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Abstract

Political exit is relatively under-researched. This paper examines the experiences of politicians leaving political office through different routes, the impact on individual politicians, their partners and family, and crucially examines the implications for representative democracy.

The paper explores the experience of the transition from political office drawing on empirical research in which 41 interviews were conducted with politicians who had left office, either having been defeated or having chosen not to stand again, their partners, and with current politicians about their thinking on their own future exit from office.

This paper then focuses on the wider implications of political exit. It argues that the conditions into which politicians are elected and the smoothness or otherwise with which they can leave office have wider implications for representative democracy. It argues that for a healthy, sustainable democracy, the route into and out of political office should be less problematic.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that representative democracy depends on elected politicians leaving office, the exit from office has been little researched by scholars. The area, Keane observes, is “*under-theorized, under-researched and under-appreciated – and in many cases under-regulated.*” (Keane, 2011 p. 283). Keane describes how “*democracies specialize in bringing leaders down to earth*” (Keane, 2011 p. 279) but theories of representative democracy are oddly silent once leaders had been ejected from office. Even political memoirs are notably reticent about the transition from elected office. Ed Balls, former MP, is a recent exception (Balls, 2016 p. xiv). He confronts head on his widely

publicized ejection from office in his book that he describes as a "*fond farewell to that part of my life.*"

The relative paucity of scholarly work on leaving political office is in stark contrast to a more considerable body of work on how to gain and sustain such office - famously for example, by Machiavelli (2009) but in the modern day, by scholars (e.g. Wren, 2007) and by scores of political biographers (Walter, 2016). By contrast to entry, there is little analysis or debate on routes out of political office, when and how to relinquish political leadership roles and what conditions facilitate politicians to leave should either they or the electorate deem that it is time (Byrne and Theakston, 2016).

What is known about the transition from political office is mostly about those leaving the highest political rank to join the exclusive, but rarely appealing, club of former heads of government (Theakston, 2010; Theakston and de Vries, 2012). Although the focus of this paper is on political leaders leaving office in western-type democracies, a cautionary tale is offered by a wider look across democracies and dictatorships. Baturo (2014 p. 250) describes how between 1960 and 2009, out of all presidents who entered and completed term limited office, more than a quarter prolonged their stay. The outcome was bleak: a majority of these were assassinated or ousted.

Contemporary literature on former politicians who departed office in a more ordered manner began with studies on US Presidents, the first a survey by Sheldon in 1925 (cited by Theakston, 2010). It took some decades for the subject to be picked up again by Martin (1951) but then followed more (Hecht, 1976; Schenker, 1982; Norton-Smith and Walch, 1990; Chambers, 1998; Belenky, 1999; Skidmore, 2004). Most of these studies have looked at what former presidents have done following their time in the White House rather than examining the experience of transition from office itself.

The interest in US commanders-in-chief sparked a similar interest across the Atlantic. Just (2004) was one of the first to study '*the largely neglected*' subject of the role of former British Prime Ministers. But it is Theakston and

colleagues who have spearheaded work on former political office holders with studies on former UK Prime Ministers (Theakston, 2010) and heads of governments from other western-style democracies (Theakston and de Vries 2012). There are few examples of government leaders leaving on their own terms at a stable time. A notable recent exception is that of John Keys, the New Zealand Prime Minister, who was on the verge of a fourth term as a popular leader when he chose to resign in December 2016. He was determined not to find himself, '*in the position many leaders around the world find themselves, which is disgruntled and unhappy*,' (Manhire, 2016).

Yet heads of government, now relatively youthful, have more possibilities open to them when they leave office, for example on international bodies, than once was the case (Theakston and De Vries, 2012). But what of those in less exalted positions, party leaders, cabinet members, parliamentarians and local government leaders? Most of the literature focuses on party leader succession, ministerial sacking or resignations, or the career pathways of ministers (for example, Dowding and Kang, 1998; Bynander and 't Hart, 2008; Dowding and McLeay, 2011; Ennser-Jedenastik and Muller, 2013) rather than the experience of the transition from office. While there is a paucity of literature on parliamentarians, it is relatively rich from Canada (Doherty, 2001; Paikin, 2003; Shaffir and Kleinknecht, 2005; Williams, 2011). Theakston has led the way in the UK with a series of studies using primarily survey data (Theakston et al, 2007; Byrne and Theakston, 2016) although an unspecified number of interviews were conducted in the latter study. Kwiatowski (2015) has written thoughtful insights from broader interviews with MPs but there is little systematic on the experience of losing political office from Parliament in the UK using interview data and none, to the author's knowledge, about the transition from office of leading local government politicians.

