People at the party a sociological-organizational approach to the puzzle of party change

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When and why do parties change? This puzzle has animated studies of political parties for decades. In this paper I make two contributions. Firstly, I demonstrate that in order to capture the socio-political function of political parties, we need to think more broadly in terms of what a party changes when it changes. Secondly, I advance a new conceptual approach, grounded in intra-party power relations where actors develop interests based on their social relations. I theorize that party change requires an introduction of new types of actors into party decision-making processes, and a change in the power structure. I test this explanation through comparison of the UK Labour party's changes in the New Labour (1992-1997) and Jeremy Corbyn (2015-2020) period. Through Bayesian analysis of 90 pieces of evidence, collected through elite interviews, internal party reports and memos, newspaper and archival sources, I demonstrate that the cohesion of "New Labour" in the 1990s was contingent on the internal replacement of trade union elites with "modernizers"; but in the 2010s, the Labour party produced incoherent change because Jeremy Corbyn could not align the party around his more radical agenda.

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Introduction

Why and when do political parties "change"? This question has long been a key question within the broader study of parties and party systems. It should receive renewed relevance as we have witnessed increased volatility across party systems. A major trend to emerge from this process has been the decline in vote-share of both mainstream left and mainstream right parties that have historically dominated their party systems. This trend was made plain in the aftermath of the Great Recession, where resentment and dissatisfaction with mainstream parties bled in to a call for them to "do something" to respond to the prolonged effects of the crisis (Hopkin and Blyth 2018). Their inability to match this call is a major factor in their decline (Hernández and Kriesi 2016). This episode reinforces our need to understand why and how mainstream parties in high-income democracies change.

Existing explanations of party change have tended to focus on the relationship between party and voter, with a more limited subset of research on how intra-party dynamics influence this process (Adams, Haupt, and Stoll 2009; Bischof and Wagner 2020; Harmel and Janda 1994a, 1994a; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2012; Schumacher, De Vries, and Vis 2013). In this paper, I make two contributions to this study. The first is to question what a party is changing. For a variety of reasons, change is generally conceptualized in terms of a party position, which allows for ease of observation and parsimony. However it potentially oversimplifies the socio-political function of a party, which limits the efficacy of analysis. By identifying a range of factors that a party controls and could seek to change, I introduce the concept of organizing logic as a dependent variable of change. The second contribution is to develop a new explanation of party change. This explanation resurrects Angelo Panebianco's (1988) concept of the dominant coalition, and marry it to Mudge's (2018) emphasis on the sociologically constituted nature of actor interests. The result is an argument that party change requires both a change in the composition of the dominant coalition, as new types of actors

bring in new political interpretations and strategies, and a concomitant shift in the power structure of the party. The combined value of my contribution is to introduce concepts that enable us to determine not just whether a party has changed, but the coherence of these changes.

I test this new explanation, relative to rival existing explanations, through Bayesian case analysis of the UK Labour party. This is an important case as it contains two sub-cases that I treat as analytically different: the period of party change under New Labour (1992-1997) and the period of party change under Jeremy Corbyn (2015-2020). Through fieldwork, I collected a vast swathe of evidence, which I use to construct 90 pieces of evidence across the two cases. I then parse each individual piece of evidence and determine whether it speaks for or against my dominant coalition explanation, relative to alternatives. The outcome of this method of comparison is a strong finding in favor of my dominant coalition explanation. My analysis demonstrates the analytical leverage gained through a more nuanced understanding of how actors develop their own interests and the power of ideas in party decision-making processes.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section I discuss party change as a dependent variable. I then outline existing explanations and develop my own, dominant coalition explanation. Third, I discuss methodological considerations. Fourth, I evaluate the evidence in both the New Labour and Corbyn cases, and discuss my reasoning. The final section concludes with a brief discussion on the generalizability of my findings.

Defining party 'change'

A potential pitfall in assessing the various merits of existing explanations is that there are slight, but important, differences in what "change" is being observed; put bluntly, what does a party actually "change" when it changes? Recent contributions in the literature have typically measured change programmatically (Adams, Haupt, and Stoll 2009; Bischof and Wagner 2020; Schumacher 2015; Schumacher, De Vries, and Vis 2013), which allows for a parsimonious

conceptualization of the relationship between party and voter and an effective and easily replicable methodological approach.

To understand party change, we need to consider what a party does and therefore identify the full range of behaviors it may seek to alter. By emphasizing only policy positions, our identification of the relationship between parties and society is, potentially, overly simplified. Parties should be recognized as unique organizations because, as Schattschneider (1977, 15) noted, their 'domain' is 'the zone between the sovereign people and the government.' Parties are the only actors that are capable of playing this mediating role (De Leon et al. 2009), and they possess an 'expressive function' through which they 'develop a rhetoric for the translation of contrasts in the social and cultural structure into demands and pressure for action or inaction'; and 'instrumental and representative functions' that enable them to 'force the spokesman for the many contrasting interests and outlooks to strike bargains, to stagger demands, and to aggregate pressures' (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, 5). By recognizing that parties function to organizing social conflict into cleavages, we see that the relationship between parties and voters is complex: parties respond to voters experiences, but parties can also directly influence exogenous events and shape voters' interpretations of them (De Leon et al. 2009).

If in observing party change, we are seeking to identify the various means through which a party mediates the relations between the state and society, we can identify scenarios in which a party could keep its policy constant but change its discourse or its campaign methods; or a party could change its programmatic position but keep other functions constant. Under a programmatic understanding of party change, we would only deem one of these scenarios as a case of party change.

Recent approaches tend to see parties as the product of other actors' actions: aggregators of voter preferences (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2012); vehicles for interest

groups (Cohen 2008); and the means to win office for aspiring politicians (Schumacher, De Vries, and Vis 2013). This potentially minimizes the actual social and political function that parties hold. The two-way relationship between party and society is better captured in Lupu's (2014) concept of the party 'brand', defined as the image of a prototypical partisan as observed by a voter. The construction of this image is, to some extent, controlled by a party in that its discourse, campaigns, strategies and policy positions all influence the way in which a voter would imagine a prototypical partisan, but it is also mediated by different actors including opposition parties and the media. This makes a party brand a fuzzier concept, because it is less obviously measurable than party position, though the trade-off is that it better captures the complexity of the different functions that a party can deploy in order to define itself. Nevertheless, relying on the concept of party brand to analyze change creates a difficulty of observation, where there can be a disjuncture between what a party intends its brand to be and how it is perceived by a potential voter.

