

Divided parties don't win elections: an ideational-organizational analysis of Social

Democratic party decline

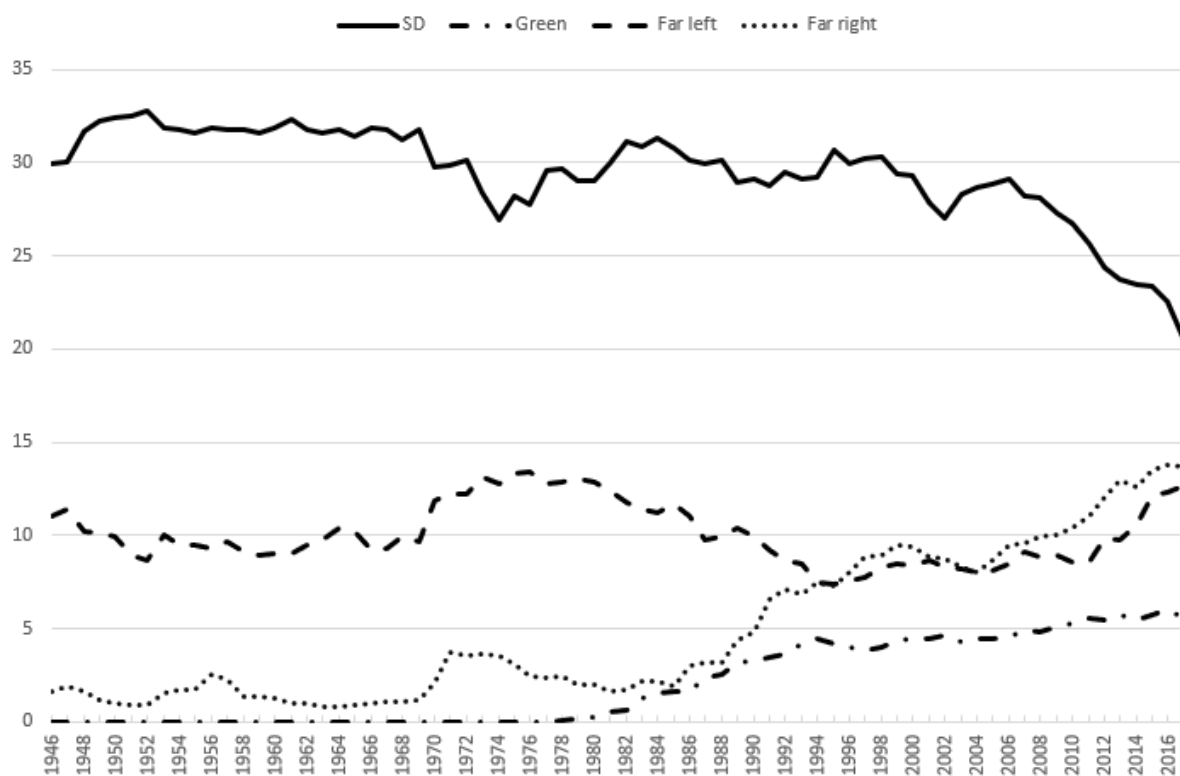
Abstract

Why could European Social Democratic respond to decline in the 1990s but not in the 2010s? This puzzle requires us to approach party organizations as the cradle of political ideas. I compare attempts at developing new orienting ideologies in response to socio-economic transformation. Through a new ideational-organizational framework, I theorize that this process requires internal interpretive debates that reshape party infrastructure to align with new interpretations of socio-economic change. I analyze the attempts of the British Labour party to adapt in both periods. Through Bayesian analysis of over 150 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 failed because Jeremy Corbyn could not align the party around his more radical agenda.

1. Introduction

Social Democratic (SD) parties are in crisis. As Figure 1 indicates, the last decade has been characterized by a precipitous decline in SD vote share. Explanations of this decline identify two mutually re-enforcing factors. Firstly, the long-term effects of globalization and de-industrialization have broken apart the traditional cross-class SD coalition (Gingrich and Häusermann 2015; Benedetto, Hix, and Mastrococco 2020). The manual working-class has declined in size, while the middle classes have fragmented according to their occupation and education status (Oesch 2008). Secondly and relatedly, party systems have re-aligned around new post-material issue dimensions that split the SD electoral coalition (Kitschelt 1994). Challenger parties, from the far-right to the Greens, have instrumentalized these divisions, which has cross-pressured SD parties (Oesch and Rennwald 2018). In effect, socio-economic transformation has narrowed the electoral demand for traditional SD parties.

