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# Leadership and the Australian Greens

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## *Abstract*

This paper examines the inherent tension between a Green political party's genesis and official ideology and the conventional forms and practices of party leadership enacted in the vast bulk of other parties, regardless of their place on the ideological spectrum. A rich picture is painted of this ongoing struggle through a case study of the Australian Greens with vivid descriptions presented on organisational leadership issues by Australian state and federal Green members of parliaments. What emerges from the data is the Australian Green MPs' conundrum in retaining an egalitarian and participatory democracy ethos while seeking to expand their existing frame of leadership to being both more pragmatic and oriented towards active involvement in government.

## Keywords

Australian Greens, parliamentary, leadership, eco-feminism

## Introduction

This article is about leadership in the Australian Greens. It reports on the research undertaken during 2011, which examined the views of leadership amongst 13 then-elected Australian Green Members of Parliament (MPs). Specifically, each of the MPs interviewed was asked for her/his understanding and application of 'leadership' and organisational leadership structures within their state and federal parliamentary party rooms (PPR). Although the role of leaders has been examined in the context of European Green parties (Kaelberer, 1998; Katz and Mair, 1993; Kitschelt, 1989; Mayer and Ely, 1998; Poguntke, 1987), it is less well examined in the Australian parliamentary setting. The Australian Greens are now involved in passing legislation in both houses of the Commonwealth parliament, and in the state and territory parliaments of New South Wales, (NSW), Victoria (Vic), Tasmania (Tas), Western Australia (WA), South Australia (SA) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Of particular note are two parliamentary milestones for the Greens; in the Tasmanian parliament, where by 2011 two members occupied the Government benches and held Ministries, and at the federal level where the 10 Green MPs were, until very recently, in a loose, but formal, alliance with the centre-left Australian Labour Party (ALP) in the Commonwealth Parliament. Since Green MPs are taking part in governing coalitions,<sup>1</sup> it is important that Australians are able to understand Green leadership roles and processes, so these can be compared with how other Australian political parties enact leadership in parliament.

In this paper, the authors briefly examine varied perspectives of leadership in Australian politics and then outline the methodology underpinning the research project. The core of the paper details the opinions and perspectives of the Green MPs who responded to an interview or questionnaire. Each elected Green MP at both the state and federal level in 2011 (a total of 34) was invited to participate in the study: to ascertain what organisational leadership positions and processes were being practiced in the various party rooms. The results of the interviews reveals that leadership models are still evolving, but as the number of MPs has increased in each electoral jurisdiction, so too has the need to codify decision making practices, most commonly through the adoption of a set of Party Room Rules (PRR). The paper concludes with an analysis of Green leadership as it functions today and argues that the data reveal marked differences in the types of PRR adopted by territory, state and national party organisations and notes ongoing resistance from within the cadre of MPs to some changes. Nevertheless, the research data also suggest that the evolving leadership model within the Greens is more formalised while retaining eco-feminist and transformational characteristics.

Cunningham currently holds a national office bearer position within the Greens, and Jackson is a former office holder at both state and national levels.

## Leadership positions

Leadership is one of the oldest areas of studies in the humanities (Ammeter et al., 2002: 752) and there has been a plethora of leadership research conducted and leadership theories created. This paper will focus on one area of leadership theory; leadership position within an organisational structure and how rank can be a basis of power and influence (Ammeter et al., 2002: 758).

Political party leadership is a niche study in leadership theorisation. This study only became important in Australia after the passing of amendments to the Commonwealth Electoral Act in 1984 that 'set up a system for registering and regulating political parties' (Harris, 2010: 71). Indeed, prior to 1977, parties were not recognised in any Australian electoral legislation (Orr et al., 2003: 394), and even with this formal recognition of political parties the older Australian parties continue to opt for a single-leader model derived from established Westminster practice. This is despite there being a multitude of leadership models which could be opted for (e.g. duopolistic, shared, collective or rotating leadership), Walter and Strangio's (2007) claim that leadership-centric politics is detrimental to democracy, and Kane et al. (2009) analysis in support of more dispersed democratic leadership models.