Acknowledging this difficulty, I argue that we should focus on party change as the product of factors that a party can control, which includes a broader range of observable features than just its policy position. I propose a new concept, "organizing logic", which synthesizes the party's "orienting ideology", meaning the substance of the party's ideas and is observed in the party's strategies, policies and discourses; with its infrastructures, which are the resources that a party possesses in order to function and can include party financing, a campaign infrastructure, policy-making processes, a network of activists and members. If a party brand is understood as the product of actions taken by the party to respond to events, as well as media and opposition parties' framing of these responses and the voters' prior conceptions of the party, alongside their unique subjective and objective circumstances, then organizing logic offers the best means of capturing the ideational and institutional responsiveness of the party.

It is also important to note that scholarly interest in party change should be motivated by consideration of whether that change is successful or effective. This is because, in part, it is incredibly likely that in a period of analysis a party will change. There will always be some exogenous development to which a party must react and no two election manifestos are the same. Organizing logic gets at a deeper quality by providing us with a concept to assess how the party interprets its own place in society. Identifying party change through organizing logic rather than positionality also enables us to evaluate the quality of change. In offering organizing logic as the dependent variable to be observed in party change, it should be approached as a dimensional variable that varies between coherent and incoherent. A coherent organizing logic is observed when its orienting ideology and its infrastructures are complementary; where there is a disjuncture in these factors, we would expect to see an incoherent organizing logic. For instance, a left party that holds a particularly egalitarian Democratic Socialism as its orienting ideology while simultaneously relying on large corporate donations for its financing would have an incoherent organizing logic; or if, in responding to a policy issue, the party leader and a leading party figure provide conflicting messages. Naturally, coherence is a matter of degree, a party may update its ideas and not its infrastructures; it may only change some of its infrastructures; or it may determine that its ideas do not require updating but its campaign approach does require change. The task for the observer is to assess the degree to which these factors complement each other, in part by identifying how the party utilized its organizing logic to engage different external actors.

This conceptualization is similar to an earlier generation of party change scholars, who aggregated institutional and positional features of a party to measure change (Harmel et al. 1995; Katz and Mair 1992). Yet it extends this earlier work by providing a concept that synthesizes how these institutional and ideational features function. The coherence of a party's organizing logic does not, in and of itself, guarantee a party electoral success as this would

likely depend on a range of exogenous factors including electoral system and media context, as institutions that can mediate the supply of a party's brand to its voters. Regardless, a party's organizing logic is the strongest factor that a party itself can control within its overall branding; and at the very least if a party changes its orienting ideology or its infrastructure then it will change its brand, and thus this becomes an effective means of conceptualizing party "change".

Existing explanations of party change

Why and when do parties change? I draw on the existing literature to identify two key explanations, before I contribute a third of my own.

The first explanation, which can be dubbed the "electoral change" explanation, solely emphasizes exogenous drivers of party change. Parties are understood to be aggregators of public opinion and they change in response to shifts in public opinion (Downs 1957). Importantly, when compared to other explanations of party change, their internal decision-making processes are not relevant; public opinion is the mechanism that mediates the effect of exogenous events on the party: if there is a change in the preferences of the mean voter, then the party will respond by developing a new orienting ideology that is entirely premised on the preferences of the mean voter. Its infrastructures will also be constructed to maximize the potential of targeting the mean voter. We would expect to observe internal party-decision making that is oriented around the preferences of the mean voter, regardless of the party leader's personal interests or preferences. The coherence of this change would be impacted by the quality of the party's institutions in identifying the preferences of the mean voter; a time-lag in responding to the mean voter; or a vagueness in the mean voter's preferences on a salient issue. It should be noted that much of the literature on party change acknowledges the relevance of external stimuli, including public opinion shifts, as a clear driver, however it is rarely seen to act independently of intra-party dynamics (Adams, Haupt, and Stoll 2009; Harmel and Janda 1994a).

A second, "leader-power" explanation, argues that the way in which parties respond to external stimuli is determined by the extent to which a party organization is dominated by leaders or activists (Schumacher, De Vries, and Vis 2013; Schumacher and Elmelund-Præstekær 2018). A party is categorized as 'leader-dominated' when it has a small number of veto points, which concentrates power in the hands of party elites (Schumacher, De Vries, and Vis 2013). Conversely, a party is activist-dominated when it has a large number of veto points, which forces party elites to negotiate with party activists (Schumacher, De Vries, and Vis 2013). There are different goals that a party can prioritize: office-seeking, policy-seeking and vote-seeking (Strøm 1990), but it is anticipated that the way that these goals are prioritized is contingent on whether a party is categorized as leader-dominated or activist-dominated.

A critical assumption of this explanation is that elites and activists prioritize different goals. A party elite is motivated by 'status-oriented goals associated with political office' and thus respond to environmental incentives that may constrain their party's capacity to achieve this goal (Katz and Mair 1994; Panebianco 1988; Schumacher, De Vries, and Vis 2013). A party activist is policy-seeking as they sacrifice personal resources in the pursuit of promoting a specific ideology and are therefore less willing to moderate their goal in order to gain office (May 1973). More to the point, elites and activists are likely to self-select into different types of parties according to their goals, as potential elites or "careerists" are likely to join leadership dominated parties for the instrumental reason that it will offer a faster route to office and they are less likely to be accepted in policy-seeking parties (Panebianco 1988; Schumacher, De Vries, and Vis 2013). Even where activists in an activist-seeking party seek office alongside policy influence, they will seek policy assurances from their leader prior to any election so that their party will follow the "correct" policy once elected (Adams et al. 2006; Schumacher, De Vries, and Vis 2013).

Empirically, when this type of explanation has been operationalized, it has been assumed that the leader versus activist power dynamic is static (Bischof and Wagner 2020; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2009; Schumacher, De Vries, and Vis 2013; Schumacher and Elmelund-Præstekær 2018; Schumacher and Giger 2017). This could be due to these studies reliance on expert surveys that were conducted in the 1980s and 1990s (Harmel and Janda 1994b; Laver and Hunt 1992; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2012), and a lack of alternative methods of identifying intra-party power relations across a large number of cases. This is justified by proponents of this explanation on the basis that parties are conservative and have, historically, rarely changed their power dynamics once they reach a certain level of maturity (Schumacher, De Vries, and Vis 2013, 470). This is also supported by the central tenet of Michels' (2007) iron-law of oligarchy, where the institutionalization of mass parties leads to their domination by elites. Michels' (2007) highly influential theory posited that the professionalization of a party leads to the creation of a party bureaucracy, composed of leaders and politicians, who have distinct interests from the party members that they represent. While leaders may be recruited from the party membership, their interests will differ precisely because their employment and status are tied to the continued growth of the party. Michels' concept underpins the office versus policy-seeking dichotomy that structures our assumption of elites and activists respective interests. Because, per Michels (2007), every party organization needs a professional bureaucracy to function effectively, we would assume that the larger the party, the more likely it is to be leader-dominated. In general, this means mainstream parties with a history of governing are likely leader-dominated parties, and niche parties are more likely to be activist parties (Adams et al. 2006).