In the absence of a substantial literature on exit from office, the wealth of literature studying other transitions may have relevance to the experience of political exit and provide clues about the framing of research into loss of political office. Ebaugh's work on role exit is especially pertinent although she did not consider political exit specifically. She makes clear that '*The process*

of role exiting involves tension between an individual's past, present and future' (Ebaugh, 1988 p. 149) and the importance of the distinction between being 'an ex' rather than 'a never, that is, having been in a role in the past and never having being in that role.

The literature on redundancy, unemployment, retirement, bereavement, and loss and change more generally (e.g. Jahoda, 1982; Beehr, 1986; Hartley, 1987; Marris, 1993; Vickers, 2009; Gabriel, Gray and Goregaokar, 2013; Wang, 2013), usefully informs thinking about politicians leaving office. It demonstrates that the transition for each person is a journey over time, with multiple meanings and impact beyond the immediate financial and practical, and affecting families, not just the individual. Of particular relevance is the literature on leading athletes (for example, Lally, 2007) who share with politicians (and members of the clergy) a role in which the boundary between personal and the professional is blurred.

Given the gaps in the literature demonstrated above, the study reported here explored:

- The experience of losing elected political office for the office-holder and their families;
- Current politicians' thinking about how political exit is approached while in office;
- Wider implications for representative democracy of how the transition from political office is managed.

This paper briefly describes the study and its results but then focuses on the last question, asking what, if any, might be the wider implications of the transition from political office. Fuller details on the research, the results and their analysis, and what practical steps might be taken to mitigate the impact of losing political office are described elsewhere (Roberts, 2017). To the author's knowledge, it is the only study that has explored the transition from political office in both national and local government; and the only research

that has sought to link an understanding of individual experience of losing political office with its impact on a system of representative democracy.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The study was on UK Westminster MPs and English local authority council leaders (of unitary or county authorities) who had left office, either having been defeated or having chosen not to stand again. The sample also included a number of current politicians about their thinking on whether and how they contemplated leaving office.

The study was based on interviews using a semi-structured interview approach. An interview protocol was compiled from core questions to address the research questions – a narrative of what happened before, during and after the loss of office as well as feelings and thoughts about the transition – and informed by existing literature. Three former politicians (none interviewed subsequently) were consulted for their views on the protocol. The analysis was based on thematic analysis of transcribed interviews.

41 interviews were conducted using a stratified sampling technique. Of these, 10 were former politicians who had left office having stood down and 10 having been defeated. Of these 20, 12 had been MPs and eight had been council leaders. The sample also included 11 interviews with partners of the former politicians (where available to speak to the researcher). Lastly, 10 were politicians serving in office at the time (4 MPs and 6 council leaders or directly elected mayors).

The aim was to achieve a sample with recent experience so the sample was taken from those MPs who had left Parliament at the 2010 General Election and for local politicians, those who had left their leadership position and council membership between 2008 and 2012 (as very few had left office in 2010). The sample was mixed in terms of political party, geography within England, gender, age, and for MPs, seniority within the Commons.

All the former MPs were interviewed about two years after they left office and most of the former council leaders were interviewed between 12 to 18 months after their exit from office. The former politicians had been in office from under one year to 27 years.

TABLE 1 about here

The duration of the semi-structured interviews with former office holders was mostly around two hours. Interviews with partners and current politicians were shorter.

Consent was sought to audiotape the interviews and to quote from them on an unattributable basis in all cases.

RESULTS

The results about the experience and impact of losing office on recent politicians are presented in a brief summary so that the focus of this paper can be on the implications for representative democracy. A fuller account is available elsewhere (Roberts, 2017).