In Australia's academe, political leadership is most often perceived through the lens of a party government model of representation (Smith et al., 2012). This perspective analyses macro and micro levels of organisations and systems with a shared world view in which leadership structures are entrenched in a political military-industrial complex. Arguably, this framework entails a tacit understanding that hierarchical leadership is a given, and electoral success gives great power and influence to a party's elected representatives (Katz and Mair, 2002; Vromen and Gauja, 2009: 91), notwithstanding McAllister's caveat that the 'nature of legislative, executive and electoral institutions mould the style and substance of political leadership within a country' (2007: 577).

Hierarchical leadership has been perceived as 'normal' during the last century in Australia, when the major parties, the ALP and the Liberal/National Coalition parties (LNP), have dominated parliament and played the politics of power and leadership ruthlessly. In this party-government world view, party leaders manage their parliamentary colleagues to attain solidarity for Cabinet decisions and PRR (Hede and Wear, 1995). It is a system in which the slimmest majority can overrule a significant minority, where the transaction of votes for positional authority is the currency that encourages obedience, and where a zero-sum, 'winner take all' perspective is the dominant media framing of the political issues covered each day.

In this atmosphere of realpolitik, the initial question of whether hierarchical leadership is inevitable has rarely been discussed. Granted, there has been a few instances when so-called 'left' or 'progressive' non-Green parties have tentatively questioned the inevitability of leadership positions. Stears (2011) argues, for example, that the Labour party in the UK has never been comfortable with leadership hierarchies. He sees this discomfort from two extremes, with one Labour perspective being 'inherently suspect about the idea of leadership' because the ideal of egalitarianism 'insists that no one should think of themselves as a "above" the crowd', whereas the opposite perspective argues that without party leadership 'the party becomes a mess, incapable of designing a programme of its own, let alone advancing one effectively to the electorate' (65). We argue that in Australia, leadership and hierarchy tensions are not strong in any of the older parties but the Australian Greens is the one party that demonstrates existential tensions with positional authority and leadership power.

Leadership theory debates the pros and cons of positional power and leadership hierarchies; with one view in the social sciences perceiving leadership as unavoidable and 'inherent to any group or organization that lasts for a while' and a competing view perceives leadership as 'widespread but not inevitable . . . (especially) in the framework of

small groups that strongly embrace horizontality, reject leadership, and develop ways and techniques to turn this ideal into reality' (Rucht, 2012: 100). This theoretical debate about political leadership has been playing out in the Australian Greens (AG) and within the broader canvas of leadership arrangements in Green parties of some political significance around the globe. Table 1 reveals a mixture of previous and current leadership mechanisms in various global Green parties. The parties chosen have (with the exception of England and Wales and Canada) figured prominently in national and state parliaments, with most having also participated in government as a junior coalition partner. What the table shows is that a number of Green parties have changed their leadership structures in recent years and nearly all the parties have moved from horizontal models to more vertical structures. What it doesn't show is why this pattern towards leadership hierarchy has occurred.

Table 1. Global green party leadership.

Nation	Structure	Previous Leadership Structure <sup>1</sup>	Current Leadership Positions <sup>1,2</sup>
Germany	Federal	Three co-Speakers (rotational)	co-Chairs (non-rotational)
Finland	Unitary	Collective (Green Commission)	Leader
England and Wales	Unitary	Three co-Chairs	Leader
Ireland	Unitary	Collective	Leader
France	Unitary	Collective (National Council)	National Secretary
Austria	Federal	Collective (national executive)	Leader
Switzerland	Federal	Shared – executive board & President	President
Sweden	Unitary	Shared – Annual Congress & Parl. Party (each with 2 co-Speakers)	Two co-Speakers
Belgium	Federal	Two separate parties: <i>Ecolo</i> -Federal Secretariat; <i>Agalev</i> -steering committee	President
Canada	Federal	Three co-Speakers	Leader

### Historical origins of Green leadership

To understand why leadership structures have changed in Green parties in recent years, it is important to reflect upon Green parties' historical origins. Green parties have emerged primarily in the industrialised West, but also sporadically and unevenly in the global South, as a response to a variety of environmental and social pressures, including the perceived failures of hierarchical leadership models and structures in existing political systems (Kitschelt, 1993). Early Green organisational leadership models were influenced by eco-feminist.

