of leadership politics, the 'election that never was' received a significant amount of media attention and speculation which only contributed to damage Brown's leadership, as Seldon and Lodge state: 'the decision to abort an early election in October 2007 was monumental and, overnight,
destroyed Brown's newly gained reputation as a steady and decisive statesman' (2010a: 24; also see Guardian 2008; Rawnsley 2010: 496-514; Seldon and Lodge 2010b: 37-39).

Secondly, the leadership transition arguably marked the end of a long awaited event by Brown. After the supposed 'deal' between the two political players, it had been assumed that Brown would become the leader of the Labour party when Blair decided to resign. As Blair arguably failed to keep to his part of the deal, it had been suggested that Brown was determined to receive, and had a direct claim to, the leadership of the Labour party – a day he 'dreamt of for years,' a day to 'put behind him all the broken promises of power he believe[d] Blair has offered him' (Seldon and Lodge 2010b: 1). As Naughtie notes, 'We all know the truth.....with every day that passes Gordon will make another cross on the calendar. Day after day after day.....' (2002: 75). Although the 'deal' remains disputed in the literature, and versions vary from their different perspectives, such as the diaries, biographies and autobiographies of political associates, it is an issue best sidestepped. (See Gordon Brown: Past, Present, Future (Beckett 2007), Speaking for Myself, (Blair 2008) A Journey, (Blair 2010) Gordon Brown, and Gordon Brown Prime Minister, (Bower 2005; 2007) The Blair Years: extracts from the Alastair Campbell diaries, (Campbell 2007) Pulling No Punches, (Prescott 2008) The End of the Party, (Rawnsley 2010) Gordon Brown – The Biography, (Routledge 1998) Blair and Blair Unbound, (Seldon 2004, 2007)). Only two people really know what – if it existed - the 'deal' was, and as Naughtie notes, 'none of this was written down. There is no firm evidence of what was said. Brown believed he had a near-promise of succession; Blair insists that nothing so clear could have been offered, and wasn't' (2002: 73). However, it can be noted that the belief of a 'deal,' and the subsequent failure to stick to the terms of this deal, created a feud which 'would increasingly pollute New Labour and undermine the effectiveness of the government' (Heppell 2010b: 176). As Seldon and Lodge state, the concept of this 'deal' between Blair and Brown had a 'corrosive impact,' with speculation about Blair's stepping down between 2004 to 2007 being a 'damaging period,' which ultimately 'weakened' Brown's leadership (2010b: xxivxxxv).

It is therefore hard to assess the impact that Brown's leadership had on the party, especially at a time of problems for the Labour government, not least the lingering issue of the Blair-Brown deal, as well as other problems which came to the fore under New Labour's governance, such as the 'Cash for Honours' scandal, issues of MP's expenses, and most importantly, the unpopularity of the decision to go to War in Iraq. However through opinion
polls, it appears clear that the selection of Brown as party leader had an immediate positive impact on the Labour party. In an unwelcoming and unsympathetic climate the change in leadership established Labour with a more positive and fertile political landscape, with an initial bolstering of Labour poll standing - the 'Brown Bounce' (Grice 2007; also see Seldon and Lodge 2010b: 34). This 'bounce' in the immediate aftermath of the leadership transition could have arguably saved Labour from complete failure after Blair's departure. As J.A. Brown notes of Major, 'arguably, then, a fresh face at No. 10 Downing Street had, at least initially, rescued the fortunes of the Conservative Party from the downhill slide it had been suffering in the months running up to Thatcher's fall' (1992: 553). This same principle could also be attributed to the new leadership of Brown after Blair. Brown could have been perceived as the 'fresh face' compared to Blair, who, towards the end of his premiership, had ultimately became a 'source of weakness for Labour' (Evans and Anderson 2005: 834). Those supportive of Brown could ultimately argue that Brown becoming of leader rescued the party from a certain failure under Blair.

Applying Stark's Impact Measure – The Case Study of Brown

Although Stark shows the effects of poll standing and leadership satisfaction on one graph, this dissertation will provide separate graphs for each of the three measures. This is due to the fact that whilst poll standing has been measured every month, the leadership satisfaction and unity index have not been measured in this way, and therefore the dates for the data do not correlate. It is easier to see the levels of the poll standing, leadership satisfaction and unity index on separate graphs as there are discrepancies in the ratings.

Poll Standing

As Stark notes, 'the first measure is poll standing, which indicates the share of the electorate intending to vote for each party at the next general election' (1996: 142). To measure the poll standing of the party, this dissertation has taken the monthly averages of the UK Polling Report from 2007. The UK Polling Report includes a number of political pollsters, 'providing enormous quantities of information on polling data and the implications of those polls through a 'purely analytical lens' (Politics.co.uk Blog). The UK Polling Report is hence used to ensure the conclusions drawn from this data are as accurate as possible.
As the data shows, the 'Brown Bounce' was not imagined. Opinion polls taken from the time of the leadership transition prove that the change from Blair to Brown was immediately greeted with a positive response. In terms of poll standing, it is clear to see that the poll standing of the party began to increase in the climate of a leadership transition. (Figure 1)