Figure 1: Average vote share of SD, Green, Far left and Far right parties in Europe, 1946-2017



Note: the figure shows the average vote share that different parties received in nineteen European countries. For a given year, the share was calculated by taking a party's average vote share from the most recent legislative election before that specific year. The countries included are Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Spain, Switzerland and the UK.

Yet all of this isn't exactly necessarily new. As Figure 1 shows, SD parties may have experienced the most extreme decline over the last decade, however it is not the first time that a significant decline has occurred. Nor is it the first time that these parties have experienced increased competition from challengers. Indeed, this figure masks regional complexities, where the pace of SD decline and the specific identity of the challenger parties varies across Southern Europe, Scandinavia and Central Europe (Hopkin 2020; Benedetto, Hix, and Mastrococco 2020). It is worth contextualizing the present period in comparison with the wave beginning in the late 1970s because many of the explanations for contemporary SD decline also apply to this earlier wave: it was prompted by the reduction in size of the manual working class and the increasing political significance of the educated middle class (Kitschelt 1994; Oesch 2008); and party systems were increasingly structured around new post-material cleavages articulated by emerging challenger parties (Kriesi 1998; Inglehart 1977). One might point to the Global Financial Crisis as an important point of difference between the two waves, but even then, the first wave of decline occurred, in part, because of the stagflation crisis. Certainly both economic crises tore apart the ideational paradigms that had underpinned SD parties – Keynesianism prior to stagflation; the Third Way prior to the GFC (Mudge 2018). The difference is that one set of parties adapted, while the other has not.

This is important as it limits the explanatory power of voter-led explanations. If SD parties can respond to similar dilemmas at one point in time and not at another we need to

understand why. A major reason for this gap is the undertheorizing of the role that political parties play in the development and diffusion of political ideas. The overriding assumption that characterizes the dominant approach to SD decline is that they have failed to respond to the way in which voters have updated their preferences. Yet beyond an identification of a complex strategic dilemma and different suggestions for policies and strategies (Kitschelt 1994; Gingrich and Häusermann 2015; Abou-Chadi and Wagner 2019), we lack an understanding of *why* parties have failed to adapt and the factors that condition their capacity for responsiveness.

In this article I develop on an ideational-organizational conceptual framework to argue that parties must respond to the fragmentation of their electoral coalition through the construction of a new “organizing logic”, which describes the alignment of a party’s institutional structure with its orienting ideology. An organizing logic is thus the ideational and material means through which a party interprets, engages and organizes its external environment. It is more than a programmatic position or a policy strategy as it describes how a deeper ideological worldview is aligned with the institutional means through which the party makes and acts on representative claims over social and interest groups. I show that the construction of a new organizing logic is contingent on a change in the internal balance of power between different party actors. New types of actors that hold distinct interests and worldviews must emerge and gain authority within a party’s dominant coalition. This new internal dynamic must then be institutionalized across the party’s structures, which requires either internal accommodation between different party actors or the domination of the old order by the emergent actors.

I utilize this framework to argue that the reason that SD parties adapted to decline in the 1990s but not in the 2010s is their failure to construct a new organizing logic. The Third Way provided SD parties with an ideological orientation that made sense of the socio-economic impact of globalization. Yet this was not an easy, rational shift in party policy but instead

represented the culmination of prolonged internal interpretive debates in which “modernizing” politicians and advisors defeated “traditional” elites. It was only through these victories that parties were able to develop the institutional infrastructure to diffuse the Third Way and build a new cleavage of support. In contrast, in the aftermath of the financial crisis, the Third Way no longer provided a viable organizing logic as it lacked relevance to the increased economic insecurity of middle class social groups (Horn 2021). However, I argue that SD parties in the 2010s could not develop a new organizing logic because pro-Third Way actors retained important veto positions inside the party organization. The relative weakness of their internal opponents meant that they could not institutionalize a new orienting ideology across the party structure, which prevented the diffusion of a fundamentally different SD worldview.

