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# **Prefigurative leadership: the Building of Leadership Roles in a Municipal Campaign**

## **Abstract**

Most research on leadership focuses on how leaders view and exercise power when in office. In contrast, we study ‘prefigurative leadership’ during a municipal campaign, i.e. the way in which putative leaders construct, stage and consolidate a leadership style that foreshadows the way they will exercise power if they get elected. We rely on the study of the 2020 French municipal election in Bordeaux, characterized by political alternation, succession to a strong leader, and electoral uncertainty. Based on the triangulation of qualitative data (interviews, in situ observations of campaign events, press coverage and internal documents on the organization of the campaign), this article shows that candidates endorse a great variety of prefigurative leadership styles and juggle with a series of dilemmas inherent with the complexity of leadership roles. More generally, it contributes to the wider literature on leadership by showing how the study of political campaigns enables to study leadership in context as an ongoing process based on performance.

## **Keywords**

Leaders, Mayors, Prefigurative politics, Municipal elections, Leadership roles

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## Introduction

Recent studies on leadership demonstrate that leadership should be understood in context (Grint and Holt, 2011; Hambleton et al., 2021; Hargrove and Owens, 2003; Sutherland et al., 2022; 't Hart, 2014), as an ongoing, relational (Sancino et al., 2022) and collective (Ospina, 2017) process. Local political campaigns offer a unique opportunity to study the building of leadership, as they are deeply embedded in a particular context and put potential leaders, their teams and their allies in public competition with each other. Moreover, political campaigns rely on specific and intense communication, emphasizing the communicative dimension of political leadership (Fairhurst and Connaughton, 2014). Yet, paradoxically, few pieces have studied how leadership is built during local campaigns.

This article addresses this gap by using insights from the literature on mayoral leadership (among others, see Bäck et al., 2006; Heinelt et al., 2018; John and Cole, 1999; Judd, 2000; Karsten and Hendriks, 2017; Roberts, 2020; Teles, 2014). These studies generally focus on the way leaders envision and exercise power when they are in office (Berg and Rao, 2005), with a particular focus on leadership styles (Getimis and Hlepas, 2006; Hlepas et al., 2018). Yet, before exercising power, one has to build a convincing leadership performance during the political campaign. We divert from the dominant approaches by analyzing the building of leadership roles in a municipal campaign characterized by high uncertainty and political alternation.

We contend that political campaigns are crucial moments to understand what we call 'prefigurative leadership'. We define this concept as *the way in which putative leaders construct, stage and consolidate a leadership style that foreshadows the way they will exercise power if they get elected*. In other words, leadership is not a given but an ongoing process built with followers. It results from intentional strategies and the mobilization of various resources that (may) allow heads of lists to acquire or maintain their ability to be in a

leadership position. Leadership roles built and performed during a political campaign should prefigure the practices of power used by leaders to implement their political project and will eventually affect their ability to exercise power if they get elected. Prefigurative leadership is linked with the idea that leadership relies on the building of performances and narratives (Grint, 2014).

To study this phenomenon, we rely on the case study of an intriguing municipal campaign elections taking place in 2020 in a city of the South-West of France, Bordeaux. It constitutes a critical case to study this topic for several reasons. Firstly, all of the contenders had to succeed a strong leader. None of them possessed strongly established political resources built during the previous mandate or election. Secondly, the city experienced its first alternation in several decades in a context of strong electoral uncertainty. Thirdly, this municipal election of 2020 in Bordeaux did not revolve around intense party oppositions between distinctive projects, but around competing visions of mayoral leadership. We triangulate various qualitative data (interviews, in situ observations of campaign events, press coverage and internal documents on the organization of the campaign, see Appendix 1).

The theoretical section presents a typology of leadership styles we use as a starting point before showing its limitations and the way in which the concept of prefigurative leadership could overcome these pitfalls. The research design section explains the choice to focus on a single municipal election in Bordeaux and presents our qualitative material. The four following sections present the prefigurative leadership roles of the four main candidates, analyzing four dimensions: the policy proposals of the main candidates, how they handle the legacy of the former strong mayor, their relationship to parties and collective organizations, and their self-presentation strategies. Finally, we summarize the main results and discuss how they speak to the wider leadership literature.

## Mayoral Leadership roles and prefigurative leadership

### *A Typology of Mayoral Leadership Styles*

Mayor leadership is characterized by the shift from ‘local government’ to ‘local governance’ (John, 2001; Stoker, 2006), with the advent of an increasingly complex, multilevel context for mayors, which in turn affects their leadership styles. Mayors can build very different forms of leadership within the same environment, according to their own personal abilities, their interpretation of the context, or their vision of change (Leach and Lowndes, 2007; Lowndes and Leach, 2004; Reynaert et al., 2009; Teles, 2014). Consequently, there is no convergence in the practice of local leadership.

In order to make sense of the variety of leadership styles endorsed by mayors, several authors have established typologies. Refining former attempts (John and Cole, 1999), the dominant typology accounts for two main factors (see Figure 1): the leadership orientation, and the attitude towards the exercise of power (Getimis and Hlepas, 2006; Hlepas et al., 2018).

**Figure 1.** *Typology of leadership styles*

<b>Exercise of power</b>		
Cooperative	<b>Visionary</b>	<b>Consensus facilitator</b>
Authoritarian	<b>City Boss</b>	<b>Protector</b>
	Strategic leadership	Reproductive leadership
	<b>Leadership orientation</b>	

*Source: Hlepas, Chantzaras, and Getimis 2018, 217*

The leadership orientation is linked with the way in which leaders envision their role. Strategic leaders aim at developing distinctive political agendas, are change-oriented and seek to transform their environment. They are proactive, act with a long-term perspective, and encourage change and innovations to attract new resources and build new capacities. Reproductive leaders, on the contrary, do not develop a long-term transformative political agenda, are status quo oriented, reactive, and focus on routine work and traditional municipal activities (Getimis and Hlepas, 2006).