Assuming that the party under analysis is a leader-dominated party, we would expect to observe that an external shock that forces the party from office would lead to a change in organizing logic. To a significant degree this is similar to the first explanation, however in

application there is a greater degree of nuance in the type of shock that can cause change. For instance, an economic crisis or corruption scandal may lead to a party being forced from office. Moreover, while public opinion would likely be a mediating factor in how the party leaders assess the impact of this shock, it is not necessarily the shift in the mean or median voter but could include a target group of voters, such as a geographically or demographically specific type of voter, that the leaders assess is pivotal to their chances of election. A source of potential incoherence in a party's organizing logic would largely be driven by exogenous factors as organizational structure is treated as constant. It would be the difficulty that parties have in maintaining a voter coalition due to the impact of an external event on public opinion. The experiences of Social Democratic parties over the last thirty years is an indicative example of such an issue, where increased heterogeneity in middle and working class preferences has made it harder for these parties to coherently respond to the preferences expressed by each group (Gingrich and Häusermann 2015; Kitschelt 1994).

A new approach – actors on the dominant coalition

I introduce a new explanation that focuses on the interaction between internal and external factors and contends that some form of organizational change is required for a party to change. At its core, this approach contends that a necessary condition for party change is a change in the leader. This is typically, although not always, caused by an exogenous event like an election defeat or scandal. The destabilizing effects of this event on the party are compounded by a change in the party leader. In an age of personalized politics, the image of the party leader is a strong contributor to the party's brand (Rahat and Kenig 2018). A new leader will have their own qualities that are distinct from their predecessor and so they will seek to ensure that this is reflected in the party's infrastructure (Harmel et al. 1995). There is a small, but important difference with the leader-domination perspective, in that the specific preferences and interests of the party leader, and indeed all party actors are not assumed by

virtue of their position. While, particularly in larger parties, the party leader may be pressured to follow office-seeking strategies, there is space for disagreement on the proposed ideological or strategic approach that can be employed to mobilize voter support. A given party is likely to have a vast array of actors, which can include party leaders, cabinet members, parliamentarians, policy advisers, campaign advisers, public relations advisers, party donors, trade union leaders, activists and party members. These actors will have different preferences for how the party, as an organization, should function, in particular over the specific contours of its orienting ideology. these preferences are not fixed according to their position inside the party, but instead are historically and socially specific; they are tied to the actors' social relations as they extend outside of the party, which informs their interpretations and preferences for how their party should respond to external pressures (Mudge 2018). This means that not all politicians will necessarily be office-seeking, and indeed some party activists may be office-seeking. The specific preferences and interests of each actor are determined by their unique experiences within a broader historical context (O'Grady 2018). To this end, it important to recognize that while leaders are likely a necessary actor in the process of party change, they will not all have the same opportunity to do so, as they will face different external contexts but, perhaps most importantly, they may be constrained by internal opposition (Harmel et al. 1995, 6). As such, a new party leader cannot, independently, be identified as a key mechanism of party change.

In the literature on party change there is a suggestion that when a new leader emerges and is supported by a change in the dominant faction, then overall party change will occur (Harmel and Tan 2003). Not all parliamentarians have to share the same ideological interests by virtue of their status in the party and can hold different interpretations over the optimal means to respond to changes in society. Indeed, likeminded actors are likely to cohere on the

basis of their interpretations of the party's place in the world. This explanation is underpinned by the idea that party change does not 'just happen' (Harmel and Janda 1994a), instead, a change in faction and leader will see the party update its orienting ideology and adjust its interests such that the party will change its organizing logic in a way that is specific to the interests of the leader. However, there is a potential problem in identifying factional change as a supporting condition. In the last thirty years, as 'cartelization' has unfolded, intra-party decision-making has become increasingly concentrated in the parliamentary section of the party; and, at least in mainstream parties, the parliamentary section has become increasingly homogenous (Bardi, Calossi, and Pizzimenti 2017; Katz and Mair 1994, 1995, 2009). This has not prevented factional change from occurring, however it has taken an increasingly personalized, rather than ideological, form of division (Rahat and Kenig 2018). By way of example, the intra-party division between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown in the UK Labour Party or between Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard in the Australian Labor Party is better explained through personal animosity filtering through the party organization than through ideological contestation between competing factions. As such, a potential pitfall of this explanation is that factional change can occur without it leading to party change due to the absence of ideological division between factions.

I propose two mechanisms that can better explain how party leader change can contribute to party change. I argue that organizational change is predicated on a change in party leader, and that new leader must be supported by significant changes in the types of actors that hold influence in the dominant coalition; and that this newly composed dominant coalition must have a high degree of conformation in order to institutionalize changes to the party's organizing logic. Before, elaborating on these mechanisms it is necessary to briefly define the concept of 'dominant coalition', which Panebianco (1988, 38) describes as the 'alliance of alliances' between the most powerful actors within a party and serves as the 'coalition of

internal party forces with which [the party's leader] must at least to a certain degree negotiate' (Panebianco 1988, 38). Panebianco refers to both the *composition* and *conformation* of the dominant coalition. Composition is simply the different actors that hold influence within the coalition, while conformation refers to the distribution of power across these different leaders and can range from a dispersed structure, in which there are a number of competing leaders that struggle to maintain agreement to a situation in which a single faction or group of actors dominates; to a centralized, hierarchical structure in which a handful of actors hold power across a number of institutions.

Rather than factional change being a necessary condition for organizational change, a change in the types of actors that have influence inside the dominant coalition is necessary. Some actors from the pre-existing dominant coalition may remain, however they must do so in a renegotiated alliance that includes actors that had previously been excluded. It is the entry of new types of actors, who bring preferences and interests shaped by their unique social relations, that generate change. Of course, because each actor and their interests are historically specific, a significant external shock is likely to lead to re-alignment inside the dominant coalition, but it could also make it harder to achieve a high degree of conformation because the historically and socially specific nature of actor interests inform their proclivity to work with internal opponents.