In 2007, the average voting intention for Labour rose from 33% in May, to 35.5% in June, to 39% in July. As Stark's 'impact measure' utilises data from the month before and the month after the leadership selection/transition, we can see here that there is a six per cent increase in poll standing for Labour from the month before and the month after the transition. However, according to Stark, only an eight per cent change in measures amounts to 'empirical impact,' which suggests that the change in data from May to July is not statistically significant. If we measure the data for a longer period of time, viewing the leadership transition in context of Labour's poll standing for the year, it is clear to see that there is a significant rise in voting intention for Labour at this time. From the lowest poll standing of 30.5% in April, after Brown takes the leadership, the Labour party reaches a high poll standing of 40.4% in September. This almost ten per cent increase in poll standing reaches the eight per cent threshold for 'empirical impact.'

Although this is beyond the time frame Stark utilises, there is a clear correlation between the change in Labour leadership and the rise in poll standing. The increase in poll standing for the Labour party was not unnoticed by the media. Political pollsters were keen to note the rise in Labour poll standing: for example Angus Reid (2007d) reported that Brown gave Labour a 'Ten-Point Lead in UK,' and newspapers reporting how Brown had 'revived Labour' (Jones 2007b). As Seldon and Lodge note, Brown's message of 'change' was received well by the general public. The Prime Minister's personal ratings were high too, and he was felt to trump Cameron in all but 'likeability' (2010b: 35). Political commentators also gave their views on the changing poll standing, Grice reported that 'Labour's increasing popularity since Gordon Brown became Prime Minister appears to be more than a temporary "Brown bounce"," and that 'Labour is no longer held back by Tony Blair's unpopularity, and Mr Brown's personal ratings are much higher' (2007). As suggested by Curtice it could be that 'Mr Brown may be benefiting from relatively low expectations when he came to office' (cited in Grice 2007). This was backed up by Richards, stating that 'contrary to most predictions he's still standing, while his internal critics are nowhere to be seen' (2008). Similarly, Glover commented that Brown had 'got off to a dream start. Mr Brown has achieved the bounce that Labour has been
hoping for' (2007). Curtice was also keen to note how Brown had 'won the first round of the battle for public opinion since he became Prime Minister,' and that in terms of polls, Brown's leadership had made a crucial impact - 'according to our exclusive ICM poll, Labour now has 40% of the vote, up eight points on our last poll just six weeks ago, and seven points ahead of the Tories. While every poll conducted since Mr Brown succeeded Tony Blair has put Labour ahead, the seven-point lead is the biggest yet. The result must arouse concern at Central Office that the recent turnaround in the polls is no temporary "Brown bounce" ‘(2007). As Stark's model is the basis for this dissertation, the change in poll standing does not register as 'empirical impact,' so despite there being an obvious correlation between the rise in polls and the leadership transition, this cannot be referred to as 'empirical.' Yet this lends itself to reassert that Stark's eight per cent threshold is somewhat arbitrary, and can potentially miss significant changes in opinion polling due to this high threshold for change. In addition, compared to Conservative poll standing, it is worthwhile noting that at the same time the poll standing of Labour increases, that of the Conservative party gradually decreases, dropping from a high of 38.8% in March to 33.1% in September (Figure 2). This is not to suggest that there is a specific correlation between the positive impacts of leadership selections having a negative impact on the other party, as other factors contribute to changes in polling data. For example it may have not been the change in leadership from Blair to Brown that boosted morale at this point for Labour, but a substantial dissatisfaction with the Conservative party. Despite the initial general positive impact of Brown becoming leader, reaching a poll standing average of 40.4% in September, the poll standing of the party fails to remain at this high level for very long – which relates to the 'honeymoon' period of popularity of new leaders which J.A. Brown refers to (1992: 556). Labour's poll standing began to dwindle again not long after this honeymoon period, falling to 32.7% in December. Since September 2007, the Labour party have not managed to reach the high levels in poll standing under Brown. The perceived poor performance of the Labour party under Brown and the failure to remain up in the polls may suggest why the Conservative party poll standing increased, with Ball noting that 'opposition party success has much less to do with its own efforts and much more to do with the problems of the party in power' (2003, cited in Bale 2008: 288).

Moreover, it is worth noting that the Labour party have only managed to beat the Conservatives in the polls towards the end of 2010, under the climate of a leadership election and a new leader. (Figure 3) Under Ed Miliband, the Labour party once again have seen a rise
in poll standing, suggesting that the 2010 leadership contest has had a general positive impact on the party. Although the contest of 2010 is not what this dissertation aims to evaluate, it is worthwhile noting that it was only under a new leadership that Labour have managed to once again reach the high poll standing seen under Brown in 2007. This was stressed in the media, with Ed Miliband bringing the party two points above the Conservatives on the 29th September 2010. (Figure 4) New Statesman reported that 'Ed Miliband's big day has got off to a good start, with a poll putting Labour ahead of the Tories for the first time since the election that never was in 2007' (Eaton 2010).