The second dimension relates to the exercise of power. Authoritarian leaders have a top-down and personal approach of command and control, do not valorize institutions of participation and coordination, and determine the municipal agenda unilaterally. Cooperative leaders determine the municipal agenda multilaterally, include several actors in an open style of exercising power and coordinate political action through consensus, bargaining, and deliberation. As a consequence, four leadership styles can be identified: the visionary (strategic and cooperative); the consensus facilitator (reproductive and cooperative); the city boss (strategic and authoritarian); and the protector (reproductive and authoritarian, Getimis and Hlepas, 2006; Hlepas et al., 2018). Dominant leadership styles may evolve over time. For instance, in 2006, Getimis and Hlepas (2006) showed that there was an important predilection across mayors in Europe for an authoritarian exercise of power and a strategic leadership, whereas in the late 2010s, authors identify a general tendency towards a facilitative and cooperative leadership style because of the increasing complexity of local governance (Hlepas et al., 2018).

This typology does not escape what Collinson calls the ‘dichotomization’ and the opposition of ‘immutable polarities’, and tends to over-simplify ‘the complex, inter-connected and shifting relationships that characterize leadership dynamics’ (2014: 39). We use it as an

analytical starting point, but we develop the concept of prefigurative leadership to address the dilemmas and ambivalences overlooked by this typology of leadership styles that is too leader-centric, static and neglects collective dynamics and context-specific factors. This typology should be used critically: one may try to impose a dominant leadership style, but this does not mean that one is actually able of doing so.

### *Prefigurative leadership during municipal campaigns*

The works presented above study leaders when they are in power, without focusing on the moment in which leadership is built and on the processual, performative and contextual aspects of leadership. We contend that electoral campaigns are key moments in which putative leaders mobilize and build resources that are critical not only during the election period, but also to exercise power after the election. Campaigns can be conceptualized as moments of prefigurative leadership: candidates do not only put forward policy proposals, but also provide voters with a vision of what kind of leadership they want to incarnate and actively build leadership roles that prefigure their exercise of power. By performing their ability to rely on networks and carry on with their program during the campaign, they also define the nature of their support and authority. As already mentioned in the introduction, stemming from a constructivist perspective, we define prefigurative leadership as the way in which candidate leaders create, stage and then establish a leadership style that prefigures their future mode of exercising power.

The concept is directly inspired by the notion of prefigurative politics initially used to study social movements and revolutionary processes. Carl Boggs (1977), who first coined the term, defines it as ‘the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture and human experience that are the

ultimate goal'. Following Leach (2013), it has been defined as 'a political orientation based on the premise that the ends a social movement achieves are fundamentally shaped by the means it employs, and that movements should therefore do their best to choose means that embody or 'prefigure' the kind of society they want to bring about'. Social and political actors express the political 'ends' of their actions through their 'means' and create alternative arrangements or institutions within their movements that prefigure what a future political project could look like.

Applied to the building of leadership over political campaigns, this means that candidates propose what Yates calls 'performance of alternatives to outsiders' (2015, 11): they build a political project (the ends) and perform a type of leadership that prefigures their future exercise of power (the means). To do so, they mobilize strategic resources and build performances in order to acquire or maintain their ability to be in a leadership position. As argued by Swain (2019), prefiguration and strategy are not opposed: performances need to be both effective and attractive enough to convince followers. The ends and the means are always intertwined. During a campaign, candidates have to perform their leadership in order to mobilize resources and convince voters of their ability to govern, by conflating their political platform with their candidate performance.

To overcome the limitation of the current main typology of mayoral leadership *styles*, we also contend that it is more promising to talk about leadership *roles*. French ethnographies on professional politicians have insisted on the relational and fluid nature of leadership through the notion of 'role-taking' (Le Bart 2003) or of 'role prescriptions' defined by Lagroye as 'the succession of behaviors, ways of doing things, "tricks" that appear in the daily exercise of the profession of elected official (...) and force him or her to resort, when prompted, to different registers of justification.' (1994: 5). Leaders or aspiring leaders internalize know-how, representations and practices related to their function, but also offer



different performances of their role and navigate between different roles embedded in multiple configurations of social relations (Lagroye, 1994). All leaders have to take on multiple and sometimes contradictory roles (Verheul and Schaap, 2010). **In the remaining of the article, we study how prefigurative leadership illuminated the current evolution in French mayoral leadership by analyzing four distinctive dimensions of the leadership roles endorsed by putative leaders during political campaigns.**

The first dimension deals with the political project of the different candidates. This enables to understand both the leadership orientation of the leaders (do they impulse a strategic vision or have a reactive and reproductive political platform?) and, to a lesser extent, the cooperative or authoritarian exercise of power envisioned by the leader. The second dimension relates to the relationship that each of the four putative leaders entertain with the legacy of the former mayor, in order to understand their relationship with the political status quo. The third dimension deals with leaders' relationships with parties, coalitions and organized groups during the campaign, in order to analyze the exercise of power the candidate is advocating (authoritarian or cooperative). Finally, we analyze the self-presentation strategies of the four main candidates. These strategies give indications also about their preferred forms of legitimization, their political capital (Bennister et al., 2015; Bourdieu, 1981) and their personal resources. These four dimensions capture the interplay between the collective and individual dimensions of leadership. They relate to how individual candidates define themselves but also to how they interact with organized groups and parties in particular.

## **Research design and methods**

*A case study in the 2020 French municipal campaign: Bordeaux*

We rely on a critical case study based on the French municipal campaign in 2020 in a major city of the South West of France, Bordeaux. Both are emblematic of the transformations taking place in local government. France is a country which corresponds to the strong mayor model (Borraz and Négrier, 2007; Kerrouche, 2005) i.e. a context in which the mayor has considerable executive authority and discretion in municipal affairs. However, the leadership of French mayors has now weakened with the emergence of more complex policy environments (Desage and Guéranger, 2014), the increasing competition among cities and a more limited ability to implement major policy change (Bäck et al., 2006; Panara and Varney, 2013). This case is particularly telling to study prefigurative leaderships in municipal campaigns for several reasons.