I demonstrate the applicability of this argument through case analysis of the British Labour party. This represents a critical case as it largely conforms to existing explanations of the different outcomes across waves of decline, except for the anomalous and volatile support for Jeremy Corbyn in the period 2015-20. I employ Bayesian process tracing to assess the plausibility of my organizational-ideational framework to explain both the success of “New Labour” in constructing a new electoral coalition in the late 1990s and the failure of Jeremy Corbyn to rebuild a coalition in the late 2010s, relative to existing explanations. I show that Blair’s success was not simply predicated on the adoption of a median-voter strategy, but a wholesale re-organization of the party organization and the displacing of trade union power, which enabled him to suture together an electoral coalition that was oriented around the interests of business groups; in the Corbyn period, rather than decline being explained purely through his economic radicalism or Brexit, I demonstrate that the heterogeneity of interests amongst his supporting elites prevented the institutionalization of a new orienting ideology. As a result, Labour failed to adapt to new exogenous demands.

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section I outline existing explanations of SD decline in greater detail. In section three, I develop my organizational-ideational explanatory framework. I then provide a brief justification of my case selection strategy. In section five I outline the Blair period, while in section six I explore the Corbyn period. Section seven provides a discussion of the implications of my analysis and section eight concludes.

2. Existing explanations of SD electoral success

SD decline is typically explained through the changing preferences of voters amidst long and short-term effects of socio-economic transformation and the concomitant rise of challenger parties. Where SD parties' historical strength was tied to its cross-class coalition, they have been confronted with a strategic bind by the decline in size of the manual working class (Kitschelt 1994; Benedetto, Hix, and Mastrococco 2020). SD parties responded by orienting themselves to the preferences of the middle classes (Kitschelt 1994; Rueda 2005; Gingrich and Häusermann 2015), yet this has prevented them from winning elections as they have alienated other social groups (Piketty 2020). As a result, challengers – from the far-right to the Greens – have emerged by taking advantage of SD parties' uniquely cross-pressured dilemma (Oesch and Rennwald 2018).

It should be recognized that this dilemma was also clearly present for SD parties in the 1990s (Kitschelt 1994). The post-war economic settlement made economic security widespread, which diminished class voting and increased the salience of socio-cultural issues (Inglehart 1977). SD difficulty in responding to these trends created opportunities for challengers as varied as the Green Party in Germany; the Liberal Democrats in the UK; the Front National in France; and Forza Italia. As is indicated in Figure 1, that these challengers come from quite disparate ideological backgrounds parallels the dynamics of party competition in the more recent wave of SD decline.

That SD parties adapted to socio-economic and party-system changes in the 1990s does not deny the relevance of these factors to the decline of the 2010s. Instead, we should try and understand what has changed about SD parties that limits their capacity to respond. There are two answers that are advanced in the existing literature. Firstly, there is an argument that the formula for SD success is a program that combines investment-oriented economic positions with liberal socio-cultural positions (Kitschelt 1994; Gingrich and Häusermann 2015; Abou-Chadi and Wagner 2019). This was, arguably, at the heart of the Third Way turn that SD parties undertook in the 1990s (Blair and Schroeder 1998). It is plausible that their present decline is explained by the strategic move away from this formula, either as a result of abandoning liberal socio-cultural positions (Abou-Chadi and Wagner 2020); or a shift towards economic radicalism. Yet, amongst contemporary SD parties there is little evidence that SD parties have abandoned the supply-side Keynesianism that underpinned the investment-oriented economic positions of the 1990s (Bremer and McDaniel 2019). Moreover, a small number of parties, in particular the Danish Social Democrats, have adopted more authoritarian socio-cultural positions and improved their vote share (Rathgeb and Wolkenstein 2022). By contrast, a second set of answers explanation that it was precisely the move towards the Third Way, in particular the right-ward shift on economic policy, that has created long-term consequences for SD parties (Evans and Tilley 2017; Schwander and Manow 2017; Berman and Snegovaya 2019; Polacko 2021; Horn 2021). Yet we still do not understand *why* SD parties have not moved away from these policies given their consequences; or why, in the limited cases in which such an effort has been made have not been met with success.

