Leadership is a standing topic in political philosophy and the social sciences. Despite the recognized and continuous relevance of political leadership in any political system, an exhaustive and conclusive concept, theory, or even definition is still missing. Probably most advanced is research on leadership in organizations. But, as Yukl has pointed out, even in this research field no consensus has been reached on how to explain and study leadership. Despite those conceptual and definitional problems, political philosophy and theory have been concerned with political leadership from the very beginning. Plato's idea of "philosopher kings," Machiavelli's principle, and Max Weber's concept of traditional, rational-legal, and charismatic leadership show ample evidence of the relevance of the leadership concept through centuries. These thoughts still inspire research on political leadership. Notwithstanding these fruitful reflections, the term leadership remains lucid in political science and political philosophy. It is often used with diverse meanings in politics and in the social sciences. Connotations of leadership include positive and negative normative views, depending on the chosen definitions. Positive usage of the term often relates to functional definitions and to leadership as a communication process, whereas negative evaluations prevail regarding elitist views, power relations, and coercive processes.

Mughan and Patterson have shown that two characteristics of leadership are common to all definitions and approaches: the understanding that leadership is a relationship in which influence is exercised, and that this relationship can be best studied as a form of dynamic interaction within groups. Otherwise, definitions vary strongly and there are debates between advocates of different perspectives. At a very general level, one can differentiate two basic approaches: the power-based approach and the interactionist perspective on leadership.

Janda proposed a power-based definition. For him, leadership is a special type of power relationship in which a group member accepts the right of another group member to prescribe behavior patterns to the members of the group as legitimate. Similarly, Blondel defines political leadership as a phenomenon of power, because it characterizes the ability of the one or few who are at the top to decide on the actions of the others. He regards this as a top-down process. This perspective has been criticized for being too static and too strongly tied to the view that a rigid command hierarchy governs the leader-follower relationship. Burns has argued that all leaders are actual or potential power holders, but not all power holders are leaders. For Burns, leaders are a particular kind of power holders. The reach and domain of leadership are more limited than those of power, because leadership is exercised in a condition of conflict or competition in which leaders contend for followers by appealing to their convictions. Absolute wielders of brutal power may not be regarded as leaders from his point of view. A directing leadership in democracy, this perspective meets the normative understanding that leadership involves a voluntary response of followers to leaders. However, it should not be neglected that the dark side of European history in the 20th century has shown that dictatorship may also find willing followers. Leadership covers a wide spectrum, varying from dictatorial forms to highly participatory or democratic forms.

Emergence of Leadership and Leadership Characteristics

Until the late 1940s, the situational approach was dominant among the psychological explanations of leadership. The opinion prevailed that the specific situation of a group largely determined who became a leader of that group. In a situation of attack, someone with the respective fierce capabilities would be chosen; in a situation of peaceful adaptation, someone with management qualifications would take the lead.

In its modest form, the situational approach still finds support. Empirically, there seems to be some truth in the observation that leadership flourishes in problem situations. However, at the end of the 1950s, the situational approach was replaced—or better: complemented—by a variety of interactional approaches. The insight that leadership traits are not universal but vary with the situation enhanced the development of more complex models to understand the relationship
between personality and leadership. To some degree, and at a very general level, the interactional character of leadership and the varying composition of leadership characteristics are already inherent in such basic concepts as the charismatic leadership of Max Weber. In Weber's approach, "charismatic grounds" for leadership rest on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him. Charisma applies to an individual personality with extraordinary qualities that is seen and treated as gifted with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers and thus recognized as a leader. Although this conceptualization lacks specificity, it already highlights the relational aspect of leadership, because it refers several times to the evaluation by the group members. A person must be considered as exceptional to be treated as leader. This is not the only condition. Weber has made clear that, in addition, a leader must achieve something because leadership has to benefit his followers, otherwise he will lose his charismatic authority.