Actors achieve influence in the dominant coalition through their control of key party infrastructures (Panebianco 1988, 37). They can gain influence by mobilizing sentiment and support from outside the party, but this must be harnessed into institutional authority in order for this actor to have a place at the table in the dominant coalition. Different actors within the dominant coalition will compete to have their preferences over the party's orienting ideology realized, and this process of competition can itself impact intra-party power relations. Naturally, when there is internal disagreement, infrastructures can act as chips to be 'spent' in

intra-party interpretive debates. For instance, a party leader may threaten to resign, and withdraw the personal reputation and claim to expertise that they hold, if they feel that they are not getting their way in an internal dispute; a trade union leader may threaten their unions' affiliation fee if the party supports labor market de-regulation.

Assuming that there is a change in leader, we can envisage four different outcomes for change in organizing logic dependent on the composition and conformation of the dominant coalition:

Figure: Envisaged outcomes for change in organizing logic

		Conformation	
		Low	High
New actors in dominant coalition	No	Incoherent maintenance of existing organizing logic	Coherent maintenance of existing organizing logic
	Yes	Incoherent change in organizing logic	Coherent change in organizing logic

Across the top-row there is unlikely to be a change in the party's organizing logic although for slightly different reasons. If the dominant coalition is structured according to the top-left square, then we are likely to observe a reduction in the coherence of the party's existing organizing logic. In this scenario, the new party leader has sought to introduce change, however they lack support for this from new actors and have to contend with a highly fractious organizing logic. Such a scenario is likely when an external shock has introduced significant debate amongst the pre-existing dominant coalition and has caused dis-alignment. However,

the absence of new party actors stalls the genesis of new ideas. As a result of this power dynamic it may be difficult to clearly identify and describe change in the party's organizing logic, however its coherence may be reduced.

If the dominant coalition is structured according to the top-right square, then we are likely to observe the status-quo. A new party leader may seek to change the party's organizing logic, however the alignment and interests of the dominant coalition are unlikely to have substantially changed. This dominant coalition is in a position to block the leader, which weakens their capacity and willingness to seek change. Such a scenario may result from the weakness of external stimuli failing to take hold inside the party, or the entrenched nature of pre-existing power relations limiting opportunities for change.

Whereas across the bottom row, there is likely to be change, although with variation in terms of coherence. If the dominant coalition is structured according to the bottom-left square, then we are likely to observe an incoherent change in the party's organizing logic. A new party leader is supported in their efforts to change the party's orienting ideology by the entry of new types of actors, however they are confronted by a highly fractious dominant coalition. In such a scenario the external shock is likely to be significant as it will have caused disagreement amongst the pre-existing actors in the dominant coalition and created opportunities for the entry of new types of actors. However, the fractious nature of this dominant coalition creates ample veto points for actors who oppose the changes made by the party leader to publicly dissent, which reduces the coherence of the party's organizing logic.

If the dominant coalition is structured according to the bottom-right square, then we are likely to observe a coherent change in the party's organizing logic. A new party leader is supported in their efforts to change the party's orienting ideology by the entry of new types of actors, and they either gain widespread control of the dominant coalition by capturing key veto points or they gain consent from a number of pre-existing actors, which enables them to force

out their intra-party opponents. By controlling key veto points, these new actors can ensure that the party infrastructures function according to the party's orienting logic, producing a coherent organizing logic.

Research Design

I test these different explanations through a case comparison of the way in which the UK Labour Party changed under the leaderships of Tony Blair and Jeremy Corbyn. There is a trade-off with regards to a small-n comparison in testing the new approach to party change.

As was discussed above, one of the reasons that party change has been increasingly analyzed in terms of programmatic positioning is that this allows for large-n comparison. Moreover, as was implied in discussion of both the external change and leadership-domination explanations, the desire for large-n comparison has also impacted the way in which we conceptualize what happens inside political parties. An unfortunate result of this is that political parties are often treated as black boxes. The intention of this paper is to return to an earlier generation of scholarship that demonstrated that change does not 'just happen', and that to understand party systems we must get inside the party. This produces a trade-off where because intra-party relations do not lend themselves to easy quantification, to identify such processes we have to limit our analysis to a small number of cases.

By adopting a Bayesian approach to process tracing (Fairfield and Charman 2022), I can at least offer a methodological approach that reduces arbitrariness and, by carefully stating my reasoning for individual observations, can enable reproduction. My data collection included interviews, systematic newspaper analysis, documentary analysis of party reports and memos and secondary sources (see Appendix A for interview list and for a description of my interview techniques). Through my data collection, I constructed multiple pieces of evidence for each case. Each piece of evidence is weighed, in decibels, according to the volume to which it speaks for one explanation relative to another. At the end of this process, I aggregate the scores to

determine which explanation is more plausible given the overall weight of evidence. Due to space constraints, in the next sections I employ heuristic Bayesian reasoning to discuss how key pieces of evidence spoke for different explanations. In Appendix B, I provide a more detailed description of Bayesian process tracing and evidence construction as well as outline my reasoning for each piece of evidence.

It is worth reflecting on the potential constraints that emerge from the specific case selection strategy. I see this as an effective strategy as it allows for analysis of two very different attempts, ideologically speaking, at change of the same party. Tony Blair's efforts revolved around "modernization", which was to adapt the party from an industrial to a globalized economy which, in terms of ideology meant reconciling Labour with a market economy and, in general, moving the party to the right, while in terms of infrastructure, making the parties policy making structures oriented to focus groups and polling, while utilizing spin as a central plank in its communications strategy. By contrast, Jeremy Corbyn's attempt at change was to move the party radically leftwards, while moving the party back towards an envisaged mass party model of organization. It could be argued that either of these cases are extreme outliers in the history of the Labour Party and thus not representative of "normal" cases of party change; or that the two cases are too different in multiple ways: the UK party system changed between the early 1990s and mid-2000s; the issue landscape, in particular Brexit, created new divisions inside and outside the Labour party; and the rules for selecting party leaders were substantially different for Blair and Corbyn. This may attribute many different drivers of party change as well as to the overall coherence of any changes.