The current politicians

Current politicians in this study had given little thought to how long they would seek to remain in office whether in a marginal seat or not. The MPs especially were reluctant to engage in thinking about leaving office with one exception: an MP who had previously been defeated in a different seat and had found the experience deeply scarring. This MP had likened the experience of defeat

to a bereavement and even some years later on, had not *“been able to have that sort of conversation properly with anyone really ... it was very bottled up.”* Most other MPs simply did not want to think about how long they might remain in office, one clearly stating it was, *“Something I prefer not to think about. I just hope that when the moment ... my preferred life course is one where I wake up one morning dead.”* It was the proximity to major national and international issues, the ‘buzz’ of being at the centre of what was going on, that was so compelling for many. One MP argued that, *“It’s a weakness of our modern political structure that there aren’t many people who engage in it having an active commitment in a world outside.”* Another had been given cause to mull over the future as a result of an unexpected demotion from Government pointed out how unusual the position of MPs was, *“Where else are you at the top of your game one minute and then your company says you’re going back to the shop floor effectively and you’re back on your starting salary and your expertise is no longer used but it’s no longer used by a rival firm as well?”* One ruefully observed also, *“What other job would half the population be dancing in the streets if you got made redundant?”*

Council leaders’ tenure may be shorter and yet many commented on how few options they would have once they had left office. One summed it up, *‘I think that there needs to be an exit strategy ... I gave up something that I can’t go back to ... you want to make it easy for people to leave.’* Another reflected on how unappealing the future could be having seen, *“Some of the former leaders, I mean some of them are brutally treated, absolutely horribly treated. You wouldn’t treat a dog like some of them...”* A couple of the council leaders had toyed previously with standing down but put the idea off as the time approached, neither sounding as though they had really wanted to go. Few council leaders had given thought to succession planning, one frankly acknowledging, *“I didn’t want a successor because I always wanted to carry on.”*

The former politicians

Many assume that politicians who choose to stand down will fare well in distinct contrast to those who are defeated. This was not necessarily the case in this study. Manner of exit was an element in the experience of former politicians but there was not a simple division between those who had stood down and those who had been defeated. Two interviewees who had been unexpectedly very narrowly defeated had flourished after initial devastation while a couple who had stood down had struggled much more including for one, a period of depression.

Most – whether they had chosen to go or not – described a sense of loss at having left political office and for many it was described graphically in terms of grief, just as the current MP above. One reflected that it was, *‘Like a bereavement – and it was - but there was no funeral.’* It was a loss not only of what had been but crucially, for what might have been, the possibilities of the future. One who had stood down reflected, *“It was the end of my political career basically and my government job because I was never going to go any higher, you know, whereas you all dream.”*

Most had experienced at the very least a sense of dislocation, losing a sense of who they were and what they did. A very different life awaited: how to structure the vastness of time that had suddenly opened up; no longer being at the centre of all that seemed to be important; coming to terms with no longer mattering to others in the same way; finding a new narrative about who they were and what they did, and a number had struggled hard to find employment despite an impressive range of skills. A partner summed up the experience of her spouse who had stood down as, *“You have a few dustbin bags put at the door of your office and that’s it, end of story.”* Many struggled with on the one hand knowing that having to leave political office was an intrinsic part of the democratic process but on the other, the lived experience. One MP having stood down, later came to recognise how it had been, *“Quite a rational way of looking at things but the actual experience of doing it was a whole different matter ... a bleak time ...became quite depressed.”*

There was a suggestion from a number of former MPs that a significant number of their colleagues had felt trapped in Parliament as the pressures had increased: not at ease in parliamentary office but feeling that the risks were too high to step down. It was too late to return to earlier careers, too risky to leave, and too soon to retire – ‘*Huis Clos*’, as one interviewee graphically likened it. Professional expertise acquired in jobs prior to a busy political role often could not be kept up. Said one former MP, “*Being an MP is deskilling ... one of the effects of the expenses crisis was this idea that MPs are full time, not allowed to do anything else ... it makes people extremely vulnerable.*”

Throughout there were powerful, often moving, human stories: hurt, humiliation, betrayal, failure, shame, resentment affecting not just the individuals leaving office but their partners and families. Many hid away from former colleagues and constituents, one recalling how, “*I didn’t want to see my former colleagues who’d got re-elected or even those who had lost because you don’t want to be treated as a leper.*” And it was not always just from those who had been defeated. One former council leader who had stood down, initially with equanimity, acknowledged how “*The emotional impact is a lot less simple than I thought.*” Such sentiments mostly had been kept very private. Those who had been defeated mostly described an emotional turmoil – unsurprisingly - and a profound sense of personal failure and crushing lack of confidence that had persisted. A few described periods of past or current depression. One summed up, ‘*Ex-MPs are like rotting fish. Failed politicians are the worst of the worst.*’