When the confederation of state and territory Green parties joined together as the Australian Greens in August 1992 they were informed by arguments against the hierarchical structuring of existing social democratic and conservative parties, and they explicitly worked to counter Michel's (1915) famous 'Iron Law' proposal that all parties tend towards an oligarchic structure. Essential AG structures were enshrined in its constitution (Australian Greens, 2010) recognising and fostering horizontal leadership structures and alternative decision-making processes. These were coupled with a mode of participatory politics that emphasised inclusion and thus excluded the idea of a party with a leader, or at least with leaders with party-endorsed positional authority.

Today, Green leadership theory and parties' practices are a more contested terrain. This first became apparent in Europe, where the variety of political and ideological strands involved in the early Green parties brought tensions. Although at first early Green parties stressed the devolved and participatory nature of their structures and decision making (see Table 1), as the parties gained electoral success the need for more defined decision making became apparent. Eco-feminists have offered little in terms of explicit analysis of leadership positions and this omission is perhaps one reason Green parties have not been able to create leadership structures that sit comfortably within an eco-feminist paradigm that critiques 'hegemonic masculinity' (Salleh, 2011: 46) and 'neoliberal competitiveness' (49) but does not adequately explain how to 'neutralise . . . the deeply cultural androcentric interests' (51) of organisations, including political parties. Poguntke (1987, 1992, 1993), in tracking the evolving nature of the German Greens, one of the earliest and most successful Green parties, noted that federal MPs quickly came to realise that exigencies of parliament required modification to the party's organisation. Faucher (1999) and Kaelberer (1998) both noted similar developments in the French Greens, although change was at a much slower rate. Otto Wolf (2003) has argued that the German Greens are succumbing to the inevitability of all political party organisations: to centralise their decision-making structures and vest leadership within membership elites.

The pressures of being involved within parliamentary activity have seen a move to dispense with certain aspects of non-hierarchical structures in Green parties worldwide. In recent years, this phenomenon has also been evident in the AG too, and, as has been seen with European Green parties (Drugan, 2003; Frankland et al., 2008), the structure and organisation of the AG have continued to evolve in response to the pressure to operate effectively within the Australian federal system (Dann, 2008). Electoral success has thus led the AG to act responsibly in parliament, even when advocating for seemingly radical positions (Bennett, 2008; Miragliotta, 2006; Vromen and Gauja, 2009).

In the AG, which is an environmentally based 'ecology movement' political party (Kitschelt, 2006: 278–290), we see leadership as being also aligned to transformational leadership theory (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978), in that Green parties have sought changes to existing political processes and attempted to appeal to citizen voters on radical policy issues. For example, the AG has incorporated externalities into the Australian economy (via an Emissions Trading Scheme, for example), and the current AG parliamentary leader, Christine Milne, has attempted to realign political discourse to reconceive Australia as a society rather than an economy (Bowman, 2012). What is no longer certain is whether the current AG envisions its ideals on transformational leadership through the prism of eco-feminism.

## Recent status of leaders in the AG

Since the earliest formulations of Green parties in the 1970s, debates about leaders and leadership structures have been an issue (Hulsberg, 1988; Kitschelt, 1989; Mayer and Ely, 1998) but the concept of a formal leader's position only became a critical issue for the AG in 2005. The federal PPR, which then consisted of four Senators, Bob Brown (Tas), Christine Milne (Tas), Rachel Siewert (WA) and Kerry Nettle (NSW), decided on a set of PPR that incorporated into its design elected leadership positions, including Leader, Deputy Leader and Whip. The federal MPs then sought the endorsement of their PPR at the 2005 Annual National Conference (Australian Greens, 2005; Miragliotta, 2006), but no consensus model of leadership was agreed to. So the proposal went to a vote that ultimately affirmed – but in a contentious and bitter atmosphere – the right of the federal PPR to decide upon what leadership rules they wished to operate within.