Yet these factors are captured in the mechanisms in the rival explanations that themselves are constructed through attention to dominant theories within the existing party change literature. In this sense, selecting the Corbyn and Blair cases stacks the odds against my dominant coalition theory. If we assume that the reason Corbyn's changes lacked coherence

was because of the splits in Labour's electoral coalition caused by Brexit, then this would be strong evidence for the leadership-domination theory; if Corbyn failed to change the Labour party because his ideas were too radical for the electorate whereas Blair's success was driven by the compatibility of his ideas with the electorate, then this would be evidence that speaks loudly for the electoral change theory. The value of a Bayesian approach to process tracing is that we evaluate evidence as to whether it is more likely to be observed in the world posited by one explanation relative to a rival. So if one was to have concerns over the conditions in one case compared to a rival, then this feeds into the prior odds that we hold when evaluating evidence. Issues around scope conditions and generalizability are addressed in the conclusion.

Analysis

I will firstly discuss the relative weight for each piece of evidence in each case. It should be noted that, in total, I constructed 90 pieces of evidence and so, due to clear space constraints, it is not possible to discuss them individually (see Appendix B for the full list of evidence with a short summary of my reasoning).

Constructing New Labour – (1992-1997)

Background Information

There were several pieces of background information that proved relevant to my analysis of the evidence.

The first of these was Labour's existing organizational structure, which, founded by the trade unions in 1900, was federated structure, where each autonomous affiliate organization was guaranteed delegates to the annual party conference, which served as the peak decision-making body as it determined party policy and elected officials within the party bureaucracy and the National Executive Committee (NEC). Trade unions controlled the party conference for much of the twentieth century through the operation of the 'bloc vote', where unions

received a bloc of delegates proportionate to their financial contribution (Russell 2005, 192). In theory, the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) was formally subordinated to the party conference as this institution would determine party policy. In practice, because unions could not fully influence early candidate selection processes the PLP retained autonomous power. Yet rather than this provoking long-standing conflict between parliamentary and union elites, the operation of the bloc vote tended to benefit the parliamentary leadership as it provided an efficient means for union leaders to strike deals between each other and with the party leadership (McKenzie 1964, 407; Quinn 2012, 212–18). However, this began to break down in the 1970s as trade unions adopted militant strategies to oppose the Labour government's efforts at imposing disinflationary policies, including wage restraint. (Hay 1996; Mudge 2018, 337). The actions of union leaders were widely seen as discrediting the capacity of Labour to govern, as 84% of the public agreed that they had 'become too powerful' (Russell 2005, 26). This created the space for an alliance between left-wing union leaders and party activists, so that for the only time in Labour's history, a left-wing majority controlled its NEC.

This partly feeds into the second piece of relevant background information, which was the significant electoral re-alignment of the 1980s. Labour lost the 1979 General Election though, largely due to the aforementioned internal influence of the left, retained a largely Keynesian policy program. This clashed with the monetarism implemented by the Thatcher government, which accelerated the liberalisation of Britain's financial markets and the country's de-industrialization. The proportion of the workforce classed as manual workers fell from 54.7% in 1971 to 37.7% in 1991 and trade union membership fell by two thirds between 1979 and 1993 (Russell 2005, 27). Thatcher had helped to transform the economy such that 'class' was no longer experienced through an individual's status as a worker, but whether consumption items like housing, education, and pensions were provided by the state or the market (Krieger 2007, 424). Labour's Keynesian program failed to resonate amidst the

'spectacular decline in support for the collectivist trinity of public ownership, trade union power and social welfare' amongst working class cohorts (Crewe 1982). Between 1983 and 1992, under the leadership of Neil Kinnock, Labour moderated its policy program (Crewe 1991, 43). IThere were repeated internal debates, which Kinnock largely won and minimized the influence of the grassroots left. In this period, a new "modernizing" faction emerged amongst the parliamentary party, led by Gordon Brown and Tony Blair, who were aligned with Peter Mandelson, who Kinnock had appointed Director of Communications. While Kinnock was not himself a modernizer, he often adopted a number of the programmatic and strategic suggestions that these figures pushed. Throughout this period, with some exceptions, the trade unions acceded to Kinnock's policy shift although resisted his attempts at organizational reforms, in particular the expansion of One Member, One Vote to internal elections, which would decrease the influence of the bloc vote in party decision-making (Kogan 2019, 72; Quinn 2005). These changes proved insufficient to impact Labour's electoral fortunes as it, surprisingly, lost the 1992 General Election.

Case overview

After the Labour party lost the 1992 General Election, John Smith was appointed leader. Smith had been a close ally and served as the Shadow Chancellor under Kinnock. Four months after the election, the Conservative government pulled the UK out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism. Within hours the interest rate increased from 10% to 15%. This event, dubbed "Black Wednesday" is widely acknowledged as the critical event in reshaping public perceptions of the party's economic competency. In the October 1992 Gallup opinion poll, the party's primary vote dropped from 42% to 29%. Smith adopted a 'one more heave' approach; there would be no major policy or strategic changes from the approach adopted at the 1992 General Election as Labour would instead capitalize on the public's exhaustion with the Conservative government.

Smith's approach was internally opposed by the "modernizers", believed that, irrespective of Black Wednesday, Labour had not done enough to assuage the fears of the business community and, by proxy, Middle England (Minkin 2014, 146). Moreover, Smith said that he 'did not like the black arts of public relations that's taken over politics' (in Minkin 2014, 85, see also Kogan 2019, 79). Smith abolished the Shadow Communications Agency (SCA), which had been the party infrastructure that had pioneered the use of focus groups, opinion polls and spin. The modernizers fought back, by leaking polling and publicly criticizing both the scope and pace of changes made under Smith, however they were unable to substantially change Smith's approach.

When Smith suddenly died in 1994, he was replaced by Tony Blair. Under Blair, Labour substantially moderated its policy program, which included support for the Conservatives' spending policies, a vow not to increase the top rate of income tax, and a pledge to not borrow to finance spending. The change in organizing logic was perhaps symbolized in the redrafting of Clause IV of the party's constitution. Blair personally led the process by which Labour's commitment to supporting common-ownership and full-employment was replaced with support for a thriving private sector and a market economy. Under Blair's leadership, Labour constructed infrastructures that directly engaged the business community.

Blair also enacted several changes to the organizational structure of the party. He oversaw the replacement of the General Secretary, which allowed him unprecedented influence over staffing decisions at the party bureaucracy. This led Blair to establish a new managerial culture, which gained influence over decision-making structures at the party conference and the NEC. Blair also publicly distanced Labour from the unions, by failing to support their strike efforts and not committing the party to changing Thatcher era industrial relations policy. Internally, the unions' bloc vote was removed in this period.