We can therefore see that the 2007 leadership change from Blair to Brown did have an impact on the poll standing of the Labour party. Whilst this was generally positive, it does not register as 'empirical impact,' as the poll standing failed to measure an eight per cent change. While this supports Stark's hypothesis that leadership selections are generally good for parties, the failure to register any 'empirical impact' suggests that the leadership transition was not statistically substantial.

**Leadership Satisfaction**

The next poll to measure is leadership satisfaction. As Stark states, leadership satisfaction rating 'reports the number of people who are satisfied with the performance of a party's leader' (1996: 142). While data for this measure has not been collected every month, a general leadership satisfaction rating based on monthly averages can be seen.

While there is not sufficient data to replicate Stark's model precisely, there is a noticeable change in leadership satisfaction ratings from when Brown takes over. The leadership satisfaction ratings, although we cannot measure them specifically from the months before and after the leadership change, show a significant increase on a larger time frame. In April, Blair received 28% satisfaction levels. With Brown becoming leader, this percentage increased to an average of 35% in July, to highs of 49.3% in August and 50% in September. Although an empirical impact measure from the month before and after the transition cannot be taken, we can measure the change from the last average leadership satisfaction rating for Blair (April) to the first measure of Brown. (July) The change from 28% to 35% is a change of seven per cent, one point lower than Stark's eight per cent threshold for impact. However when we look at the next month's average leadership satisfaction level for Brown, which is 49.3% in August, the 21.3% increase in leadership approval soars beyond the empirical
impact measure. Whilst the high poll percentage of the YouGov/Sunday Times poll generally skews the average data for the months, even when not used to calculate the monthly averages, Brown still achieved an average of 41.5% in leadership satisfaction levels in August, still reaching a 13.5% change in the polls. This data proves that there was a significant increase in leadership satisfaction as Brown immediately took over the leadership of the Labour party. Although there was no 'empirical impact' from April to July, when looked at more broadly, from April to August, the 13.5% increase in leadership satisfaction is hard to ignore, and therefore shows that the leadership transition undoubtedly had an immediately positive impact on the Labour party. However, what must be noted is that this flurry of bolstered poll ratings does not materialise. Leadership approval ratings start to fall again after this 'honeymoon' period, with the leadership satisfaction levels dropping from 43% in October to 28% in December, a negative 'empirical impact' of 20%.

The leadership change from Blair to Brown therefore did have a generally positive impact on leadership satisfaction levels, with there being a seven per cent point change from the month before and after the leadership transition. However, as this does not reach Stark's threshold of eight per cent, leadership satisfaction too cannot be referred to as 'empirical impact' according to Stark. While still supporting Stark's hypothesis that leadership selections are generally good for parties, this measure also suggests that the change in leadership satisfaction levels was not important enough to be labelled 'empirical.' This adds to the speculation that Stark's measures are too narrow to understand the changes in statistical data surrounding leadership selections, as both poll standing and leadership satisfaction do increase during the 2007 transition, yet neither of these are accounted for under his measure, and simply register as having a generally positive impact.

Unity Index
Stark states that 'unity index is calculated by taking the percentage of people who believe the party is united and subtracting the percentage of people who believe the party is divided' (1996: 142). However, Stark's use of unity indices is a measure that has proved difficult to find substantive information on, and data from the months before and after the leadership change have not been found. Few pollsters have enough information to make this measure statistically viable, and as only a small amount of information is readily available, it is
unlikely to prove sufficient as evidence to the 'impact measure.' For this reason, the 'Party Unity Index' of Stark's work has not been used, and in Table 1, is referred to as N/A. Whilst this is the case, there have been a limited number of polls which have suggested at perceptions of party unity, which although cannot be used to determine 'empirical' impact, or even general impact in terms of Stark's measurements, can suggest whether there has been any change in perceptions of unity over time. Perhaps most helpful, although still outside of Stark's model, are polls taken by Populus, which enable us to see the effects that Brown was perceived to have on the party unity - by looking at the year before and after the leadership change. From Populus Party Conference Polls and polls concerning Brown, the data shows a clear correlation between Brown becoming leader of the party in 2007 with a healthier looking unity index measure, suggesting that the immediate leadership change from Blair to Brown may have helped contribute to the image of a more united party (Populus 2006, 2007, 2008).

In September 2006, the unity index of the Labour party was -47%, however, in June 2007, the unity index was -22% - portraying a clear increase in those who perceived the party to be more united. However, by 2008, the unity index had dropped to -51%. As this is outside of Stark's time frame, although worth mentioning, this is not included in the table as it fails to measure the precise impact of Brown's coming to leadership on the perceived unity of the party.

The 2007 leadership transition in regard to previous leadership contests.

Now all three of Stark's measures have been used as a basis for analysing the 2007 leadership transition, we can use these results to see how the data fits in with Stark's conclusions. Stark provides a table that shows the 'empirical' and general impact of leadership contests from 1963-1994. This is necessary as 'half of the 16 contests registered no empirical impact on any of the three' poll measures, and is therefore, essential to 'speculate from additional information what the overall general impact of these contests was' (Stark 1996: 161). Stark notes that out of the eight contests which provide no statistically 'empirical impact', three seemed to have positive impacts, two had negative, two were mixed and one had no impact. This is not as conclusive as Stark would perhaps desire, however there is still more positive general impact than negative. Although there is only one more contest that had a positive general impact than negative impact out of those which registered no empirical impact, this
still goes towards supporting Stark's hypothesis that leadership selections are more beneficial than damaging to parties overall.