Few politicians, especially if defeated, had received any meaningful communication from their political party. It was as if they had dropped out of sight and mind. Partners expressed anger about this most forcibly and a number of them had left the party in fury. Their spouses – and often their families - had devoted years to the party and their political role only now to be cast summarily aside. One former council leader who had stood down was contemptuous of the national party, “*There was no acknowledgement from the*

party at all – not even a letter or an e mail. Nothing, which did hurt and looking back on it, I think that is outrageous.” Where there had been acknowledgement, and especially some sort of rite of passage, it was deeply appreciated and long remembered. There was a deep sense of frustration among former MPs, council leaders and their partners that there was so little interest in the skills, knowledge and experience gained in political office that might have been a contribution to the party that they had represented and to wider civic society, one former council leader wistfully reflecting, *“Nobody seems to want to know you after and you just fade away ... perhaps they tried to contact me on the old council e mail system which you lose on the Sunday anyway ... there are those skills that could be used to encourage other people.”*

On the other hand, a small number of interviewees, all MPs rather than council leaders, who had stood down had been hugely relieved to leave office, finding the role increasingly unattractive and wanting a more fulfilling professional and personal life elsewhere. The intensity of media scrutiny, the toll on family life, increasing pressures of the role as Weinberg (2012) has documented, and doubts about the changing role of an MP were factors that all played a part in the decision to go. The furore over MPs’ expenses from 2009 had further exacerbated the pressures (Weinberg, 2015). Unsurprisingly, this small group had fared well. But their experience raises sharp questions about the conditions into which we elect MPs now and what defences may be necessary to withstand the demands of office – all the more so since the shocking murder of a Westminster MP in 2016 (Booth et al, 2016). Council leaders in contrast, were unequivocally positive about their role: indeed, one who had been both an MP and council leader, said of the latter role that it was, *‘the best kept secret’*.

It should be borne in mind that the research was conducted with only one cohort of politicians in or around 2010 and they were interviewed on one occasion only. It portrays therefore a snapshot of the experience rather than a more longitudinal view. The political climate at that time was dominated by the 2009 ‘expenses scandal’ in which leaked details of MPs’ expenses were

published by a national newspaper, leading to widespread public outrage. The number of MPs standing down at the 2010 General Election was, perhaps as a consequence, relatively high (Byrne and Theakston, 2016).

REPERCUSSIONS FOR THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

Other than on an individual human level is there any reason to be concerned about political exit? This paper argues that the transition from political office has wider repercussions in a representative democracy.

There have been debates on the relationship between rulers and the ruled and the nature of what is now called political leadership since classical times (e.g. Plato, 2007; Aristotle, 1992; Ruscio, 2004; Wren, 2007; Rhodes and 't Hart, 2016). But in the modern day, this paper argues that any healthy system of representative democracy depends on a reasonable degree of 'fluidity' between those who are elected to serve in political office and those whom they represent. The notion of fluidity here suggests that citizens should have a reasonable chance of gaining positions of elected political leadership should they be able and motivated to do so, and not be precluded from seeking office by disproportionate risks that might be encountered. But in order for some to gain political office for the first time, others must leave. Thomas Jefferson in 1811 insisted, *'there is a fullness of time when men should go, and not occupy too long the ground to which others have a right to advance'* (quoted in Keane, 2011 p.280). Or, as Baturo (2016) puts it, that political leaders who leave office and pursue their own careers reinforce, *'the rotation in office as norm and, in turn, strengthen democratic consolidation.'*

'Democratic rotation' is far from a new idea (e.g. Aristotle, 1992; Petracca, 1992). The notion that there should be an obligation on an office holder (elected and appointed) to leave office after a defined period is an idea with deep roots in classical republican political thought. Those selected to serve on the council of ancient Athens could serve no more than two years. The principle of rotation was key to Aristotle's understanding of the relationship between citizens and rulers and the importance of both ruling and being ruled

in turn. Rotation in office allowed more opportunity to people (well, men) to serve in public office and thus deepen their understanding of the public responsibilities of office that they would retain once they had left office. Later the idea was taken up notably in the Renaissance city-states of Venice and Florence, in England by Harrington and other intellectuals, and later still in the USA by Thomas Jefferson who, in his letter in 1807 to the legislature of Vermont in 1807, made clear, '*that I should lay down my charge at a proper period is as much a duty as to have borne it faithfully*' (<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/letter-to-the-legislature-of-vermont/>).