Firstly, the peculiar electoral conjuncture of 2020 combines political alternation and strong electoral uncertainty. The 2020 French municipal elections took place after the Yellow Vests movement and during the Covid19 pandemic, with more than four months between the first and the second round. In 2020, Bordeaux experienced for the first time in 73 years a truly competitive election with three contestants in the second round. The turnout was extremely low, which amplified the political uncertainty of the final outcome. In Bordeaux as in other major cities (Grenoble, Lyon, Poitiers, Strasbourg...), the Greens replaced coalitions led by traditional governing parties (the Republicans and the Socialist Party). On the evening of the second round, Pierre Hurmic (Europe écologie-les Verts, EELV, leader of a list combining left-wing parties, ecologists and members of the ‘civil society’), won the mayor's seat at the expense of the Acting Mayor, Nicolas Florian (Les Républicains, LR), leader of a center-right list. This victory by a small margin occurred despite the rallying of Thomas Cazenave, candidate of the presidential party (La République en marche, LREM), to the list of Nicolas Florian in the interval between the two rounds and the maintenance of radical-left candidate

Philippe Poutou (Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste, NPA) and his citizens' list supported by La France insoumise (LFI).

**Table 1.** Results of the second round of the municipal elections of 2020 in Bordeaux

<b>Lists</b>	<b>% of the votes</b>
Nicolas Florian - Union for Bordeaux (LR, Modem, UDI, Agir, Mouvement radical, LREM)	44,1
Pierre Hurmic - Bordeaux breathes ! (EELV, PS, PRG, Génération.s, Place publique, Nouvelle Donne, PCF, Cap 21, MDP, Urgence écologie, Génération écologie)	46,5
Philippe Poutou - Bordeaux in Struggle (NPA, LFI)	9,4
<u>Turnout</u>	<u>38,3</u>

The second reason to focus on Bordeaux is that all of the contenders had to succeed a ‘strong leader’. None of them could rely on strongly established political resources built during the previous mandate or election. They had to actively build and bring forward distinctive leadership styles during the campaign, in order to acquire the legitimacy to govern. Former Prime Minister Alain Juppé, mayor between 1995 and 2004 and 2006 and 2019 was appointed to the Constitutional council and decided unexpectedly not to run again. Even though one of the candidates, Nicolas Florian (see. *infra.*) was the incumbent, he had less than one year to govern and did not have a strong political legitimacy because of his sudden and unexpected appointment. Since 1947, the city was led by the same political family (the Gaullists) and by only two elected mayors: Jacques Chaban-Delmas (1947-1995), and Alain Juppé (1995-2019). Both of them won all the elections in the first round since 1947, were prominent national figures and have even become prime ministers while leading the city. In 1993, Chaban-Delmas defined the qualities of a good mayor of Bordeaux as follows: ‘a man of good quality and great dimension’ (quoted in Victoire 2007, 67). The mayoral leadership in Bordeaux was characterized by national stature, cross-party support, local roots, a political

clientele, and a technocratic specificity (Lagroye, 1973). By contrast, in 2020, none of the candidates had a national political stature, meaning that the traditional leadership style of Bordeaux mayors could not be invested by any of the candidates.

The third and final reason why Bordeaux constitutes an intriguing case relates with the characteristics of political competition in this city. Contrary to contexts in which competition is agonistic, municipal competition in Bordeaux has always euphemized party oppositions and depoliticized potentially divisive issues (Arambourou and Bugnon, 2016). Thus, the center-right remained in power despite the changing sociology of the city which has become closer to the left and attracted an increasing number of graduates and managers over the last decade. The municipal election of 2020 in Bordeaux did not revolve primarily around intense party oppositions between distinctive projects, but around competing visions of mayoral leaderships.

### *Methods and Materials*

This article relies on qualitative research materials (see Appendix 1). The main material is a series of 21 semi-structured interviews with major actors of the four main lists in competition in the Bordeaux municipal election of 2020 (heads of lists, campaign managers, candidates). Secondly, we conducted a series of *in situ* observations during the campaign prior to the first round, before the Covid made observations impossible, during meetings in various neighborhoods, general assemblies, or day-to-day campaign activities in the campaign headquarters. We also analyzed integrally the regional and national press coverage of the municipal campaign between February 2019 to July 2020 (536 press articles in total). We studied the first and second round manifestos of the four lists, as well as the composition of the lists which give indications about the clientele and the networks of each candidate. Finally, we also had access to campaign documents regarding campaign internal organization. We triangulated these materials to analyze the building of the leadership roles along the four

dimensions detailed above for the four main candidates running in the election: Nicolas Florian, Thomas Cazenave, Pierre Hurmic and Philippe Poutou. Contrary to various studies of leadership styles relying on surveys or self-declarative elements, we deliberately did not focus only on discourses, interviews and press declarations, but also on the observations of campaign strategies, internal documents and party manifestos.

### **Distinction and Continuity of a Consensus Facilitator**

Florian (Les Républicains, LR) was a deputy for finance since 2014 in the incumbent center-right majority and unexpectedly became mayor in 2019. This professional politician was well established locally and held various positions and elected offices since he entered politics in 1995: town councilor, departmental councilor, departmental secretary of his party, regional councilor, and metropolitan councilor.