The creation of a PPR leadership model was originally kept exclusively to the federal parliamentary section of the AG and the national party continues to function without an executive or an official leader (Australian Greens, 2005, 2006, 2010). This dichotomisation of leadership structure, between the party and parliamentary sections, has been the subject of continued tension within the AG party: some individual members and state parties have been troubled by the creation of a traditional leadership structure at the federal parliamentary level. At the same time, both the former and current PPR Leaders of the AG, Bob Brown and Christine Milne, have regularly labelled themselves as the 'Leader of the Australian Greens' in media

interviews and in official MP letterheads and communications, and this appears to reflect support for 'at least a partial shift from collective or participatory leadership to a more formalised structure' (Jackson, 2012: 604).

As can be noted from Table 2 below, most state and territory PPRs have now adopted, or are in the process of adopting, written rules of operation. Some states have simply replicated the federal PRR, whereas other states and territories have taken a different approach to both position and operation (updated from Greens, 2011; Jackson, 2011; Miragliotta, 2012; NSW Greens, 2011).

Table 2. Leadership position adoption in the Australian Greens and constituent parties.

	<i>Position adopted</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Mechanism for adoption</i>	<i>Position holder as of July 2012</i>
TAS	1989	Leader	Parliamentary Caucus may elect a Leader	Nick McKim
Federal	2005	Parliamentary Party Leader	National Conference adopted Party Room Rules with contained provision	Christine Milne
SA	2008	Parliamentary Party Leader	State Conference adopted Party Room Rules with contained provision	Mark Parnell
WA	2009	Convenor of the Parliamentary Party Collective	State meeting agreed to proposal from State MPs	Giz Watson
ACT	2009	Parliamentary Leader <sup>1</sup>	Role and duties written into Party Constitution	Meredith Hunter
VIC	2010	Leader	MPs adopted Party Room Rules	Greg Barber
NSW	2011	Convener of the Party Room	State Conference adopted Party Room Rules with contained provision	(none elected or adopted)
QLD	Never adopted	-	-	(none elected or adopted)
NT	Never adopted	-	-	(none elected or adopted)

## The research project

Epistemologically, the research project evolved within a critical theory perspective as it sought to ask questions and elicit answers that challenge the dominant discourse on political leadership in Australian mainstream research. Kane and Patapan (2008) argued that there has been a blind spot in political leadership theorisation as few researchers have written about leadership as it actually exists in modern day political parties:

what is lacking is a body of theory that provides, or attempts to provide, a reasoned explanation of . . . the role of leadership in representative democracies (27).

Informed by this argument, the aim of the research detailed in this article was to describe leadership position and leadership practices within the participants' AG PPR. The research aimed to discover:

- (1) How leadership terminology is understood and used by AG parliamentarians.
- (2) Whether AG parliamentarians model professional conduct in keeping with their leadership positions within their party.

The method chosen was a survey instrument, a questionnaire, to elicit AG MPs' critical reflections on their lived experiences of political leadership in their respective PPR. The decision to gather data via a questionnaire was made for expediency because politicians are exceptionally busy people who have little time to devote to an academic task. The

<sup>1</sup> The ACT Greens originally adopted the position *Parliamentary Convenor*, but changed the title to *Parliamentary Leader* in mid-2011.

questionnaire was made up of 10 questions, with set answers in table format, and opportunity for open ended responses, or both.

When participants were asked to participate in the study, they were given the choice of a written questionnaire that would take between 20 and 40 min (depending on the depth of the answers written) or a phone interview responding to questions in the questionnaire, which were typed directly onto an electronic copy of the questionnaire by the Chief Investigator, then emailed to the participant to check for accuracy.