The table Stark produces has been replicated in this dissertation, with the addition of Brown's leadership transition in 2007. (Table 1) When analysing the data in the same way as Stark, the impact of Brown becoming leader had no 'empirical impact.' However, the general impact of the leadership transition from Blair to Brown was a positive one. We can thus add this leadership change to the number of leadership changes which have had an overall general positive impact on the party.

This is in continuance with Stark's hypothesis, that leadership contests, or in the case of Brown, leadership transitions, are 'far more likely to improve a party's fortunes than damage them' (1996: 162). While it would be useful to analyse the impact of all leadership selection processes since Stark's last attempt in 1994, this is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, the overall findings of Stark, with the addition of Brown, indicate that leadership selections are more likely to have a general positive impact on the party in question. Furthermore, Stark notes that out of all 16 leadership contests by party and selection systems, leadership selections have more often than not had general positive impacts; especially in terms of the Labour party, where 'contests have been twice as likely to have positive instead of negative overall impacts.' Furthermore, 'no party has had more negative impact contests than positive impact ones' (1996: 161). (Table 2)

In the case of the 2007 leadership change, the case of Brown becoming leader has been added to Stark's table under the title of 'No Contest.' As there was a general positive impact of Brown becoming Labour party leader, this measure is also in keeping with Stark's hypothesis. As stated before, although beyond the scope of this dissertation, analysing the leadership selections since 1994, which also includes another 'No Contest' leadership selection of the Conservative party in 2003, the findings of this information would significantly expand Stark's work.

A 'Stark' Critique
Although Stark's hypothesis is supported through his statistical findings, his reliance on these methods in understanding the 'impact' of leadership selection processes can be critiqued.
Stark's model has been used by academics as an undisputed model for analysing leadership contests and their subsequent impacts; having faced little criticism from his academic peers, with few, if any, differentiating from his work. However, there are significant limitations to Stark's methods, which this dissertation is keen to challenge.

Through analysing Stark's 'impact measure,' and having utilized the same statistical measures as Stark to draw conclusions about the 'impact' Brown's leadership had on the party, two specific flaws in his work come to light - firstly, the use of an eight per cent threshold to mark 'empirical impact,' and secondly, the use of a one month before and one month after time scale to measure 'impact.' The rationale for these criticisms will be explained below, as throughout the research conducted in this dissertation, it is evident that Stark's model would have produced different results if certain aspects of this 'impact measure' were altered. It must be emphasised that Stark's time frame of evaluating impact does not take into account the consequences of other issues that can have an impact on leadership, and therefore may negate some substantially important issues which may have influenced the perception of Brown becoming leader. In the case of Brown, the impact of the change in leadership is 'empirical' if alternative measures are adopted, suggesting Stark's model is somewhat flawed in understanding the 'impact' of leadership selection in a broader sense.

To challenge Stark's 'impact measure,' this dissertation shall illustrate how 'empirical impact' could appear differently under alternate measures of both threshold and time scale. To see if these speculations are true, this dissertation shall pose some alternative impact measures to study the impact of Brown becoming leader, which shall then be drawn up in comparison to Stark's. While it would be useful to assess all of Stark's previous conclusions in this manner, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to do so. This dissertation shall therefore use alternative thresholds and time scales for assessing the impact of Brown becoming leader in 2007. While this variant on Stark's work will produce a conclusion for the impact of Brown, this is not to suggest that the results would be the same for all other leadership contests. Indeed, these results are not viable or conclusive enough to make an overall judgement, however, it must be noted that if the same measures were adopted for all other contents there could be some notable differences.
Challenging Stark's 'impact measure'

Firstly, Stark's requirement of an eight per cent change in any of the polling data to deem impact as 'empirical' is, as mentioned previously, somewhat arbitrary. Had a higher or lower threshold been adopted, Stark's results may have been more conclusive. Indeed, as only eight out of the 16 contests registered 'empirical impact,' it suggests that the threshold was too high - especially as in terms of general impact, most leadership changes tended to be generally positive. More contests registering as having an 'empirical impact' would also only help in strengthening Stark's hypothesis. Although this dissertation has not analysed all contests in this way, the 2007 leadership transition clearly had a positive impact on the Labour party, however this did not reach Stark's eight per cent threshold in the polls. Whilst generally positive, this suggests the poll change was not significant enough to suggest any noteworthy correlation between the change in leadership and the party's fortunes. Yet when looking at the data, there is a clear correlation that suggests that more than just a general positive impact exists. In terms of Brown becoming leader, the boost to Labour's polls was significant, with the leadership transition's impact perhaps deserving a more specific label than being 'generally positive.'