#### *Political project*

In spite of belonging to a right-wing party, his political project was marked by environmental concerns. Local political competition in Bordeaux is characterized by ‘a conciliatory approach advocating a rallying beyond the left-right divide’ (Arambourou and Bugnon 2016, 187) and the integration of personalities from the center-left into the municipal and the campaign team. Florian defined himself as the representative of a ‘pragmatic ecology like Alain Juppé, who was the first ecologist in Bordeaux’ (*Valeurs actuelles*, 24/6/2020) at the service of ‘innovation’ and ‘employment’, based on ‘incentives’. During various campaign events and in the manifestos, we observed that Florian insisted on what he calls the ‘democratic challenge’ related to the need for ‘co-construction’ of public policies and the ‘social challenge’, echoing the strong mobilization of the Yellow Vests during 2019 in Bordeaux.

The ideological markers of the right such as law and order were barely mentioned, to the great displeasure of some of the participants and some members of his team, as noted in several interviews and observations. The emphasis on climate change constituted an attempt to regenerate the consensual municipal political enterprise while promoting a pro-business vision dear to his electorate. One of his campaign managers mentioned during our interview the ‘ineluctability’ of the themes dealt with in the municipal elections (ecology and participatory democracy) arguing that similar issues were at stake in all the municipalities because of the health and political crisis. In other words, the agenda advocated by Florian was reactive rather than proactive.

#### *Relationship with the legacy of the former mayor*

The will to promote a reproductive leadership is also illustrated by the recurrent reminder of the filiation with the former mayor. The metaphor of the political ‘father’ was omnipresent. For example, Florian declared in *Le Figaro* on 2 March 2019 that ‘for me, Juppé is a father’, positioning himself as the custodian of the action carried out over the last 25 years. This staging of the filiation also involves the discreet but regular presence of Juppé and his wife at campaign events where the press was gathered, as we noted during several of our observations.

#### *Relationship with parties and organized groups*

During his campaign, Florian euphemized party labels, even though he relied on the center-right alliance that has governed the city since 1947. None of Florian's campaign materials bore the trace of the parties that supported him. As we observed during various events and in the press, Florian stubbornly refused to be assigned to his LR label and regularly repeated that ‘his party is Bordeaux’ (*Le Figaro*, 2 March 2020), in order to be portrayed as a

pragmatic, down-to-earth, cooperative leader bringing people from various backgrounds to work together.

Nonetheless, several national and regional centrist and right-wing leaders interfered in the electoral process. Various press sources as well as several of our interviewees reported on the attempts of several emissaries to build an alliance between the presidential party of Emmanuel Macron (La République en Marche, LREM) and the incumbent list. As evidenced by the campaign organization, for instance during canvassing, Florian relied on a tight cooperation with his party allies and actively maintained the activist networks built by previous mayors. This cooperative management of party allies was also obvious during the distribution of eligible positions on the list, which respected a balance between allied parties.

### *Self-presentation strategies*

During our observations, our informal conversations, or the interviews conducted with his campaign team, one remark came back insistently: ‘Florian is not Juppé’. The comparison was, first of all, about the leadership style of the two men. As Arambourou points out, ‘Alain Juppé is an ideal-typical incarnation of the “technocrat” (2014, 311), a political figure associated with distance, elitism and coldness but also with competence, knowledge, and access to national power’. Conversely, Florian is neither an *énarque*<sup>1</sup>, nor a national political figure, nor, of course, a former prime minister. These remarks made by a non-eligible member of the list at the campaign headquarters (9 March 2020) during one of our observations illustrate this break in leadership style:

‘I met Nicolas Florian last year and I was pleasantly surprised. He's very human, very simple, he doesn't have that smugness of the big brains. Well, a big brain, an *énarque*, a benevolent

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<sup>1</sup> The ENA (National School of Administration) is one of the most prestigious elite schools in France, and has trained a great number of presidents, ministers and high civil servants since 1945.

dictator, it's reassuring, we hate him but it's reassuring. But I think that Nicolas Florian has got down to work and that he will make a very good mayor, in a completely different style.'

During all the public events we observed preceding the first round, Florian adopted a candidate's posture very much centered on care: 'Being mayor means taking care of others', 'I will be the mayor of everyday life', 'I don't want to be the mayor of Bordeaux but the mayor of the people of Bordeaux'. Underlining his local anchorage and his lack of national ambition, he also showcased his municipal team during each campaign event rather than posing as the sole decision maker. He was therefore clearly advocating a cooperative, facilitative (Hlepas et al., 2018; Teles, 2014) style of leadership insisting on its collective dimension (Ospina, 2017). The elaboration of the program and the collective governance of the campaign reflects this conception of leadership. Many interlocutors were involved in the 2020 campaign, contrasting with previous municipal campaigns which were elaborated in small committees, and final decisions being made by Juppé, as confirmed during several interviews. This collective embodiment of leadership conflicts with the strong leadership model characteristic of France in general and French Gaullist parties in particular (Mény, 2008), but is in line with the move towards more collaborative and facilitative forms of mayoral leadership in Europe (Teles, 2014).

Florian used the registers of intimacy and proximity to justify his orientation towards the reproduction of the status quo, showing his ability to comply with the new injunctions resulting from gender equality to turn them into new political resources (Connell, 2005). The will to embody proximity, care and a sense of teamwork can be understood both as a desire to distance himself from Juppé, and as a compensation for the absence of the 'technocratic' resources. Doing so, he also undermines the traditional male leadership found in conservative parties (Arambourou, 2014; Collinson and Hearn, 2014).



The irruption of the COVID crisis in March 2020 and the late and painful merger with LREM's list between the two rounds of the election undermined the image of proximity and collegiality defended by Florian due to the return to a vertical functioning. This long and unprecedented campaign illustrates the difficulty for a mayoral candidate to play with contradictory 'role constraints' (Le Bart, 2003): one based on an authoritarian vision of leadership in a situation of crisis, the other on a collegial and cooperative one. This contradiction also demonstrates that Florian struggled to assume the kind of prefigurative leadership performed during the campaign. The transition from one role (candidate) to another (acting mayor before the second round) called into question the leadership style advocated during the campaign.

