Editorial

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Welcome to the second issue of the eighth volume of *British Politics*. Our first original article in this issue comes from Paul Dixon, and analyses the approach taken to the Northern Ireland peace process by the New Labour government. The article explores some of the key issues surrounding the presentation of the Good Friday agreement by senior government figures, especially Tony Blair, and considers their implications for subsequent power-sharing arrangements. Our second main article is from Philip Cowley, and examines the issue of public representational priorities. Among a number of findings, the article maintains that the representational characteristics that matter most to the British public are different to those that are commonly highlighted in the academic literature, and that the desirability of increased or decreased representation is based, to some extent, on large-scale ignorance about the composition of the House of Commons.

The third contribution is from Andrew Denham, and examines the long-term dynamics of party leadership contests in the United Kingdom. Noting the gradual trend towards the 'democratisation' of leadership contests, the article explores the extent to which this democratisation has led to more or less competitive contests. Overall, the article demonstrates that the relationship between democratisation and competitiveness has been an uneven one. Following this, our fourth main article is from Mark Wickham-Jones and Hugh Permberton. Here, the authors examine the changing dynamics of Labour Party membership. The article considers the party's current difficulties over its membership figures, and explores some of the ways in which these problems are being addressed. The final article for this issue, by Peter Allen, comes in our Forward Thinking section, and examines gendered patterns of local councillor drop-out. The article confirms the findings of existing literature that women are more likely than men to drop out of local politics, and considers various reasons why this might be the case.

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