All 34 elected AG state and federal parliamentarians during 2011 were approached to participate in this research project and 13 MPs agreed to do so. The participants comprised five from Western Australia, one from South Australia, one from Victoria, one from Tasmania, two from the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and three from New South Wales. Ten participants were representatives in upper house parliamentary chambers, and three were lower house parliamentary representatives. Both state/territory and federal politicians participated, with nine representing the former and four the latter. Although efforts were made to gain participation from the widest possible pool of MPs, an imbalance does exist in respect of five MPs being from WA and three from NSW. This skewing of participant data in favour of representatives of just two states can be partly explained by the Chief Investigator being an active party member in WA, and it may also indicate that NSW and WA parliamentarians are more passionate about the topic of leadership and more willing to publically discuss their stance than other AG parliamentarians. Irrespective, it would seem there are enough contrary positions and forthright responses from the MPs' responses from across Australia to capture the breadth and nuances of the overall picture of leadership that emerges from this research project.

In this investigation, the identity of each participant was not kept confidential, which led unfortunately to the state MPs in Victoria and Tasmania deciding collectively in their respective Party Rooms to not be involved. The decision for transparency was made because there is a relatively small number of elected territory, state and federal AG parliamentarians so keeping their identity a secret would be, in reality, difficult to accomplish and be of limited benefit to the research. In the consent form signed by each participant, it was made explicit that by consenting to being a participant, their identity would be revealed in the publishing of any research paper. In Table 3, we identify all participants by name and indicate some pertinent demographic details about each of them.

Table 3: Research Participants from the current and recent cohort of Australian Green MPs

<i>Name</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Parliament</i>	<i>Leadership Role*</i>
Adam Bandt	VIC	Australian House of Representatives	Deputy Leader
Bob Brown	TAS	Australian Senate	Leader
John Kaye	NSW	State Upper House	Convener
Robin Chapple	WA	State Upper House	
Caroline Le Couteur	ACT	Territory Lower House	
Scott Ludlam	WA	Australian Senate	
Lynn MacLaren	WA	State Upper House	
Mark Parnell	SA	State Upper House	Leader
Shane Rattenbury	ACT	Territory Lower House	Speaker
Lee Rhiannon	NSW	Australian Senate	
David Shoebridge	NSW	State Upper House	
Giz Watson	WA	State Upper House	
Alison Xamon	WA	State Upper House	

### Leadership continuum

In the questionnaire, participants were first asked to identify what type of leadership structures were being used in their respective PPR. The leadership scale in the following table was based on the leadership continuum designed by Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973). At the right of the table is the most traditional leadership type, hierarchical, and at the far left the most antithetical type, leaderless. Between these two opposites are four other leadership

types that represent various levels of distributed power.

The results in Table 4 indicate the number of responses recorded by participants for each possible answer they could choose from, and shows that some participants chose to record more than one answer and some chose to not mark any of the answers:

Table 4: Leadership Continuum

Leaderless	Rotational	Limited	Informal	Shared	Hierarchical
n = 3	n = 0	n = 5	n = 2	n = 2	n = 3

These results show a very wide range of perspectives about what type of leadership structures they are operating within. The optional comment responses help us to understand the reasons for this range. Several participants were adamant that they operated within a leaderless or very limited structure. John Kaye (NSW) noted that their state parliamentary party was in the process of developing PRR ‘that will have a variety of functions (and) positions but no leader’ and David Shoebridge (NSW) also claimed ‘we have a collegial arrangement, with no leader’. Robin Chapple (WA) stated, ‘we don’t have a leadership structure’ and while this was reiterated by fellow West Australian, Giz Watson, her comments suggested a more nuanced analysis of a leaderless structure, ‘we have no formal leader; [yet] each member has a lead role in certain portfolios and geographic areas (electorates). We share facilitation of our meetings’.

Others chose the mid-range of the leadership scale offered and explained their choices with written addendums. Alison Xamon (WA) wrote, ‘in essence facilitation is rotated or shared and no decision can be imposed on another. We certainly try to work cooperatively’. Lee Rhiannon (NSW) described the federal situations as one where ‘the leader is elected by the federal greens MPs [but] the leader has limited powers’. Scott Ludlam (WA) argued that the federal ‘party room is definitely not hierarchical; it operates informally even though our rule structures are formal. The rules are used only for the leadership ballot to break a deadlock, but standard practice is consensual’.