### **A New "City Boss"?**

Thomas Cazenave, a young high civil servant, former deputy director of Emmanuel Macron's cabinet, former deputy secretary general at the presidency of the Republic and inter-ministerial delegate for public transformation, decided to run for LREM in 2018.

#### *Political project*

Cazenave aimed at staging his 'strategic' vision in the political project. His list was entitled 'Renewal of Bordeaux', taking up a rhetoric typical of the 'Macron enterprise' (Dolez et al., 2019). During our interview with Cazenave (28 September 2020), he told us his motivation was 'to embody something different, to renew also a lot the political staff locally'. The rhetoric of renewal was used to oppose both Florian and Hurmic. The organization of the campaign was very top-down as confirmed by members of his team during interviews and key members of other teams who were initially approached to take part in his campaign.

Cazenave and his running mates considered that they made up for their lack of political experience by the quality and the ‘vision’ of their manifesto. The project was defined as ‘centrist and progressive’ (*Le Figaro*, 8 January 2020), his program as ‘credible, realistic and demanding’ (*La Tribune de Bordeaux*, 11 February 2020). Cazenave announced in his manifesto that he wanted to ‘break with an outdated vision of the city and the metropolis’, something he confirms during our interview when he claims that ‘the city project had come to an end’.

The themes and solutions put forward in the program are not fundamentally different from the proposals of the Republican and the ecologist candidates. What distinguishes Cazenave is a discourse using categories mobilized by Macron in 2017 and Juppé in 1995: the promotion of a strategic leadership mixing modernizing audacity, a desire for reform and an ideological synthesis overcoming traditional political cleavages. The study of the manifestos of Florian, Hurmic and Cazenave shows that the latter distinguishes himself by the discursive presentation of the project rather than by the actual content of his proposals.

#### *Relationship with the legacy of the former mayor*

Cazenave posed as the ideological heir of Juppé, presenting his political enterprise as the will to unite the ‘progressives’ in a project going from the center-left to the center-right, contrary to Florian whom he considered to be the representative of the right. Cazenave described Juppé in these terms during our interview:

‘He gradually distanced himself from LR (...) He recognized a great intellectual and political proximity around the European project defended by the President of the Republic (...), started to join the presidential majority. Juppeism is in a central / progressive axis’ (Interview, 28 September 2020).

To illustrate his proximity with the former mayor, Cazenave insisted on Juppé's national positions rather than on his local action. This strategy is out of step with municipal campaigns in France which value local embeddedness and put national politics aside (Le Bart, 2003).

### *Relationship with parties and organized groups*

The analysis of the campaign organization of Cazenave further demonstrates his top-down, personalized and vertical vision of the exercise of power. Unlike other lists, he could not rely on grassroots activists networks. As explained to us during various interviews, a small selection committee recruited the list's members on the basis of their CVs. Most of them had little previous involvement in associations, community activities, or neighborhood networks. This lack of local embeddedness and grassroots support, despite prestigious curricula, complicated the everyday management of the campaign.

Cazenave and local activists refused to constitute a joint list with Florian despite the intervention of several national leaders of the right and the center (see *supra.*). This was both the result of Cazenave's will to carry his own political project, but also of the need to give a local anchorage to LREM. Cazenave's behavior during the inter-round period reflected both his persistent reluctance towards Florian and a difficulty in accepting the constraints of local party politics, including historical rivalries. Several interviews allowed us to confirm that Cazenave's list approached the ecologist candidate before and after the second round to try to merge. These attempts were categorically rejected by the coalition partners of the allies of the Green leader. Cazenave then proposed a grand coalition to Hurmic and Florian, which they both refused, before he grudgingly merged with Florian. He minimized the compromises and cooperation needed to build large alliances, which reflects a rather vertical view of power and the lack of practice in dealing with multiple and complex local political networks. As argued by Hambleton et al., 'the city boss could well have a clear vision of what they want to see happen, but they are unlikely to be very good at listening to other voices. They may lack the

understanding, or patience, to participate in active networking and innovative policy making that modern city politics now require' (2021: 11–12). This confirms that leadership should always be considered in context (Hargrove and Owens, 2003) and the relevance of the idea of place-based power (Hambleton et al., 2021): the ability of given candidates to understand the specific nature of the context they compete in constitutes a key factor of electoral success or lack thereof.

### *Self-presentation strategies*

Cazenave's attempt to position himself as a new 'city boss' is even more obvious when we examine his self-presentation strategies in the press, the manifestos and during the observations of public events. His team members and the candidate himself regularly compared him with Juppé. They underlined, first of all, the prestigious curriculum of the two men, marked by an elite academic education and the high civil service. One of her running mates described him as a 'smiling Juppé' (*Sud Ouest*, 8 February 2020). As Juppé, Cazenave relied on the attributes of technocracy: experience in the high civil service, ties with national leaders including the president of the Republic himself, prestigious education which has allowed him to develop a 'vision'. Unlike Florian who emphasized proximity and authenticity, Cazenave revived a more vertical and authoritarian representation of the political profession, in line with the legitimizing style of the 'entrepreneurial mayor', highlighting his particular skills, his spirit of initiative and all the characteristics of a decision maker. As Le Bart points out, 'it is not easy to appear both as an effective decision maker and as an elected official who listens. The first register calls for forms of self-presentation based on distinction (competence, sense of decision, capacity for anticipation, entrepreneurial spirit, etc.), while the second works in the opposite direction (proximity implies simplicity)' (2003, 41). Cazenave clearly leaned towards the first register, against current trends in an increasingly

complex political and policy environment (Teles, 2014), whereas Florian made the opposite choice.

### **The Dilemmas of a Moderate Visionary Leader**

Pierre Hurmic, who won the election with his list ‘Bordeaux breathes’ (Bordeaux respire) with an ecologist and left-wing coalition, is a lawyer who is involved in local politics for Europe écologie les Verts (EELV) and an opposition municipal councilor since 1995.