Borgatta, Bales, and Couch argue that very special circumstances are required for the exceptional forms of leadership for which Weber's or other forms of "great man theories" of leadership can be regarded as applicable or adequate. In modern societies, functional differentiation and division of labor is extremely complex. Leadership can be observed in all kinds of hierarchies, at all levels, be it in the countless number of organizations, institutions, or the social structure.

This, however, does not imply that personal characteristics are of no consequence and that only function matters. To the contrary, in mass democracies with their full-fledged means of communication, the personality or image of formal power holders in politics, organizations, and institutions in any sector from economics to culture is probably more visible and closely observed, for example, by the mass media, than in any prior society. For candidates for political office, for example, empirical research has found that integrity, trustworthiness, and assertiveness are of equal importance for people’s choice as the perception of political competence. Scholars like Wattenberg and King have provided evidence that, at least in some systems, persons matter more today than in earlier periods of postwar history (personalization of politics; candidate-centered politics) and that personality can make a difference.

In line with this reasoning are the findings on leadership effectiveness. Organizational sociology has found that leadership effectiveness depends very much on the character and the way in which influence or power is exercised. Leadership can use coercive power, incentive by reward, legitimate influence (when followers believe that it is exercised rightfully), expert power, or referent power in the sense that the appeal, the personal qualities, or the value system of the leader is positively referred to by the followers. Outcomes are very different depending on which resources are employed by leaders. Whereas the typical outcome of the use of coercive powers is resistance, the use of rewards or legitimate power results in compliance. Only leaders who can rely on expert or referent power produce commitment. Commitment must be regarded as the most effective of the three possible outcomes, because it implies an active and affective engagement of the followers for the leader’s course. Political leadership research has demonstrated that personal effectiveness, strategic capabilities, and the ability to mobilize and persuade are crucial in order to achieve intended outcomes. In a comparative study, Brettschneider has shown that in political competition leaders or potential leaders are successful if they appear to be politically competent, trustworthy, decisive, energetic, and strong.

In competitive settings like democracy, performance and effectiveness are of crucial importance for "constituted political leaders"—that is, for those holding an official leadership position in a political order—if they want to stay in office. This confirms Max Weber’s argument that even charismatic leaders have to perform well. In addition, it confirms the interactional approach, since in democracy interaction between leaders and followers in terms of selection, election, and support is raised to a principle (alternation in power). Political competition for leadership governs the turnover in leadership. Turnover of chief executives is roughly 7 years in dictatorships, more than 4 years in autocracies, but only a little more than 3 years in democracies.

Leadership and Political Communication

The development of modern mass media communication contributes strongly to the emergence of political leadership. It has changed the way in which the relationship between politics and society as well as that
between leaders and followers work. Today, favorable media coverage is important in order to win popularity, support, and trust of citizens and voters. Many political leadership studies and theories relate leadership closely to political communication. Leaders who have major objectives (ideological, programmatic, policy, career, etc.) and who seek to activate, mobilize, and motivate cannot act as leaders without recognizing and using the means of mass communication. It is not by chance that political observers and political scientists speak of a symbiosis between the media and politics.

However, mass communication processes are more complex than just one step between leaders and followers. Already in the late 1940s, the analysis of the U.S. presidential elections of 1940 revealed that the flow of mass communication is not necessarily direct, but is mediated by personal communication. This model has become known as the “two-step flow of political communication.” Actually, reality shows that the steps are multifold. Even in societies with high levels of political sophistication the real-world process of opinion formation does not really fit the bottom-up idea, termed the “cascade” model. Leaders communicate with representatives of the mass media, opinion leaders listen to mass media, the mass public talks with opinion leaders. Communication is more intense and more open within each level of the cascade compared to communication between levels. Although opinion leadership is leadership at its simplest, certainly not achieving the high level of leadership of a Churchill, and furthermore almost invisible, it should not be neglected as basis for political leadership. As Burns has put it, the essence of “transactional opinion leadership” is that most leaders are followers and most followers are leaders. In modern democracies, the prevailing mode of government, in general, can be best described in terms of the responsible party model. Political leadership is inherent to this mode of government. It implies that political leaders competing for office have to convince to create support for their goals. Neither coercive nor reward powers would help in this regard, neither within the party nor outside.