In the modern USA, the movement in support of term limits (which has keen detractors too) is drawn directly from the principle of rotation of office (Petracca, 1992). Limiting terms has been seen both as a check on excessive power – long a pre-occupation of political philosophers – and an opportunity to enhance political participation.

In a similar vein, this paper argues that in the absence of a reasonable degree of political fluidity, representative democracy is diminished. The argument is advanced on three grounds: first, because it reinforces the perception of a political class separate from the rest of the population; secondly, because it limits the range of people who are able and willing to come forward to serve in elected office; and thirdly, with exit made more difficult than it needs to be, there are fewer opportunities for citizens to share in the fullest experience of political citizenship – representing others. Political participation itself has long been seen as an important element in sustaining a healthy democracy.

Writing in America in the early 19th century, de Toqueville maintained that participation in public affairs drew members of a community away from narrow self-interest and into a wider appreciation of co-operative endeavour thus re-invigorating civic virtue. It was necessary to, '*use Democracy to moderate Democracy*' (quoted by Wren, 2007 p.212).

These issues have become increasingly charged in the early twenty first century, with evidence of considerable disenchantment with representative

democracy in many mature western-type democracies (Stoker, 2006; Hay, 2007; Jennings et al, 2016). Many scholars have sought to disentangle the factors that account for the current degree of disaffection with representative democracy (summarized by Hay, 2007). Examining one strand of this wider complex picture, the nature of the relationship between elected representatives and citizens and the degree of meaningful connection between them, Coleman (2005) suggests, *'Democracy works best when voters and representatives connect: exchanging views, accounting for themselves to each other, and, ideally, sharing a common world.'*

In the absence of meaningful connection between voters and representatives, citizens as a whole lose out: a relatively closed political class serves its population less well (Riddell, 1996) whether at local or national level. A political class distant from its electorate risks being less effective in terms of the perceived authenticity of its conversation and communication, and in terms of its political judgements: a far cry from a common world. Indeed, recent political changes in Europe and elsewhere – for example, the vote in the UK in 2016 to leave the European Union - suggest precisely such a distance (Evans and Tilley, 2017).

A more fluid system of political representation, with individuals serving time in positions of leadership and then leaving, enhances the opportunities for a wider range of people to put themselves forward for election and facilitates a better understanding of the challenges of political office amongst a wider group. In this way, leadership would be better distributed; there would be better understanding of the challenges that are encountered in political leadership; and the relationship between leaders and citizens might be perceived as less distant.

A political class

The term, 'political class' has often been used loosely since it was introduced by Mosca at the end of the 19th century (Cairney et al, 2016; Allen and Cairney, 2017). Mosca used the term to mean how politicians had moved away from representing voters and providing the essential link between citizens and state, and instead had begun to represent themselves (Oborne, 2007).

Commentators (for example, Riddell, 1995; Mair, 2013; Wright, 2013; Kenny and Pearce, 2014) have since documented the growth of a political class in the UK and other western democracies, often as part of a much wider debate about democracy and the concept of 'post-democracy.' Mair (2013 p.43) describes conventional politics as, *'Part of an external world which people view from outside.'* Wright (2013), a former Westminster MP, writes how MPs are regarded as, *'Out of touch, living in a closed political world far removed from the concerns of those whom they represent.'* If politicians could resist the tendency to become a separate political class, it would, Wright argues, be beneficial both for them and for those whom they represent. He suggests that the focus should be on the nature and composition of the contemporary political class itself as well as on political behaviour.

Echoing these views, current Westminster MP, Sarah Champion was reported saying in 2015 that she planned to serve a maximum of two terms in Parliament and then go, *'I don't think it's healthy to be there for too long. Because the longer you're there, the more distant you get from reality.'* (Pidd, 2017).

One interviewee, a former high-ranking MP who had deliberately not taken up the pass for the House of Commons that is available for former MPs explained, *'I've always believed that if the electorate say no, that's it, and I don't like the idea of a political class who are kind of perpetually there.'* His sentiments recall Keane's caution that an elision between holding top elected office and life after political leadership is not usually good for democracy (Keane, 2011, p. 285).