A further flaw of Stark's model which becomes apparent through the findings of this dissertation is that Stark's advocated time scale of measuring impact - one month before and one month after time - is too limited in its scope to see the general change of opinion on, and witness the impact of, new leaders. If this time frame was to be extended, different answers may be drawn from the data. This has been clear through this dissertation's study of Brown, where the polling data has changed by eight per cent, however this has not been in the time period Stark specifies. Whilst Stark has his reasons for his eight per cent threshold and one month before and one month after time frame, in the case of Brown there was a clear 'Brown Bounce' that did not go unnoticed in the polls and media. It therefore suggests that Stark's 'empirical impact' measure time frame excludes some statistically important changes in the polls. If Stark's time frame were to be extended to three months before and three months after, the amount of leadership contests and transitions having an 'empirical impact' may be different.

The first alternative 'impact measure' will be that of reducing the eight per cent threshold to six per cent, yet keeping the one month before and one month after time frame. When the
threshold to register 'empirical impact' is lowered to a six per cent point change, in terms of poll standing, there is a positive 'empirical impact' for Brown in 2007. (Table 4)

The average voting intention for Labour rose from 33% in May, to 35.5% in June, to 39% in July, marking a six per cent change in the polls. In terms of leadership satisfaction, as noted before, due to gaps in the data an empirical impact measure from the month before and after the transition cannot be taken. However, when measuring the last average leadership satisfaction rating for Blair in April, 28%, to the first measure of Brown in July, 35%, there is a seven per cent change in leadership satisfaction levels. Whilst this did not reach the Stark threshold of eight per cent, it reaches the variable threshold of six per cent, and shall therefore be counted as positive 'empirical impact.' As seen in Table 4, when changing Stark's model to a six per cent threshold for 'empirical impact' and keeping the time frame as one month, there is positive 'empirical impact,' suggesting that the changes in statistics are more substantial than as noted by Stark.

The use of a six per cent threshold therefore acknowledges the changes in polling data more substantially than the eight per cent threshold; although Stark may argue that this is due to the margin of errors, and that this lowered threshold may distort the results, claiming there was more of an impact than actually existed. In terms of Brown, there was a significant increase in the poll standing and leadership satisfaction surrounding the contest, with the 'Brown Bounce' receiving significant attention and bolstering Labour's polls in ways unseen for a long period, which could be argued as being 'empirical impact.' In terms of saving the Labour polls from becoming dismal, Brown arguably refreshed the polls from the poor polling performance of the party under Blair towards the end of his premiership. The second alternative impact measure will be to continue to use the six per cent threshold, but on a longer time scale. This time scale will be three months before and three months after, to see if there are any changes to the polls, and thus 'empirical impact,' on a longer time frame. (Table 5)

This is justified as from a Labour poll standing rating of 31.1% in March under Blair, Brown reached 40.4% in September - confirming that there was significant impact on a longer time scale. Similarly, in terms of leadership satisfaction, the Labour party went from having 33% leadership satisfaction levels in March under Blair, to an average of 50% under Brown in September. The change of 17% points suggests that 'empirical' impact should be looked at on
a wider time scale than Stark advocates, as there are significant increases in the polling data which are overlooked when utilised under such a narrow time frame. Correspondingly, Stark's original threshold of eight per cent has been produced with the variable of three months before and after, which would have solidified his hypothesis that leadership selections have more positive impacts than negative ones. (Table 6)

Whilst the data has thus been viewed on a lower threshold and a broader time frame, it seems wise to raise the empirical impact measure to higher than Stark advocates, to see if any of these measures resonate on a higher measure. While we have examined what the table would look like if we reduced the threshold by two per cent, we should also assess what it would look like if it were increased by two per cent, needing a ten per cent point change in polls to register as 'empirical impact.' Arguably, a ten per cent change in polling data would indicate impressive 'empirical impact.' Although through our data we can see that there has not been a ten per cent change in polling data during the specified one month period by Stark, if the time frame is widened, there have been occurrences where there has been a huge change in the polls. Table 7 shows how Brown's leadership would look under a ten per cent threshold for empirical impact under Stark's time frame, with Table 8 showing this on the alternative time frame.

Although the change in poll standing for the Labour party on a larger time frame of three months each way is impressive, rising from 31.1% in March to 40.4% in September, it just fails to reach the high threshold of ten per cent by 0.7%. Due to this, it cannot be included in the table as 'empirical' impact, however it must be noted that it does come exceedingly close. This almost ten per cent change in poll standing is a remarkably positive impact and goes onto suggest that this wider time frame for assessing the impact of new leaders is necessary, somewhat discrediting Stark's one month before and one month after approach. When analysing this data before, the measures were taken from Blair's last leadership satisfaction level and compared with Brown's first. However, in terms of three months before and three months after, Blair's satisfaction levels in March need to be compared with Brown's satisfaction levels in September. Blair received 33% satisfaction levels in March, with Brown reaching 50% in September. This 17% point increase in leadership satisfaction goes far beyond both Stark's eight per cent threshold and this dissertations variable of ten per cent. As noted before, the high poll percentage of the YouGov/Sunday Times poll generally skews the
average data for the months. Yet even when eliminated from the data to calculate monthly averages, in August, Brown still achieved an average of 41.5% in leadership satisfaction levels. This still reaches a 13.5% change in the polls, managing to register as 'empirical impact' on the variable model.