In apparent contradiction to Ludlam, Bob Brown (Tas) ticked the box indicating that the federal party room is hierarchical, as did Adam Bandt (Vic). Brown justified this structure:

To be able to match the politics of the other parties we had to be as robust and as clear and unconfusing [sic] to the public as possible. Also, we did not want to fall into the trap of experimenting in house before we change the world. We can’t wait to be perfect; being too idealistic is a recipe for failure.

Brown also noted ‘the failure to have the option of “with leader” or simply “elected leader” for this question undercuts the questionnaire’s integrity’ implying that he saw some distinction between ‘hierarchical’ structures and elected positions. The emphasis on ‘elected’ also implies that not having a leader is somewhat undemocratic.

Mark Parnell (SA) went further to explain the evolution of leadership structures in the Australian Greens (SA) party room:

When I was the sole Green MP, our State Council endorsed a set of party room rules based largely on the Greens Federal Party Room rules. These rules were not dusted off until I was joined by a second Green MLC, Tammy Franks, in 2010, which was half way through my 8-year Parliamentary term. At one of our first Party Room meetings, it was agreed that I would be leader. However, the role has no particular decision-making power or authority and is primarily recognition of my status and longer experience in the role and the fact that the media . . . continue to come to me in any event for any commentary that was of State significance or fell outside specific portfolio responsibilities.

Parnell’s description of the process in South Australia illustrates the ad hoc nature of the development of leadership structures within the party rooms. Parnell acknowledges the lack of authority or additional decision-making powers encompassed by the ‘leader’ role, which



accords with the form, if not the detail, of how the WA & NSW MPs described their party rooms.

## Leadership rationale

Table 5. Reasons for an official leadership role.

Legislation relating to official recognition of 'party status'	Resourcing and staffing	Parliamentary party unity	Accommodate media communications	General publics' expectations that a political party has a leader	Portfolio allocations
n = 7	n = 7	n = 3	n = 7	n = 7	n = 2

The second question asked the MP participants whether any of the reasons in Table 5 were justifications for the adoption of an official leadership role in their PPRs. It is interesting to note from the responses that more importance was given to instrumental outcomes (resources and legislation) than more prosaic reasons for the adoption (party unity). This becomes a recurring theme for several respondents, suggesting that the key motivations driving the acceptance of particular leadership structures and positions is the need for resources and the accompanying institutional processes associated with that. Thus, we have the acceptance of leadership due to a perceived need to accommodate media expectations, as much as accommodating public perceptions of how a party operates.

The WA MPs clarified their 'leaderless' aims and its clash with a need for resources. Watson stated that 'our draft protocol allow for the term leader to be used in order only to facilitate access to additional funds and staff associated with party status'. Lynn MacLaren (WA) further noted that

... while a parliamentary party is required to nominate a point of contact who attracts additional resourcing, there is no specified leadership model so we are not required to establish hierarchical structures.

Chapple explained the approach taken by the Greens (WA) MPs:

We need 5 members, coming from both houses, for party room status. The current situation means we do not have party room status and we do not have to ascribe to a leader. [If we get to party room status in the future] our position is we won't accept a leader anyway. We will accept the [Barnett] government position and have a 'leader' but define it as a 'convener.' We have to comply but there are many ways to go around it. During the time when Adele [Carles] was a Green member of parliament we decided then we wouldn't have a leader except for the purpose of benefits and even then we decided we would place any surplus funding that would technically go to a 'leader' into a general fund for the whole of our parliamentary party to use for staffing and resources.

In contrast, Parnell pointed out that resourcing is not an issue in South Australia as 'there is no concept of official party status, no additional resources for parties or for leaders'. Parnell's justification for why the term 'leader' was useful was because 'media and public expectations are relevant' as opposed to resource availability.

Similarly, Brown referred to his years as a state parliamentarian and explained that:

during the Tasmania Accord years a journalist asked the other Green MPs if I was the leader and they said 'yes' even though there had been no vote. [The reporter] assumed I was [the leader] and reported that a party needed a leader for funding. A leader meant we got staff and funding.