But as Allen and Cairney (2017) write, the term 'political class' is used to cover a multitude of alleged sins. They argue that there are three distinct concepts that can usefully be extracted from the 'political class' narrative: a political elite, the professionalization of politics, and political careerism. The definition of a political elite may vary but it is almost inevitable that there will be a political elite in any polity; the issue discussed here is its permeability and the ease of flow into and out of such an elite. With regard to the notion of fluidity, the concepts of the professionalization of politics and political careerism are highly relevant.

The balance of career versus non-career politicians in the UK has been changing in recent decades (Lamprinakou et al, 2017), and the professionalization of politics has gathered apace. The increase both in the proportion of career politicians (in Cowley's (2012) sense of having worked in the political sphere prior to gaining office) and in the professionalization of politics has consequences on who gets into political office, who stays and who goes. In turn, who politicians are and who they are perceived to be will affect the degree to which voters and representatives connect: the degree to which each feels that they can connect with the other, account for themselves to each other and, crucially, share a common world.

Being an effective representative at local or national level is however a highly time consuming, energy demanding business (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2007; Hartley, 2010; Weinberg, 2012). It is not for the faint hearted. Elected politicians need considerable resilience to withstand the significantly increased pressures. But on the other hand, people want to be represented by people who they feel understand the world as they see it (Coleman, 2005).

It is not an easy balance to strike. As Coleman memorably writes, *'The challenge for democratic politicians is to be seen as ordinary enough to be representative, while extraordinary enough to be representatives'*.

This principle, it is argued, holds true at all levels of governance. Effective political leadership requires a deep understanding of the dynamic contexts in which it is undertaken (Hartley, 2010). Without such an understanding, judgements arrived at and decisions made are less likely to be sound; the communication between politicians and those whom they represent are less likely to be perceived as relevant or resonant; and the necessary sense of psychological connection between leaders who embody crucial shared values and aspirations of those whom they lead may be weakened (Reicher et al, 2016; Subasic and Reynolds, 2010).

'Doing' politics does not necessarily mean standing for elected office: it is increasingly recognised that leadership is widely dispersed in modern democracies (Kane, Patapan and 't Hart, 2011). Attaining elected office, however, is a key and important means of exercising political leadership. In a representative democracy, it is elected politicians that ultimately and rightly make decisions for which they are accountable. But if the difficulties of gaining political office, holding that office and leaving political office are too great, the group of people who are able and motivated to stand to as representatives will be narrowed. Indeed, King argues that the dominance of government by Britain's *'pan-party-political class is almost certainly a bad thing ... deters some people from seeking a political career'* (King 2015, p.295). Fluidity into and out of office is reduced and the quality of political representation potentially diminished.

In this context, evidence on access to political office will be summarised before exit from office is considered.

Entry into political office

The background of UK politicians has changed significantly over the last century or so. After centuries in which political office was effectively reserved

for the most privileged, universal franchise along with the advance of the trade union movement and the Labour Party in the UK in the 20th century, started to open up access to political office (Rush and Cromwell, 2004). At both national and local level, holding political office became more possible for those who came from less advantaged backgrounds. With the route into Parliament made somewhat more accessible, people from less privileged backgrounds began to be elected as MPs in the latter half of the 20th century. With its tight apex, local council leadership was at least as slow, possibly slower, to open up (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2007). The case should not however be over-stated: MPs and councillors were still demographically starkly unrepresentative of the general population.

But in the 21st century, access to political office seems to becoming once again more restricted, as indeed it is access to all professions (Milburn, 2014). In the 2015 UK General Election, there was a further narrowing of the occupational background of candidates with an increasing proportion from politically relevant (for example, special advisers or journalism) backgrounds (Lamprinakou et al, 2017). Nor is the picture significantly different across the devolved and European parliaments (Cairney et al, 2016). Despite a significant increase in the number of women and people from a black and minority ethnic background, a trend confirmed from the 2017 General Election (Channel 4 News, 11 June 2017), the Westminster Parliament remains overwhelmingly white, male, and privileged. The picture of councillors at local government is similar in these respects.

Furthermore, Riddell has observed that the chances of coming back into the Westminster Parliament after a defeat are likely to be fewer than they once were, not least with fewer by-elections now than in the past (Riddell 2013, personal communication). The stakes of getting into Parliament are raised.