As these variants of Stark's model have shown, it appears that the time frame of one month before and after a leadership contest is not long enough to assert and assess the impact of new leaders. As the tables portray, there is a much stronger argument to be made about the impact of new leaders when the polling data is viewed on a larger time frame. Using a time frame of three months before and three months after enables us to see the general feelings towards a party in the midst of their old leader, and a more informed judgment of the new leader after witnessing three months of them doing their job. Indeed, one month after a leader assumes a new role is not enough to assess a leader's credentials or success on. Stark's model therefore can be justifiably critiqued, as his 'impact measure' has certain limitations in understanding the complexities of the impact of leadership contests on parties. As this dissertation suggests, his 'impact measure' can be altered and utilised in different ways to provide a broader view of the impact new leaders have on parties. Regardless of whether his model would be more credible if the statistical threshold or time frame were to be changed, more generally, it must be noted that Stark's hypothesis and model formed almost solely through statistical analysis is flawed. This dissertation thus seeks to assert the fault in Stark's heavy reliance on statistical measures, which cannot be used in isolation as sufficient explanations in political science.

Stark's heavy reliance on statistical data to address the issue of 'impact' is excessive, almost wholly negating the context which surrounds leadership contests, and other factors which have an effect on polling data. While it is impossible to take every occurrence surrounding a leadership contest which might influence polls into consideration, it needs to be asserted that statistical data cannot be used in seclusion; and three statistical measures are not substantial enough to base the issue of 'impact' on. Therefore, although the data Stark produces supports his hypothesis - that leadership contests often have more positive than negative effects on parties - this conclusion, as it stands, counts for very little, with only modest explanation for this being attempted. Stark's only rationale for why this is the case is somewhat limited, stating that it is due to the media attention parties receive in times of leadership changes which create this positivity, especially when a party's current leader is unpopular, with Stark
therefore encouraging that it is in a party's interest to 'provide regular opportunities to leadership contests' (1996: 164). Stark states that 'the conclusion that clearly emerges from this study is that parties and party leaders should be well-advised to reduce their resistance to leadership contests' (1996: 166).

Extending Stark's study

If this dissertation could be further research the 'impact' leadership selections and the consequences that new leaders have upon parties, there are a number of areas which would be valuable to look into. To extend the study, other aspects could be investigated, so that statistical information is not used in isolation. This type of analysis has been attempted by other academics. Although Stark discredits J.A. Brown's 'Major Effect' article as being a narrowly focused study into the impact of leadership selections, this article does however examine some underlying issues which Stark fails to address. Although the article cannot be used as a universal guide to understanding 'impact' of leadership changes overall, 'The Major Effect' goes some way into looking into other issues surrounding the concept of leadership which may have had an impact on a leader and their respective party. Further investigation into myriad factors, such as personality traits and media representation, opposition party performance and public perception, may help provide an additional insight into the impact of Brown becoming Labour leader. These further measures could be useful to take into account when analysing 'impact,' further reiterating that Stark's 'impact' measure cannot be used in isolation.

A further issue which may need to be considered is what happens after the immediate impact of leadership selections. Stark fails to address why leaders cannot capitalise on the support they get after a contest, and if, as Stark claims, that impact is usually positive, we can question why this is the case. J.A. Brown attempted this in 'The Major Effect' – inquiring into, but failing to establish a universal reasoning as to why a leader's 'honeymoon' period fades. J.A. Brown poses a question about the honeymoon period for Major; was this 'due solely to the contrast between the incoming Major and the outgoing Thatcher? Or is there a more general rule that a new face at the head of the government will create some sort of positive impact simply due to the novelty of the new leader and the general public's desire for periodic change?' (1992: 555) This suggests that the initial positive effects when a change of leadership occurs are 'not unique to this particular episode but seem to reflect more of a general tendency for parties in Britain to benefit positively, at least in the short term, from a
new face at the top' (Brown, J.A. 1992: 556). This can be seen under the event of the 2007 leadership transition, with Blair's unpopularity arguably hindering Labour's polling performance, which was substantially altered after Brown became leader. Whilst J.A. Brown concludes that 'in this comparative sense, it seems that the honeymoon period enjoyed by new Prime Ministers tends to be short-lived,' there seems to be no specific reasoning for this which can be attributed to leadership contests in their entirety; Prime Ministers' 'abilities to hang on to and capitalize on their initial popularity advantages were mixed,' and no substantial universal conclusions made (1992: 558-560). Obviously the individual reasons for the failure of leaders to do this are subject to specific contextual circumstances; and the factors which contribute to a leader's downfall are unique to them. While these deductions are fairly inconclusive, J.A. Brown makes more of an attempt than Stark to aim to understand the reasons for the changes behind the statistics.

Stark does not identify the problems which leaders come by which reduce their support and popularity, failing to appreciate the wider context of leadership contests and transitions. Whether it is the fact that leadership elections take more pressing issues off the agenda for a small amount of time that helps the party bolster its opinion polls in the short term, or whether people feel sympathetic to new leaders at first, or indeed, just want a 'new face' at No.10, these questions have not been posed by Stark, and are perhaps even more important than analysing the impact leaders have purely through statistical measures (Brown, J.A. 1992: 556).