Parsing the evidence

The period between 1992 and 1997 is clearly a case of coherent change. The key question is whether the programmatic and strategic changes to the organizing logic were contingent on the organizational changes that he also made. This is what we would expect to observe under the dominant coalition explanation, where we would see Blair's organizational changes as means by which he changes the composition and gradually increases the conformation of the dominant coalition. By contrast, under the electoral change and, particularly, the leader power explanations, we would expect that Blair would not need to make significant organizational changes as the Labour party would already have institutionalized the dominant position of the leader. Also of relevance is whether Blair was ideologically motivated, as we would expect under the dominant coalition explanation, or motivated only by office-seeking interests.

Before we get to the Blair period, it is important to note that evidence from the period where John Smith was leader, from 1992 until his death in 1994, seemed more likely to conform with the mechanisms set out by the leader power explanation. While we might generally have expected Smith to adopt a program of change, it appears that the economic crisis around Black Wednesday (E1 in Appendix B), was of sufficient magnitude that his 'one more heave' strategy was formulated on an interpretation of the opinion polls that Labour's optimal route to office did not require them to change their program. Moreover, while the modernizers did not like this approach, Smith's capacity to fend them off, as observed in E2 and E3, is expected as it appears that he utilized the powers available to the leader to assert his authority. By contrast, under the electoral change explanation, we would expect to observe a change that is consistent with the interpretation outlined by the modernizers, although intra-party power relations would not be the mechanism that would drive such a shift. Some of the factors that we would expect to observe in a dominant coalition explanation are present in this early period, however it is somewhat surprising that the new leader does not seek to reshape the party in their own image

and adopts many of the same policies as his successor. Thus, these early pieces of evidence were weighed most in favour of the leader power explanation.

After Blair becomes leader, the sequencing events spoke for the dominant coalition explanation. In E13 through to E20, we observe different pieces of evidence that reflect a new managerial culture developed within the Labour party. Central to this was Blair's personal dominance over the party General Secretary, which was unprecedented in the party's history and enabled him to control staffing decisions and, as we see in E16, change the types of people that can become Labour party staffers. This is an important piece of evidence as it speaks to the qualitative change in the composition of the dominant coalition that we would expect to observe in a world in which the dominant coalition explanation is true. We then have several different pieces of evidence, from quite a range of sources including a party manager turned MP, a party historian who was a participant observer in the NEC and National Policy Forums during this period, and statements from union leaders, that speak to the newfound managerial control that the emanated from the party leader's office. In my reasoning across these pieces of evidence, and again in E33, E34 and E35, where we can actually observe how the managerial system had a substantive impact on intra-party debates over either policy or organizational reforms. Broadly speaking, it appears that this culture was a contingent factor in Blair's capacity to change the party's organizing logic.

Under the leader power explanation, we would expect that the narrow veto points in an institutionalized Labour party would enable Blair to pursue the various changes to the organizing logic that he does, without the fundamental shift in power relations with the trade unions. To this end, the creation of a business liaison unit, which we observe in E29, occurred without consultation with traditional decision making institutions inside the party; as well as a clear policy change away from support for unions' use of industrial action to achieve their aims. This emphasis on electoral coalition is different to what we would expect to observe under a

straight mean-voter strategy. Further evidence in favour of the leader power explanation is Blair's changes to Clause IV of the party constitution, which had clear symbolism as embodying the party's commitment to socialism, and as we see in E21, while the NEC did constrain an element of Blair's intended shift, this was still by and large a relatively straightforward leader-dominated process. Yet the sequencing of the events observed across the pieces of evidence, where Blair reshapes the function of the party conference and enacts a new policy making process that is more leader dominated, in the form of the National Policy Forum (NPF), is important as these sidelined unions that were increasingly concerned with the nature of changes that Blair sought. This demonstrates that, it was only under Blair, not before, that veto points were narrowed for Labour to be sufficiently coded as a 'leader-dominated' party.

The process by which Blair changed the function of the NPF, outlined fully in E19 in Appendix B, is illustrative of the importance of sequencing. The NPF was created by Smith in 1993 as a policymaking to build two-way consensus between the NEC and the Shadow Cabinet, however once Blair becomes leader, Minkin observes a change in approach where the NPF becomes a one-way institution where the NPF are made to 'appreciate and confront the real policy choices as the leadership saw them' (Minkin 2014, 303). We later see how the NPF is shut down by 1996, while policymaking and strategy is pushed directly out of the leader's office. Under the leader power explanation, given that Labour is supposed to be a leadership dominated organization, it is surprising that the NPF would be created in the first place, let alone as a consensus building institution that empowers non-leader actors that sit on the NEC. That Blair then sought to change the function of this institution, is more reflective of how different types of parliamentary actors held divergent interpretations as to how the party should structure itself to respond to exogenous developments. Smith appears to have taken a more traditional approach, which we know from previous evidence angered the modernizers. Once

Blair becomes leader, the change in function of the institution is entirely in line with what we would expect to observe under the dominant coalition explanation.

This is an important example of how the sequencing of the reforms made by Blair suggests that the clear change in organizing logic was contingent on a shift in the composition of the dominant coalition, with the entry of Blair's new party managers, which in turn leads to increased conformation as union leaders' power declines. This enables Blair to achieve a highly coherent change in the party's organizing logic.

An incoherent radicalism: Labour 2015-2020

We can now turn to the period in which Jeremy Corbyn was the leader of the Labour party. Relevant background information includes Labour's defeat at the 2015 General Election. Labour lost 26 constituencies and achieved a vote share of just 30.6%. At the 2015 General Election, the Scottish National Party (SNP) won 56 of 59 constituencies. According to Evans & Tilley (2017, 179), prior to 2010 there was no major difference between working and middle class support for the SNP. However in 2015, 60% of working class Scots supported the SNP, compared to less than 45% of middle class voters. Moreover, only 34% of working-class Scots saw Labour as a party of the working class. As such they conclude that 'the rising tide of Scottish nationalism did affect working class voters more than middle class voters, but this was more due to changing perceptions of Labour than perceptions of the SNP.' In England and Wales, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) won 15% of the vote, which was an increase of more than 10% from the 2010 election. At the 2005 and 2010 General Elections, just 2% of working-class voters supported UKIP, while at the 2015 General Election this increased to 23%. These working class voters were attracted by UKIP's policies around immigration and Euroscepticism (Ford and Goodwin 2014).