#### *Political project*

The manifesto of ‘Bordeaux breathes’ put the issue of climate change at the forefront. Hurmic posed as the only candidate who had concretely demonstrated his long-term ecological commitment and called voters ‘to beware of counterfeits’ (*Sud Ouest*, 12 September 2019) by castigating the opportunistic commitment of his opponents on this issue. The staging of the elaboration of the manifesto followed the same participatory pattern as those of Florian and Cazenave and resulted in a dense program of about a hundred pages co-constructed with the citizens centered on three priorities: ‘adapting the city’, ‘reinforcing the links’ and ‘oxygenating democracy’, with Hurmic's constant concern to focus on issues that are not politically divisive, such as climate change. As confirmed by several interviewees, the party organizations involved in the coalition put forward various proposals and were fully involved in the definition of the campaign priorities. This demonstrates Hurmic’s will to pose as a leader with a long-term vision working in close cooperation with his teammates.

#### *Relationship with the legacy of the former mayor*

During the campaign, Hurmic hesitated between two opposed stances: he wanted to appear both as a strategic leader with a clear vision but also as a moderate who would not

break abruptly with the past. This is manifest in certain positions taken during the campaign. During the presentation of his manifesto, Hurmic described Juppé's record as 'generally good' (*Sud Ouest*, 17 January 2020). As a running mate from a left-wing party of the coalition pointed out during our interview (25 September 2020):

'We cringed! (...) Because it's complicated to build a campaign on themes such as zero land artificialization and (...) say at the same time (...) that the balance sheet is positive when we're defending a large part of the opposite of what has been done in recent years.'

However, well aware that a very large part of the voters needed for their potential victory supported Juppé in 2014, it seemed impossible for Hurmic and his team to directly oppose the action of their illustrious predecessor, hindering the ability to assume the strategic break with the past. This example illustrates Hurmic's ambivalence and his hesitation between strategic leadership and preservation of the status quo. This contradiction is even more obvious when we examine the first months in office of the new mayor and his team. The unexpected victory of an inexperienced team and the rigidities of the functioning of a complex local administration hindered their ability to implement strategic breaks and led to a phase essentially dedicated to everyday management of existing policies. For instance, one of the running mates of Hurmic, currently deputy mayor, explains during our interview (22 October 2020):

'All of us were discovering everything. What the departments are, how they work, what the subjects are at the same time, because we have to keep the town hall running (...). So we had to understand, get into the subjects, get the basic functioning going, and understand the articulation with the departments''.

*Relationship with parties and organized groups*

Even though Hurmic rejected party politics as being ‘outdated’ (*Le Figaro*, 18 October 2019), the everyday organization of the campaign relied heavily on local parties within an institutionalized coalition. The genesis of the ‘Bordeaux breathes’ list resulted from a long and complex party negotiation. Regular meetings and public events between multiple Green and left-wing party organizations took place between March and September 2019 (PS, EELV, Génération (s), PRG, PCF, Radicaux de gauche, Mouvement des progressistes, Place publique, Nouvelle donne, Bordeaux Maintenant). Even though EELV took part in these unitary endeavors, Hurmic launched his own initiatives to unify all the ecologist forces over the summer 2019. He managed to impose his candidacy as head of list while the PS, traditionally the dominant player on the left, was undermined by local and national divisions. After complex negotiations, the official agreement was reached in December 2019. It provided for the creation of a steering committee of the campaign composed of about twenty people including representatives of each political force involved in proportion to their weight in the list. On all campaign documents, the acronyms of the party organizations were visible. The collective organization clearly shows the cooperative vision of Hurmic’s prefigurative leadership. This collective vision of leadership was enacted during the first months in office, as confirmed by several interviewees: for instance, the allocation of delegations took place during a whole weekend of negotiation and compromise, with extremely collegial forms of decision-making.

### *Self-presentation strategies*

Hurmic led the campaign by emphasizing what he considered to be his main asset in the face of his opponents: the constancy of his ecological commitment, a guarantee of his integrity and his vision. Hurmic strategically played with (positive) stereotypes associated with his origins: the Basque Country (obstinacy) and the Gironde (moderation and rejection of Parisian Jacobinism). He also described himself as someone who ‘likes the discipline of a

long-distance runner, gritting his teeth, holding on, setting a goal, reaching it' (*Sud Ouest*, 30 June 2020). Finally, he is a practicing Catholic, an element that he did not put forward himself but that his detractors often remind of (*Sud Ouest*, 30 June 2020). Faced with attacks from the left, who blamed him for being too moderate, and from the right, who wanted to confine him to the posture of the 'eternal opponent', Hurmic did not hesitate to take advantage of his 'bourgeois' condition (*Agence France Presse*, 19 February 2020) to showcase his moderation. Rather than the leadership of proximity of Florian or the entrepreneurial vision of Cazenave, Hurmic presented himself as a man with unshakeable convictions, as evidenced by all his social, physical and political dispositions. Again, the exercise of power demonstrates the potential contradiction between its visionary prefigurative leadership and the actual way to govern: as confirmed by several interviews, Hurmic proved a very cautious leader once in office, refusing to endorse strategic political decisions that would have broken too abruptly with the past.

### **The Personalization of the Collective: Building the Leadership of the Opposition**

Philippe Poutou was the head of the radical-left-wing 'Bordeaux in struggle' list, which made a very clear break with the policies of the incumbent mayor. He is the former candidate of the New Anti-Capitalist Party in the presidential elections of 2012 and 2017, a laid-out worker of the Ford-Blanquefort factory and famous local figure in various social movements and elections since 2007. Unlike the three other candidates, it is hard to describe Poutou's vision of leadership by relying on the typology of Getimis and Hlepas (2006). This is mainly the case because Poutou did not seek to present himself as a future mayor, but as the future leader of the opposition, a role that has rarely been studied at the national level (Heppell, 2012; Surel, 2004) and even less so at the local level.