In the case of Brown, it is obvious that the initial positive impact of him becoming leader was extremely temporary, with opinion poll ratings failing to come close to the initial support he received in the first few months of his leadership. Indeed it would be useful to analyse the factors which contribute to the fall in the polls as well as those which favour the party in times of a new leader. Many academics have sought to explain the factors which contributed to the downfall of Brown as Labour party leader, to name a few, Bower (2007), Foley (2009), Kettell and Kerr (2008), Rush and Giddings (2008), Seldon and Lodge, (2010a, 2010b). The literature surrounding Brown's failure as party leader focuses on both the personal limitations of Brown as well as the structural contextual constraints Brown faced. As Heppell notes, 'despite an initial honeymoon period he has endured one of the worst beginnings to a Prime Ministerial tenure in living memory' (2010b: 190).
Kettell and Kerr comment that, 'after an initial season of promise, in which Brown's measured handling of a series of crises had led to an upswing for Labour in the polls, a subsequent succession of tactical misjudgements, mishandlings, and mistakes, have led the Prime Minister to the brink of what, in the circumstances of New Labour's prior electoral success, could be a highly embarrassing oblivion' (2008: 490). After a honeymoon period of Brown's leadership, facilitated by a 'change of style and substance from the Blair era and by his handling of terrorist attacks within two days of taking office and of serious floods in large parts of central England,' as well as the foot and mouth crisis, things soon started to go downhill (Hardie 2010, Riddell cited in Rush and Giddings 2008: 8). As mentioned before, Brown's decision 'not to call a snap election in the autumn led to claims he had "bottled" it, and never recovered,' with Heppell noting 'what was to really damage his political credibility was that having decided not to hold a snap general election he denied that his decision was influenced by the changes in the opinion polls over the previous week' (2010b: 191). Brown's repertoire further suffered with Vince Cable noting Brown's transformation from "Stalin to Mr Bean," with policies such as abolishing the 10p tax rate accentuating his 'stubbornness' as well as 'alienat[ing] core support' (Hardie 2010). Furthermore, Brown's handling of issues such as the global economic crisis and recession, 'came to dominate his premiership, first bolstering his reputation but subsequently held back by a refusal to accept the need for spending cuts' (Hardie: 2010).

Moreover, as Heppell notes, the manner in which Brown became leader created a 'contradiction.' While it could be argued that his mandate was 'enhanced by the fact that he was elected unopposed,' the 'cataclysmic failure' of Brown led to the questioning of his leadership 'on the basis that only one third of the Electoral College contributed to his selection' (2010b: 194). Furthermore, Heppell notes that under Brown, the Labour party 'witnessed the interaction of two uncomfortable aspects [...] first, the propensity for plots and rumours designed to remove the incumbent; combined with the second aspect, their ejection procedures which make it immensely difficult to unseat a sitting Labour leader.' This 'state of permanent speculation on whether Brown can be challenged' ultimately 'disfigured the party' and thus 'immobilised Brown as Prime Minister' (2010b: 194). There are further academic debates surrounding the factors which led to Brown's downfall, with Foley referring to Brown's leadership as a 'crisis of manifold complexity,' which ultimately resulted in the 'erosion of leadership authority' (2009: 498). Kettell and Kerr argue that his failure was not due to the 'usual suspects for governmental unpopularity, such as economic instability, party
disunity, voter ennui, or, indeed, significant policy failure,' but by 'his failure to construct himself parallel to two key discourses which work, in various ways, to frame the potential success of contemporary political leadership in the UK; namely, what we term here the discourses of 'Westminsterism' and 'modernity' ' (2008: 491). Seldon and Lodge pose five reasons responsible for Brown's failure: Brown's inheritance; deficient leadership qualities; deficiencies of character; the corrosive impact of Blair on Brown from 1994-2007; and Brown's lack of political clarity (2010b: xx-xxvi). Whilst this dissertation is limited in understanding the underlying causes of Brown's leadership decline, and starts to defer from the real question at the heart of this study, whatever the reasons for his subsequent leadership failures, it must be asserted that 'Brown brought the party back from the brink in 2008 and 2009 to deny the Conservatives an overall majority,' and was thus a temporary success for the Labour party which was mirrored in the polls (Seldon and Lodge 2010b: xviii). This supports Stark's hypothesis, that leadership contests, or in this case transitions, 'tend to be more beneficial than harmful for political parties' (Stark 1996: 164).

Conclusion

Stark's hypothesis, that leadership contests are 'far more likely to have positive than negative impacts,' is a claim which is supported by the use of three statistical measures: poll standing; leadership satisfaction; and unity index (1996: 142). This dissertation sought to use the same model to see what this 'impact' would be in the circumstance of no contest – the leadership transition from Blair to Brown in June 2007. In accordance with Stark, this dissertation has established that the transition did have a generally positive impact on the Labour party.