Programmatically, Labour had moderately moved to the left under Corbyn's predecessor, Ed Miliband, however it supported the Conservatives' austerity program. While

at the beginning of his leadership, Miliband had consciously sought to move the party on from the New Labour era, however his Shadow Cabinet was full of Cabinet Secretaries and advisors to Blair and Brown. From 2013, Miliband also appointed former New Labour spin doctors to his own staff, which a range of sources indicate was the point at which the party adopted a poll-driven strategy.

Finally, during the Miliband leadership key trade union leaders sought to restore their position within the dominant coalition. Their support had proved critical in Miliband's victory over his brother and it appears that trade union leaders were motivated by their opposition to the Third Way (Kogan 2019; McCluskey 2021). Each of the big three trade unions – UNITE, UNISON and GMB, adopted political strategies where they would use trade union branches to recruit members and influence Labor candidate selection processes. Miliband feared increased trade union influence, and in response to one of these selection processes, publicly accused UNITE of corruption. The process by which this was de-escalated saw the unions reduce their financial contributions to Labour in exchange for a new leadership selection process, where the new leader would be selected entirely by OMOV, although any candidate would have to be nominated by 15% of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Case outline

Jeremy Corbyn's selection as Labour Party leader was a shock. As a representative of the activist left, it appears that he was only able to achieve the requisite nominations for the contest as his colleagues patronisingly lent him their signatures to 'widen the debate' (see E37 in Appendix). Corbyn mobilized left-wing sympathy amongst the existing membership and encouraged hundreds of thousands of new members to join and his support his candidature. However, once he became leader, he struggled to implement policy and strategic changes. He was forced to appoint a Shadow Cabinet that largely comprised fierce critics, because he lacked

parliamentary allies in the PLP; and he was constrained by a party bureaucracy that was still run by Directors appointed in the New Labour era. This lack of cohesion was demonstrated on policy approaches to welfare, military intervention in Syria and during the 2016 Brexit referendum.

In the aftermath of the Brexit referendum, the Shadow Cabinet resigned on mass and the PLP overwhelmingly passed a no confidence motion in his leadership. However Corbyn refused to resign and he appointed a new Shadow Cabinet, primarily comprised of inexperienced MPs that were more aligned to the trade unions than their senior colleagues. Unanimous support from the trade union and grassroots delegates on the NEC enabled him to remain as leader.

Labour was polling around 25% between the Brexit referendum and the snap General Election called by the Conservative Government for May, 2017. However, at the election, Labour won 40% of the vote, its highest vote share since 2001. The British Election Study links this result to the coalescing of the anti-Brexit vote around Labour and the personal and programmatic support for Corbyn's more radical agenda. This is surprising as while the PLP did not intervene, the party bureaucracy actively constrained Corbyn's advisors from running the campaign that he intended, until UNITE intervened by seconding a senior figure, in Andrew Murray.

After the General Election, Corbyn used the political capital won through the party's unlikely result to engage in organizational reforms as he expanded grassroots representation on the NEC, which allowed him to replace staff at the NEC. As Corbyn also had a more amenable Shadow Cabinet, he was in a position to engage in more coherent reform. However, it was at this point that Brexit became more salient. This presented a strategic quandary for Labour as the majority of the constituencies that it held had supported Remain, while the majority of the constituencies that it needed to win had voter Labour. On this basis, it appears that Corbyn and

his advisors sought to negotiate a soft-Brexit with the Government, however this was rejected by the Conservative party and resisted internally in the Labour party by senior Shadow Cabinet figures and the majority of the mass membership. On at least two occasions Corbyn sought to force through a soft-Brexit position, most notably at the 2018 party conference, however he was forced into an incoherent compromise position that included support for Brexit and a second-referendum.

At the 2019 General Election, in which Brexit was much more salient than in 2017, Labour's Brexit policy was that, if Labour were to win an election it would negotiate a new Brexit deal within six months, and then put this deal to a new referendum in which Remain would be an option. Polling indicates that a majority of the population did not understand Labour's policy on the agenda. At the same time, in the lead up to the election campaign, disfunction within LOTO meant that the key strategists and policy makers that had been influential in devising the 2017 campaign were side-lined. During the campaign the party struggled to make decisions on basic things like determining a slogan. Its policy program was broadly similar to that of 2017, and appeared to reflect an interpretation that the disaffection that had motivated support for Labour in the previous election would do so again, however in reality, it was now shaped firmly through Brexit which Labour's policy failed to coherently articulate.

Parsing the evidence

The Corbyn case is slightly more straightforward than the New Labour case, as the weight of evidence overwhelmingly speaks loudly for the dominant coalition explanation. The broad base of evidence, which forms the basis for the above narrative outline, reflects a case which is broadly one of incoherent change with a brief increase in coherence around the 2017 election. We can consider how each of explanations would make sense of this.

The external change and leader power explanations would each emphasize exogenous factors. The external change explanation would expect Labour to change policy in line with shifts in the mean voter, and any incoherence would be observed as a result of a lack of resources in identifying and targeting the mean voter or as a result of ambiguous preferences in the mean voter itself. While Labour had internal disagreements over how their resources should be deployed, there is little evidence that it lacked these resources. There is partial evidence that the preference of the mean voter may have been ambiguous on the key issue of Brexit, however this was increasingly clarified by 2019 when Labour was at its most incoherent.

Instead, the strategic quandary that Labour faced with regards to Brexit is evidence that we would expect to observe in the leader power explanation. While it is difficult to interpret the broad changes that Corbyn made to Labour's organizing logic as office-seeking, there are multiple pieces of evidence, including quotes from many of his advisors and intra-party opponents, that his prioritization of a soft-Brexit policy was largely motivated by strategic considerations. This is particularly clear in the deliberation around policy in the period after the 2017 General Election, when, in the context of a minority parliament and when Corbyn's Labour was polling higher than May's Conservative party, Labour sought to use Brexit as an opportunity to force another election rather than a second referendum (see E77 – E82 in Appendix B). To this end, under this explanation we would expect that Labour's incoherence would be motivated by the strategic quandary on Brexit, where the diverging preferences of different parts of Labour's electoral coalition force the incoherent position. The increased coherence that we observe around the 2017 election could be explained by the increased salience of other issues, like economic inequality.