The stakes are getting higher also for council leaders and directly elected mayors. The emergence of the full-time executive leader in English local government “*amounts to nothing less than the professionalisation of politics*” (Berg and Rao, 2005 p.7). While there may be advantages in taking on a

demanding council leadership role full-time, it will have implications that may not have been considered in the rush to follow a parliamentary model. Who might be precluded from standing in the first place if there is an insistence on the role being full-time? Especially in more politically contested authorities, the pitfalls of giving up a satisfying career may be seen as too high to contemplate standing.

These concerns are not confined to the UK. From Australia again, Coghill observes how the knowledge of the difficulty in finding employment combined with a reduction in retirement benefits is, '*expected to have a chilling effect on citizens offering themselves for candidature*' (Coghill, 2015, personal communication).

With the profound changes in elected representatives over a relatively short time, are they deemed to be '*ordinary enough*' given the narrowing of the pool from which MPs are selected and elected? There is a larger cadre of professional politicians not only within the Westminster Parliament but also within the devolved governments of the UK, and now within local government - but little thought appears to have been given to its consequences.

Exit from political office

Pressures in office on parliamentarians in the UK are intense (Hartley 2010; Weinberg 2012; Weinberg 2015) such that perhaps only those with psychological defences that are most adaptive to these pressures may be able to withstand them. A minority may flee, as in this study.

Those politicians who can stand, or even thrive in, the heat of office increasingly may not want to leave, as observed by Keane (2011) in his notion of the malady of '*office dependency*'. One interviewee in this study more prosaically but memorably described such politicians as '*bed blockers*'. The stakes of leaving are raised still further.

This study suggests that office dependency may be encouraged by making the transition from political office more difficult than it needs to be. There will always be risk in any transition but this research suggests that without some acknowledgement of the challenges of dealing with the loss of political office and of the importance of its better handling, the risks may be too high.

Former politicians in the UK, certainly those who have not been in very senior positions, often struggle to find employment (Byrne and Theakston, 2016), a finding borne out in this research. The widespread belief that there is a 'revolving door' for MPs – from Parliament and into lucrative private sector jobs - needs to be refuted. In the UK, the evidence is that this is simply not the case (González-Bailón et al, 2013) despite the furore in 2017 surrounding a former UK Chancellor of the Exchequer's high-profile appointments. Former senior Cabinet ministers may find an easier berth – a (very) few may be appointed to the House of Lords - but this is not generally the case. Furthermore, it may be more difficult than previously for MPs to return to their previous employment, as they often unable to maintain their professional skills following more stringent rules on Westminster MPs' registers of interests introduced in 2009.

But even over three decades ago, King (1981) observing the change in the nature of the House of Commons, comments that career politicians will not want to go, *'Career politicians will want to stay in politics. They will therefore want to stay in the House of Commons. Accordingly, they will defer their retirement from the House of Commons for as long as possible.'* Echoing King, Riddell (1995) describes how the determination of career politicians to stay in Parliament once they have been elected: *'The new breed of full-time politicians is also determined to cling on to both office and seats in the Commons - though there was never a golden age of allegedly honourable politicians resigning on principle.'*

In a similar vein, Osborne (2007) paints a cogent and powerful picture of the higher stakes that MPs now face and the personal calamity that failure

represents. In contrast to Riddell, he suggests that they were more willing in the past to contemplate resignation in the event of fault or dishonour.

These perspectives chime with this research on current MPs who, with the exception of one who had already experienced the trauma of defeat, simply did not want to think about going. It was not a subject on which to dally. One serving MP has subsequently described even the thought of leaving Parliament as painfully reminiscent of the sound of '*scratching my nails down a blackboard.*'

Council leaders arguably have more of a personal and political imperative to think about leaving office given that their position within their party group may be keenly contested in some authorities, and a change of party control will inevitably lead to the end of their council leadership. Here too there was reluctance on the part of many to think too hard about how they might shape the ending of their time in office or to succession plan. While council leaders in office might have acknowledged that they should think about when and how they hoped to leave and the importance of there being a pool of able people from whom their successor might be drawn, any plans either to go or to identify and support possible future leaders, were often non-specific and put off to a later time. Yet, nurturing the leaders of the future – encouraging the confidence of some, and facilitating training to build up the capabilities of junior colleagues - is recognized as an integral part of leadership in other sectors (Hartley and Benington, 2010).