While Stark's methods have been praised and utilised by many academics in the field of leadership studies, this dissertation has aimed to understand some of the problems that his purely statistical approach to the question of 'impact' poses. The limitations of such an approach have become apparent throughout the duration of this dissertation. A key aim has been to challenge the two component parts of Stark's statistical measure: the eight percentage point threshold for 'empirical impact,' and the time frame of evaluating this change, one month before and after the leadership contest or transition. This study has therefore adopted alternative impact measures to challenge the validity of Stark's model, using the 2007 leadership transition as a case study. The conclusions drawn from this suggest that Stark's 'impact measure' is too narrow to understand the issue of 'impact' in its entirety. This is notable, as the transition registered as having 'empirical impact' on four out of the five of this
study's alternative impact measures, with three of these registering as positive, and one having a mixed impact. While this study's results are far from providing a universal conclusion on the impact of new leaders overall, it must be noted that if alternative 'impact measures' were to be adopted for the contests already evaluated by Stark, there may be notable differences in his results.

Whilst this may be the case, this study desired to further critique Stark's statistical approach to understanding 'impact' more generally; an approach which is limited in comprehending the factors which contribute to a new leaders 'impact.' Although Stark's hypothesis is supported by statistical data, his limited appreciation of the wider contextual occurrences surrounding leadership changes, ensure that these conclusions fail to provide a sufficient analytical approach in understanding the reasons as to why leadership changes have certain 'impacts.' This dissertation has pointed to further areas of discussion, namely more qualitative research, which may provide a useful insight when examining the question of 'impact.' In isolation, Stark's 'impact measure' is far from an in-depth enquiry into the issues which can have impacts on leaders immediately after a leadership change.

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**Figures and Tables**

Figure 1. *Impact of 2007 Labour leadership transition – Poll Standing (2007)*

![Labour Party Poll Standing 2007](image)

Figure 2. *Poll Standing of Labour and Conservative Parties (2007)*

![Poll Standing 2007](image)


Figure 3. *Poll Standing of Labour and Conservative Parties (2007-2011)*

![Poll Standing 2007-2011](image)

*Source:* UK Polling Report (Voting Intention 2005-2010), (Voting Intention since 2010)
Figure 4. *Poll Standing of Labour and Conservative Parties (2007-2011)*


Figure 5. *Leadership satisfaction of Labour Party 2007. Tony Blair Approval Ratings from UK Polling Report, Approval of Gordon Brown as Prime Minister from UK Polling Report.*

Figure 6. Unity Index Labour Party September 2006 – September 2008.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contest</th>
<th>Poll Standing</th>
<th>Leadership Satisfaction Rating</th>
<th>Party Unity Index</th>
<th>Overall Empirical Impact</th>
<th>Overall General Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1963 Labour</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963 Conservative</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965 Conservative</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967 Liberal</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975 Conservative</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976 Labour</td>
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<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976 Liberal</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980 Labour</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982 SDP</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
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<tr>
<td>1983 Labour</td>
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<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988 Liberal Democrat</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988 Labour</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989 Conservative</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 Conservative</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992 Labour</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994 Labour</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007 Labour</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: += significant positive impact  None= no statistically significant impact  
-= significant negative impact  N/A= data not available
Table 2. Overall general impact by party and selection systems, with added 2007 Leadership transition and ‘No Contest’ category (Stark, 1996:162)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall General Impact</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Mixed</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Parties</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Selection System</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magic circle</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election by MP’s</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral College</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMOV</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No contest</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.

(Constant) Brown under Stark’s Model (8% threshold for ‘empirical impact’ and one month before and after leadership change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contest</th>
<th>Poll Standing</th>
<th>Leadership Satisfaction Rating</th>
<th>Party Unity Index</th>
<th>Overall Empirical Impact</th>
<th>Overall General Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007 Labour</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.

(Variable) Brown under 6% threshold for ‘empirical impact’ and one month before and after leadership change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contest</th>
<th>Poll Standing</th>
<th>Leadership Satisfaction Rating</th>
<th>Party Unity Index</th>
<th>Overall Empirical Impact</th>
<th>Overall General Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007 Labour</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.

(Variable) Brown under 6% threshold for ‘empirical impact’ and three months before and after leadership change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contest</th>
<th>Poll Standing</th>
<th>Leadership Satisfaction Rating</th>
<th>Party Unity Index</th>
<th>Overall Empirical Impact</th>
<th>Overall General Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007 Labour</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 6.
(Variable) Brown under 8% threshold for ‘empirical impact’ and three months before and after leadership change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contest</th>
<th>Poll Standing</th>
<th>Leadership Satisfaction Rating</th>
<th>Party Unity Index</th>
<th>Overall Empirical Impact</th>
<th>Overall General Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007 Labour</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 7.
(Variable) Brown under 10% threshold for ‘empirical impact’ and one month before and after leadership change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contest</th>
<th>Poll Standing</th>
<th>Leadership Satisfaction Rating</th>
<th>Party Unity Index</th>
<th>Overall Empirical Impact</th>
<th>Overall General Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007 Labour</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 8.
(Variable) Brown under 10% threshold for ‘empirical impact’ and three months before and after leadership change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contest</th>
<th>Poll Standing</th>
<th>Leadership Satisfaction Rating</th>
<th>Party Unity Index</th>
<th>Overall Empirical Impact</th>
<th>Overall General Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007 Labour</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>