So, where party funding is available, there is clear deference paid to media expectations about leaders and the accompanying resources. Equally, Shane Rattenbury (ACT) argued that a 'leader' was necessary because 'the other parties expect it – the leader plays an important liaison role for us with other parties in the context of being in the balance of power'.

## Leadership terminology

All participants ticked a box for each of the questions in Table 6 and yet the results in the table offer less elucidation than the comments that followed.

Table 6: Leadership titles

Within the Green parliamentary party room, of which you are a member:	Yes	No	A yes/no response is too simplistic
Do you think leadership titles matter?	n = 7	n = 2	n = 4
Do you think the term Leader is 'less green' than titles like convener, facilitator, or spokesperson?	n = 4	n = 5	n = 4

Several participants were certain that leadership terms matter, but did not particularly like the term 'leader'. Shoebridge suggested that 'leaders tend to take over from member control of a party', while Chapple was emphatic: 'leaders lead to factionalism: as an ex-president of the ALP I have seen it destroy a political culture. Leadership is an anathema to me'.

This questioning of titles extended to offering definitional responses. Kaye wrote that "leader" and "convenor"/"facilitator"/"spokesperson" are not interchangeable; they have different meanings and different implications for maintaining a power sharing, grassroots democracy'. Caroline Le Couteur (ACT) argued, 'leader, convenor, facilitator and spokesperson all have different meanings. We have a parliamentary convenor which I think is an accurate description of the role'. MacLaren stated that 'the terms facilitator, convenor or spokesperson relate to function, while leader implies primary decision maker or an individual who others defer to or follow behind without any authority to choose otherwise'.

Other participants held various degrees of conviction that leadership titles did not matter. Rattenbury equivocated by writing that he was 'not sure that titles matter, but there is a role for leadership in the party room. The discussion is then about what that leadership should look like, how it should be exercised, etc'. Parnell also offered a prevaricated response:

I think leadership matters more to the public and to the media that it does to the Party. Other alternative titles can act as an unnecessary, and sometimes for the public, worrying point of difference between the Greens and 'normal' political parties . . . Having said that, we actually don't often use the title 'leader' in our day to day work. It is mostly for the media.

The most strident rejection of the questions came from two participants. Xamon argued, 'a title is just a word in the end. I have seen "convenors" (within the party) engage in unilateral, authoritative behaviour. I have seen 'leaders' engage in facilitative and inclusive behaviour'. Brown was succinct, 'the job is not altered by the title. It is a mistake to believe that the word applied changes things'.

## Leadership in the AG

The data presented in this article suggest that the term 'leader' and the positional authority associated with leadership have become highly contentious amongst Australian Greens' parliamentarians. At one extreme, we have a few AG MPs who believe that leadership in their PPR is hierarchical in structure, openly ascribes the term leader to the top position in the hierarchy, considers this structure and labelling necessary for a multiplicity of reasons and are quite dismissive of the debate on leadership terminology because it is seen as a peripheral or unwanted distraction to the core business of advocating Green policies in Australian parliaments.

At the other extreme we have some AG MPs who believe that their PPR has a structure that is deliberately anti-hierarchical, begrudgingly ascribes the term convenor to a fellow parliamentarian if absolutely necessary, considers this structure and labelling necessary for equally significant reasons, and are quite passionate about the debate on leadership terminology

because it is considered a central issue in the core business of promoting Green policies and philosophy in Australian parliaments.

Whereas other MP participants' opinions fit somewhere in the middle of these two extremes, it is fair to conclude that leadership terminology and conceptualisation are polarising issues for the confederation of AG PPR. This polarisation reflects the tension between the parties' activist roots that embedded a grassroots conception of participatory democracy in its structures and the growing professionalism of the party that pushes its structures towards a representative conception of democracy (Jackson, 2011). Some party rooms have actively pushed back against this structural adjustment, for example, NSW and WA, while other party rooms have accepted the changes with pragmatism, for example, SA and Federal.