The means by which potential leadership can emerge and may succeed in elections is successful mass communication. Modern election campaigning shows how relevant it is to manage communication in order to install leadership. With the evolution of the modern campaign the location of political communication gradually shifted, from the print media toward the electronic, from the constituency toward the central party leadership, and from amateurs toward professionals. The crucial point is, however, that leadership does not automatically evolve from the achievement of sufficient and favorable media coverage. It may help to install a formal leader, but this does not necessarily imply leadership. Only if the leading person is able to create positive resonance among the potential followers, she might qualify for leadership. In democratic and noncoercive settings, leadership rests on acceptance and vital support. This is the basic message of the interactional approach to leadership. Empirical research on the selection and election of leaders has provided evidence that there is not the “one and only” route. Even if a person may carry all the qualifications conducive to leadership, leadership may not emerge because the potential followers do not follow. This proves true for constituted as well as for nonconstituted leadership. However, the processes of interaction and resonance between potential leaders and potential followers fostering political leadership are still not very well understood. There is urgent need for an integrated perspective of leadership and mass communication. The demand for advances in this direction will keep the topic on the agenda of political science and communication research.
Political Marketing

Political marketing has developed in parallel with commercial marketing through the course of the 20th century, particularly in America and Europe, with the rise of the universal franchise, the development of broadcast media communications, and scientific methods of assessing market and public opinion, which have transformed how political campaigns are run today. The use of marketing in British political campaigns has been said to have developed over four different eras: the unsophisticated selling era (candidates promoting themselves to different social classes in the 19th century); the selling era (early 20th century, when politicians used the mass media to disseminate messages but did not research voting intentions); the sophisticated selling/nascent marketing era (the private poll was developed, allowing voter feedback into the political process); and the strategic marketing era (which has yet to emerge).

The commercial world of marketing has informed the worlds of political and referendum campaigning, and to a lesser extent vice versa. Charities and other campaigning organizations are increasingly using marketing techniques to influence legislation and public opinion and so use the techniques of political marketing. With the development of globalized industries, the interplay between marketing and politics has increased further, and marketing methods associated with political campaigning are increasingly used by companies to influence legislators and regulators (e.g., in Brussels, Washington, D.C., Doha) who in turn influence the structure of, and legislation associated with, commercial markets. The underlying process in political marketing is the exchange of political support (in terms of votes, petitions, funding, resources) for political influence (in terms of legislative, regulatory or programmatic—commercial or political—changes).

Although the use of promotional and managerial techniques in political, electoral, and commercial campaigning has long existed, the uptake of marketing techniques has rapidly increased in recent decades. Political marketing has been likened to a marketing-propaganda hybrid, particularly in America, where negative attack-style campaigning is rife. The political marketing “product” could be said to include party policy on important issues and party ideology and ideals, which effectively comprise political representation. Considering political representation as a political service provided to companies or voters provides a better understanding of the political party’s raison d’être vis-à-vis its target markets. In parallel to the development of marketing techniques, such as advertising and market research, there is increasing use of strategic marketing techniques such as market positioning, where the campaigning organization determines its campaign’s ideal positions in the minds of those in their target markets and uses research to continually refine the difference between their actual position and their ideal position. Market segmentation is also an important marketing activity for political parties as they divide the electorate into groups of targetable voters.

Parties function in representative democracies to provide the nation with guidance and information on current and potential political and economic infrastructure. This process benefits the public by improving social cohesion, democratic participation, and citizen belongingness, and ensures that politicians take account of important economic considerations associated with commercial markets. Political marketing could be argued to be increasingly important as political participation declines in Western political markets, although, ironically, its cynical overuse may