### *Political project*

Poutou and the members of 'Bordeaux in struggle' believed that there were fundamental differences between their manifesto and the one of 'Bordeaux breathes', both in terms of content and style. The program was not elaborated in participatory workshops but drawn up in general assemblies and presented in public meetings. It aimed to demonstrate the capacity to make demands that respond to social emergencies. Poutou highlighted the specific conception of the role of local elected representatives: to be the voice of social struggles and a transmission belt between councilors and the people, through general assemblies to prepare the municipal councils. In this sense, Poutou broke with classical opposition roles. The press pictured him as a 'permanent opponent' and criticized his emphasis on class struggle. During our interview (12 September 2020), Poutou, for his part, was unapologetic about this strategy: 'From the beginning, we raised issues from the point of view of social class, poverty. The social movement of the Yellow Vests revealed this. (...) We could see that there was a poor world, a precarious world, a world which felt excluded. As a result, there was this rupture, and we are the bearers of this'.

### *Relationship with the legacy of the former mayor*

The list sought to mirror the social composition of the city. Poutou and the other members of the list clearly insisted on the profoundly collective and cooperative dimension of their political enterprise. Their campaign style was agonistic: the political stance and sociology of the list reflected the class conflicts of which the political field is the immediate translation. The candidates referred to their opponents as 'the Chaban-Juppé system' and as members of a social elite incapable of representing working-class neighborhoods and people. In the second round manifesto, Poutou insisted: 'We must turn the table upside down immediately and put an end to decades of co-management'. Unlike the three other candidates,

Poutou is the only one who explicitly rejected any links with the legacy of the former mayor, equating all of its competitors with the political and social status quo. After the election, Poutou's prefigurative agonistic leadership of the opposition was confirmed by his outbursts at the City Council.

### *Relationship with parties and organized groups*

The setting of the list occurred in a context of proliferation of so-called 'citizen lists' actually led by party leaders in the French municipal election of 2020. The list resulted from the junction in January 2020 of a citizen's collective supported by the radical left-wing parties France insoumise (LFI) and the NPA (Della Sudda and Gaborit, 2022). The assemblies leading to the list gathered party activists, prominent figures of recent social movements and community activists and defined the main campaign themes (housing, transport, and education). For this France insoumise candidate at the bottom of the list, 'it was the national strategy: Popular federation. And then try to do with people, "citizens", associations, activists of all kinds on causes that are close to us' (Interview, 11 July 2020). The composition of the list took place after a general assembly, with a call for volunteers. The first ten positions negotiated according to the weight of the affiliated and non-affiliated members, whereas the following positions were allocated according to personal requests. The list then organized the division of labor between the head of list (who acted as the figurehead of the whole collective) and the other running mates. Parties played a structuring role in daily campaign activities, working in close collaboration with non-affiliated members of the list. Non-party members, such as the Yellow Vests or the community activists, insisted on the need to ensure a balance between party members and non-affiliated members, fearing party activists domination. Indeed, as confirmed by the first months in opposition, the horizontal functioning of non-party activists conflicted with the oligarchic tendencies inherent to party organizations. Moreover, the strong personalization of Poutou's leadership left little room for newcomers

during municipal councils and exacerbated conflicts within the opposition group, as illustrated by the resignation of the only Yellow Vest opposition councilor only one year after the election.

### *Self-presentation strategies*

The self-presentation strategies of Poutou enable to better understand the way in which he performed his prefigurative opposition leadership. Refusing to wear a suit and a tie, even during the presidential campaign, he plays out a blue collar and agonistic identity. In January 2020, Poutou rushed to the polls and announced on the set of TV7 that he wanted to ‘move the lines, shake up the habits’. The municipal election was thus presented as a natural outlet for social protest: ‘it's our municipal council, the field’. At the same time, just as Juppé did when he ran in 1995, Poutou's leadership was presented as ‘self-evident’, relying on his activist experience and personality. One of his running mates explained during our interview (25 September 2020):

‘Philippe Poutou's personality was obvious. It was really obvious. Because I mean, we needed someone who really represents our struggles (...). Moreover, he had run presidential campaigns, which gave him a political base and political experience which could be quite useful’.

The candidate's trade union activism, and long experience of contentious and national politics in different networks was regarded as a crucial resource for the list and a guarantee for a combative opposition leader. ‘Bordeaux in struggle’ was therefore structured both around a deeply collective dimension through links with the different social mobilizations, and around the personalization of a charismatic figure, who served as the embodiment of these different struggles as the cement of the list.

## Summary of key findings

Most of the studies on local leadership focus either on the observation of leaders when they are in power, or on the study of their representation of the role through interviews and questionnaires. We chose a different approach by studying empirically how candidates embody prefigurative leadership roles over the course of a municipal campaign (Table 2). The triangulation of various qualitative materials enables to understand how candidates relate to the political status quo and their view of the exercise of power (Getimis and Hlepas, 2006; Hlepas et al., 2018), but also how the building of leadership roles is plagued with ambivalences and contradictions.