While the issue of whether to have 'leader' positions within the party has been debated for much of its history, the data accord with older research that the contestation has largely been as a resource acquisition one (see, for instance, Weatherly (1993) or ACT Greens (1997)), as opposed to one of positional authority. This would appear to have changed during the PPR leadership of Senator Brown. His charisma and fame gave him the political capital of a celebrity (t'Hart and Tindall, 2009) and this capital, coupled with his responses in this research, attest he was himself content with an emerging model of federal Green leadership that is hierarchical and perhaps even succumbing to Michel's 'Iron Law' of oligarchy. The question then remains that if the Greens still have some adherence to eco-feminist practice, does that practice 'maintain an active political and participatory emphasis that is both deconstructive (reactive to current injustices) and reconstructive (proactive in creating new forms of thinking and doing)' (Lahar, 1991: 36)?

Walter and Strangio (2007) argued that democracy would benefit by reclaiming politics from leaders. The data arising from this research suggest that many Greens MPs accord with this perspective and attempt to downplay the role of formal leadership positions in their party rooms even while those roles are in fact becoming quite pivotal. The contested terminology surrounding leadership in the party reflects the theoretical argument that a traditional leader can be viewed as an antithetical concept to democracy and equality since a leader by definition is positioned above others (Ruscio, 2004: 3). While there is little doubt the data acknowledges that leadership in Green PPRs have become more formal and codified, it would seem that the acceptance by MPs to pragmatic political realities is only countenanced because all MPs aspire to a transformational vision of the party that 'offers a new way of looking at the world' that provides 'ideas, hopes and aspirations' (Ruscio, 2004: 9).

## Conclusion

This paper has been our attempt to begin addressing the blind spot noted by Kane and Patapan (2008) in contemporary political leadership theory by providing data that reveal contemporary Green political leadership as it actually exists and to begin theorising about it. In the PPR leadership transition to Senator Christine Milne on 13 April 2012, Brown (2012) noted in his press gallery resignation speech that

We are a party of a majority of women and now a female leader . . . A strong leader can suppress talent and there's a wealth of talent and skill in this team . . . In my book they are all leadership material . . . The eight of them standing behind me . . . You can bank on them . . . I wish we had more positions, but there you go.

This speech highlights both the aspirational and contested nature of leadership in the parliamentary parties of the Australian Greens. It acknowledges the reality of positional power and the need to conform to parliamentary structures that allow for only one leader in a party. While the dichotomies of positions are evidenced in this paper, what is also evident is that the leadership in the AG is positionally weak, somewhat retaining a commitment to an eco-feminist perspective of leadership, and underpinned by transformational goals. Looking forward, it will be fascinating to observe whether the AG retains its ambivalent position on formal leadership positions in the party or whether the era of Milne and Bandt will see a strengthening of hierarchical leadership structures.

## Notes

1. Following the October 2012 ACT election, the ACT Greens were reduced from four to three MPs, but the remaining MP entered a formal Coalition with the Australian Labour Party and now sits as a Minister in the ACT Government.
2. The ACT Greens originally adopted the position Parliamentary Convenor, but changed the title to Parliamentary Leader in mid-2011.

## Author biographies

Christine Cunningham is an early career lecturer and researcher in the School of Education at Edith Cowan University. Upon completion of her published doctorate, *Corrupted Principles and Critically Reflective Leadership*, Christine joined academia, after sixteen years of experience gained in K-12 education sectors in Western Australia and internationally. Christine is a political activist, critical pedagogist and eco-feminist, and her research analyses, through these three spectrums, organisational leadership; decision-making processes and participatory democracy in organisations.

Stewart Jackson is a Lecturer in Politics at the University of Sydney. Prior to completing his PhD, Stewart had a diverse work career, beginning in the public sector, before training as a youth worker assisting unemployed and disadvantaged young people, and with to a long involvement with the Australian Greens party, of which he was the National Convenor (President) in 2003–2005. His research interests are primarily in Australian, environmental and Green politics, with a further interest in the nature of environmental politics in the Asia Pacific region.

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