However, the majority of the evidence collected around Labour's Brexit positioning is more likely to be observed in the dominant coalition explanation than the leader power

explanation. This is because, under the leader power explanation, we would expect that on as salient an issue as Brexit, Corbyn would utilize his domination over a narrow range of veto points to ensure his strategic or policy approach is adopted across the party. To this end, it is highly surprising that the evidence outlined in E82, E84, E86 and E87 would occur in these conditions. In E82 we see different internal party actors seek to achieve to influence Labour's policy making processes at the 2018 party conference, and while Corbyn does seek to use veto points available to the leader, in the form of the compositing process, to suppress the pro-second referendum forces, he lacks the authority to achieve such an outcome and instead Labour adopts an incoherent expression as no side can fully exert authority over the other. This piece of evidence is much more likely in the conditions of the dominant coalition explanation, as it reflects a scenario in which there is low conformation amongst the contending actors within the dominant coalition. E87 is also highly surprising as we observe two of Corbyn's close advisors and stalwart supporters criticize him for his lack of commitment on the Brexit issue. This is highly surprising under the leader power explanation, as we would expect the leader to speak clearly and coherently on such an important issue.

The Brexit issue is probably the most complex within the Corbyn case, as the weight of evidence speaks loudly for the dominant coalition explanation. While it is highly surprising under all explanations that Corbyn would become leader in the first place, this explanation's emphasis on the conformation of the dominant coalition helps to explain the observed incoherence in the early part of his leadership. This incoherence was expressed when Corbyn and the relevant Shadow Minister were publicly at odds on a specific policy issue. Under the dominant coalition explanation, we would expect this if no single actor or alliance of actors is able to exert authority across the organization. Whereas in the leader power explanation we would expect that, while allowing for a degree of internal negotiation, that the leader's viewpoint would typically prevail. Instead, we only observe this around the 2017 General

Election, where the sequencing of events observed sees Labour's coherence increase as Corbyn strengthens his internal authority as his supportive coalition gains greater control over the dominant coalition. After the PLP failed in their attempt to remove him from the leadership, Corbyn was able to select a more supportive Shadow Cabinet, and the intervention of union leaders to force through his preferred strategy during the 2017 General Election helps to explain the coherence of changes to the organizing logic at this critical juncture.

The decrease in coherence after the General Election appears to be explained by the fissures within his own supportive coalition. As disagreements over both Brexit, as outlined above, as well as organizational reforms provoke a split between Corbyn's union backers on the one hand, and grassroots activists on the other. These disagreements were observed in the selection of a new General Secretary, where the UNITE candidate prevailed as the activist was pressured to stand down (E71); in an inability to control candidate selection contests (E72 and E73); and a public disagreement over whether the 'mandatory reselection' of candidates (E75 and E76). In E76 we even observe Corbyn admitting, a year after his leadership had ended, that the reason mandatory reselection had not been passed at the party conference was the opposition of the trade unions. This is notable because, prior to his leadership, Corbyn had been a noted campaigner for greater internal party democracy. In this sense, the decreased conformation provoked by the fracturing of his own coalition reduced conformation on the dominant coalition and made it harder for the party to coherently sustain the changes to the organizing logic that Corbyn sought as the leader of the party.

Conclusions

The New Labour and Corbyn cases lend support for the dominant coalition explanation that I have advanced in earlier sections of this paper. In both cases there was clear change in organizing logic from the previous period, which is partly explained by the symbolism inherent to Blair and Corbyn as representatives of a particular form of politics. This is consistent with

the change in leader mechanism that the dominant coalition posits. The variation in coherence that is observed in each case, where Blair pushed through coherent change, whereas Corbyn's change largely lacked coherence, is explained through the different degree of conformation in the dominant coalition. This is an important point that is worth underlining, because, particularly with the Corbyn case, there is good reason to believe that the leader-power explanation and its emphasis on different preferences between key constituencies within an electoral coalition as the driver of incoherence offers a better explanation. In the Corbyn case, the strategic quandary that the party confronted through the salience of Brexit would serve as this mechanism, whereas in the Blair case, Labour needed to increase support amongst middle-class voters but there is less evidence that this itself would be a driver of incoherent change.

However, I contend that the emphasis placed on interest formation in the dominant coalition explanation allows for us to better conceptualize how exogenous factors, including strategic dilemmas pushed by an electoral coalition, can influence party decision-making. In the Blair case, the emergence of new types of political advisors – spin doctors and policy wonks – was significant because this represented a qualitative departure in the sense that previous types of advisors had emerged through the party membership and were more socialized in party traditions. These new advisors were more likely to come from middle class backgrounds and thus share the preferences of the types of voters Labour was trying to win over, and also brought skills and experiences from outside of the party organization to aid them in this task. This shift helped to drive organizational reforms, the effect of which was to reduce the power of the trade union leaders within the dominant coalition, which enabled Blair to make coherent changes to the organizing logic. By contrast, the disparity of interests between different types of Corbyn's intra-party allies, particularly more pragmatic trade union leaders who advocated for an office-seeking approach to Brexit, and the more idealistic pro-second referendum grassroots activists reduced the conformation of the dominant coalition and was a major factor in the incoherence

of the party's orienting ideology. The point that emerges from this analysis is that by placing better emphasis on how different types of actors have unique interests that are formed through their social relations outside of the party, rather than their status inside the party, we can understand how political interpretation can influence and be constrained by intra-party power dynamics.

In considering implications from these findings there are two points that are worth making. The first is with regards to any concern with regards to the generalizability of these findings given the analysis was contained to two cases from the same party. Put simply, is this explanation unique to the UK Labour Party? There is no reason that an explanation grounded in analysis of the changes in composition and conformation of the dominant coalition could not explain change in other mainstream parties in high-income democracies. Because niche parties or minor parties do not necessarily seek to win power, this would introduce a different dynamic into the explanation. However, mainstream parties are office-seeking, but are likely to contain a vast range of different types of actors who each have different interpretations for what strategy and ideas will help the party attain this goal. The capacity for these different actors to form alliances with each other is the key driver in the nature of change, and thus further research could seek to apply this framework to other cases.

A final, related point pertains to the availability of data. Research on political parties has been plagued by a lack of comparative data beyond voter preferences. This paper has demonstrated that processes of party decision-making are highly relevant to our understanding of parties and party systems more generally. However, this creates a conundrum because these processes are not easily quantifiable and thus there are clear limitations in the capacity to conduct large-n comparisons that would easily generalize findings. This should thus be read as a call to consider more fine-grained qualitative approaches in the study of political parties, which would enable us to better understand relevant dynamics.

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