Within local government, with an increasing likelihood of full-time leaders, the risks of standing down increase. Like MPs, this research suggests that it may be difficult for council leaders to return to the profession or job from whence they came. With the degree of uncertainty about future employment and no access since 2014 to the Local Government Pension Scheme, standing down carries significant financial risks. It is notable that 80% of council seats in England and Wales go to incumbents at each election (<https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Local-Government-Final-Report.pdf>).

If the professionalization of parliamentary office continues - with local government leadership following helter-skelter in its wake - there is a compelling argument that the support on exit that is available to any professional losing their job should be available to elected representatives. Advice in writing curriculum vitae and in effective interview techniques, for example, is now standard for most who leave professional jobs.

At present, however, most former MPs and council leaders have little of the support that is available in other occupational roles and many seem almost to disappear. It can be extremely difficult even to track down who council leaders have been. In democratic terms, that is as it should be. But if the personal struggle is made so harsh and unforgiving, it is hardly surprising if moving on might be an unappealing prospect for those currently holding political office. Might some therefore not be tempted to seek to remain in office for longer than they might otherwise? Interviewees in this research hint that this may be the case. Why would they go given potential oblivion, possibly to face unemployment and financial insecurity? Might succession planning be too threatening? This study suggests it may well be. Might a local government reorganization, perhaps involving a reduction of council seats, carry high personal risks? Might it be too precarious for some even to embark on the possibility of standing in the first place given the risks involved? Might there be some groups for whom the risks would be seen to be especially high – those with jobs to which a return would be difficult, for example - thus influencing the nature and composition of those who get to be elected? This research indicates that a return to some professional roles can indeed be problematic. Any what of their legacy when politicians may outstay their time in office?

Powell's less well-known observation of Joseph Chamberlain - that an earlier resignation would have saved him from personal humiliation - could have been usefully borne in mind by a number of politicians since. Of Chamberlain, Powell (1977 p. 136) judged, '*The consequences of his failure to resign were never to be repaired.*'

Losing political office – how it is viewed by those holding office, how it is experienced and managed by those making the transition, and what happens subsequently – may be only a tiny part of a much wider, more complex landscape, but it may have some bearing on the nature and composition of the political class. If political exit could be managed more gracefully as part of a broader appreciation of the importance of fluidity in political representation, representative democracy might be enhanced.

The increasing professionalization of politics at all levels and the predominance of career politicians in the Westminster Parliament as well as the increasing pressures of office, diminish fluidity into and out of political office. It is becoming more difficult to access political office for many, it is becoming more uncomfortable to stay in office for some, and it is becoming more risky to exit office. Recalling one interviewee's comment, *'It's becoming harder and harder and why would people take those kinds of risks with their lives?'*

Notwithstanding Aristotle's dictum that time served on the Athenian council should be limited to two years, there is in the modern day an inevitable tension between bringing in new blood to serve in political office and losing valuable expertise. Professions generally are becoming more specialized and politics is no exception in this regard (Riddell, 1995). Elected political office is however exceptional in that representation is an integral part of the role. That political office should be continually 'refreshed' - that we should maximize the opportunities both to rule and to be ruled in turn - therefore has a salience missing from other roles. There is little evidence however from this study or more widely in the UK or beyond that politicians' stepping down is well tolerated, despite frequent complaints that they are out of touch. Witness the criticism directed towards two Westminster MPs, Jamie Reed (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-38390152>) and Tristram Hunt (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-38608825>), who resigned their seats in early 2017 (in different political circumstances from that in which they were elected) to go to jobs elsewhere. Is there not reason to welcome that they

were able and willing to go into a different field, taking their expertise into new terrains and to enable others to stand in their stead?

While there is a balance to be struck between the accumulation of experience gained in office and the fresh perspective from a more recently elected politician, diminishing the fluidity of access into, through and out of political office has costs for all citizens. By making it more possible for a wider range of people to step forward to serve in political office, the opportunity of the fullest expression of political citizenship is extended; and with a wider range of people having experienced political office, understanding of and confidence in politics and politicians is enhanced. Crafting '*a politics of retreat*' (Keane, 2011, p.283) - in which the transition from political office is thought about, talked about and better managed – would bring benefits not just to individual politicians and their families but also to representative democracy.

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TABLE 1 *Interview participants*

	Former politicians who stood down	Former politicians who were defeated	Current politicians
Number of interviewees	10	10	10
Number of partners interviewed/ number still with the same partner at the time of loss of office	4/8	7/9	N/A
Number who declined to be interviewed or did not reply	1	1	3