**Table 2.** *Summary of the prefigurative leadership roles developed in the campaign*

<i>Dimension of analysis</i>	<i>Florian (consensus facilitator)</i>	<i>Cazenave (city boss)</i>	<i>Hurmic (moderate visionary)</i>	<i>Poutou (personalization of the collective)</i>
<i>Political project</i>	Reactive agenda focusing on unavoidable themes	Strategic, centrist and progressive agenda elaborated top-down	'True' ecological commitment, long-term strategic vision	Agenda elaborated in general assemblies to address social emergencies
<i>Relationship with the legacy of the former mayor</i>	'Filiation' with the former mayor	Self-proclaimed 'ideological heir' of the former mayor	Moderate break with the past	Clear break with the former mayor and other candidates
<i>Relationship with parties and organized groups</i>	'No-party label' rhetoric but tight cooperation with party allies	Lack of links with grassroots groups, minimization of the constraints of party politics	Campaign activities heavily relying on parties, institutionalization of coalition practices	Cooperation and negotiation between party members and non-affiliated members
<i>Self-presentation strategies</i>	Care, intimacy, proximity, collegiality	Technocratic attributes, competence, entrepreneurial qualities	Constancy, integrity, moderation, discipline	Charisma, personalization of collective struggles

This study first demonstrates the variety of prefigurative leadership styles that candidates have tried to embody. Florian positioned himself as a consensus facilitator and as the custodian of the action of the former mayor. Cazenave sought to acknowledge the incumbent's legacy by positioning himself as a new 'city boss' just as Juppé in 1995. Hurmic tried to promote a strategic and cooperative form of leadership but refused to break too

directly with the political status quo. Poutou intended to present himself as the true leader of the opposition and as the only alternative to break away from a ‘system’, through a personalized incarnation of the collective (see Table 2). During the campaign, contenders tried to capitalize on a variety of individual and collective resources to prefigure their future leadership in office and in opposition. They did so in a constrained context in order to embody a type of leadership which could best serve their political enterprise during and *after* the election. Some explicitly tried to take over the leadership assets of the former mayor to appear as legitimate, either by using his networks and staging filiation (Florian), or by claiming his ideological heritage and his personal qualities (Cazenave). Others actively put in place a campaign organization that could prefigure their future functioning after the election, by institutionalizing coalition practices (Hurmic) or general assemblies linking representatives with grassroots organizations (Poutou).

The second main result is the difficulty to perform convincingly a single leadership style when confronted to the multiple arenas in which a political campaign takes place and to the arrival in power or in opposition. All candidates juggled with a series of dilemmas that are inherent with the complexity of mayoral roles (Verheul and Schaap, 2010) and with leadership in general (Collinson, 2014): proximity vs. competence, authoritarian decision-making vs. cooperative decision-making, status quo vs. alternation, personalization vs. collective. Campaigns enable putative leaders to construct, stage and consolidate a leadership role that foreshadows the way they will exercise power if they get elected, but these attempts are not always successful. The confrontation of prefigurative leadership roles between candidates, arenas and phases of the campaign brought to light various contradictions and ambivalences. For instance, the incompatible prefigurative leadership styles of the center-right candidates (consensus facilitator vs. city boss) hindered the ability of these potential political partners to collaborate and exacerbated political rivalries, even though they

eventually merged during the inter-round period. By contrast, the candidate's ability to bring together numerous coalition partners and to build a relatively cohesive collective organization during the electoral campaign enabled the Green-Center Left coalition's candidate to build a leadership role that he pursued when he got into office, even though he actually abandoned much of his 'strategic' claims. For the radical left candidate, the difficult balance between personalization and collective governance is now put under strain by internal conflicts on political strategies. Prefigurative leadership styles can therefore facilitate or hinder potential political collaborations and more or less effectively enable the accumulation of resources that can be mobilized after the campaign.

### **Discussion and conclusions**

How can our conclusions travel beyond our case study and how do they inform leadership studies more generally? This study explores the concept of prefigurative leadership in a very specific local political context. Further studies should test the ability of this concept to travel in settings where the power configuration takes other forms and shapes. Nevertheless, several valuable lessons emerge from our study.

First of all, we argue that prefigurative leadership is a particularly relevant concept to study local political campaigns. Indeed, political resources and leadership performances should always be understood as embedded in a given local context (Hambleton et al., 2021). The efficiency of prefigurative leadership roles is highly dependent on the specific local context. Here, we studied a personalized political campaign due to the institutional role of mayors in France, even though campaign dynamics evidence the interplay between the personal and collective characteristics of leadership (Grint, 2014). However, even in countries with a 'primus inter pares' form of leadership with a more consensual and collective style of

decision-making (Reynaert et al., 2009), prefigurative leadership could help understanding whether electoral campaigns can play a part in the acquisition and maintenance of relevant political resources for potential leaders. For instance, using the case of Netherlands, Karsten and Hendriks (2017) show that in consensus democracies, mayors do not valorize the ‘decide-and-accomplish’ leadership, but rather the ‘bridging-and-bonding’ leadership in which they act as the democratic guardians above political parties.

Secondly, we believe that the concept of prefigurative leadership roles speaks to studies conceiving leadership as a performance based on the building of narratives (Grint, 2014). This performance can be more or less convincing according to the arena, the moment and the local context in which it takes place. Leadership is never given and disincarnated, but is built, staged and embedded in complex environments and multiple social and political spheres. To use Grint and Holt’s expression, (2011: 95) ‘leadership does not occur ‘in theory’ but ‘in practice’. Leadership styles (Getimis and Hlepas, 2006; Hlepas et al., 2018) are not static and engraved in stone, but shifting, fluid, dynamic and always related to the multiple roles (know-how, representation and practices performed in various configurations of social relations) performed by leaders or aspiring leaders (Lagroye, 1994; Le Bart, 2003). The concept of prefigurative leadership helps us to transcend the dichotomies of current typologies.

Thirdly, our study demonstrates the importance of studying empirically the contradiction and the confrontation between the individual-centered aspects of leadership and its collective dimension, which is made more explicit during political campaigns. Indeed, as campaigns occur in multiple arenas (some internal, such as party gatherings or coalition discussions, some public such as interviews, political meetings or, demonstrations), they offer an intriguing setting to study the way in which putative leaders mobilize alternatively

individual and collective resources to build their leadership role. Leadership is neither purely individual nor collective (Ospina, 2017): it is both.

Fourthly and finally, this study and the concept of prefigurative leadership shows that the building of leadership occurs well before becoming an actual leader. Leadership is therefore best understood as processual (Schweiger et al., 2020). The ability to build a convincing performance of various leadership roles before accessing to the leadership function is the result of a complex process and influences the ability to become an actual leader.



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