3. Parties as the cradle of ideas: An ideational-organizational approach to party responsiveness

Through existing explanations of SD decline we have a solid understanding of the structural forces that have narrowed political demand. However, we lack the conceptual tools to make

sense of how SD parties respond. The ideational-organizational conceptual approach that I develop in this article is premised on parties' unique 'expressive function' where, through the supply of political ideas and identities, they shape the way in which voters' interpret social change (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). This moves beyond a purely instrumental understanding of political parties by integrating the sociological function that parties play in suturing together a social bloc (De Leon, Desai, and Tuğal 2015). Parties do more than aggregate preferences by updating a manifesto as they engage in a range of socio-political activities, including but not limited to making and enacting policy; campaigning at the local and national level; and influencing media discourse through speeches and rallies. In doing so, parties provide social groups with the ideas and identities that shapes their understanding of the world. We need to understand how parties construct and change these ideas in order to understand how they can respond to threats. In this section, I outline an actor centered ideational-organizational conceptual approach that equips us with the tools to identify a party's capacity for responsiveness. I do so in general terms as it is envisaged that this conceptual approach could apply outside the specific puzzle of SD decline, although I conclude the section by specifically theorizing its suitability to this case.

Organizing Logic: orienting ideology, party infrastructure and the dominant coalition

I conceptualize the range of activities and underpinning ideas through which a party fulfills its expressive function as an *organizing logic*. At the root of a party's logic is its "orienting ideology", which is not a set of abstract, theoretical ideas but is instead an 'expression of contested relations' (Mudge 2018, 12). This ideology *orients* the party in that it underpins the strategies, policies and discourses that the party employs to engage with its potential supporters. From the perspective of the party's supporter groups, this orienting ideology can become a resource through which they conceive of their own material interests and therefore align

themselves with other groups. In this way, an orienting ideology is the party’s primary ideational resource that is at the root of its engagement with its external environment.

Table 1: The definition of principal party infrastructure

Infrastructure	Function	Observable behaviors
Competency	‘Power of the expert’: Specialized knowledge gained through experience and position inside the party.	A leader or politician threatens to resign and withdraw their knowledge and the perception of their experience.
Environmental relations	The formal and informal institutions that connect to other parties, <u>movements</u> and organizations outside of the party.	Policymaking; campaign strategy; institutional liaisons with business associations and trade unions; the party manifesto
Communication	Control of the circulation of information inside the party.	The distribution, manipulation, and suppression of information.
Formal rules	Control and manipulation of the organizational rules that constitute the party.	The outcome of debates over the meaning of the party constitution.
Financing	The flow of material resources.	Party donations; the secondment of staff from outside organizations; campaign subventions.
Recruitment	The control of member recruitment and career advancement inside the party.	Candidate selection contests; promotion of members into organizing/adviser positions.

The other key component to a party’s organizing logic are the institutions through which the party functions. These institutions have been termed “zones of uncertainty” and are summarized in Table 1 (Panebianco 1988, 33–35), though describing them as “infrastructures” perhaps helps to clarify their purpose. They are the resources that a party must possess in order

to exist, and they can take on an ideational or material quality, or both. For instance, “competency” is the normative claim of expertise, although it becomes embodied in the performance of a specific individual. This is essential for a party to claim authority and understanding of the specific ideas through which it articulates its coalition. Financing is a far more material infrastructure, in that it reflects the actual financial capacity of the party to fund itself, although it can still carry symbolic significance – for instance, whether the party is funded by large donations from wealthy individuals, by its membership dues or by trade union subscriptions.

I argue that for a party’s organizing logic to be coherent, its infrastructures must align with its orienting ideology. Because parties are comprised of multiple actors, each infrastructure will function according to the historically and sociologically specific interests of the actors that controls it. The experiences of these actors outside of the party, which can in turn influence their personal interests, will inform their preferences for how the party, as a whole, should function, which is likely to lead to some form of internal disagreement both over what the party’s orienting ideology should be and how different zones should function.

Actors gain their authority inside the party organization through their control of infrastructures (Panbianco 1988, 37). Naturally, when there is internal disagreement these zones can act as chips to be ‘spent’ in intra-party interpretive debates. For instance, a party leader may threaten to resign, and withdraw the competency 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. This re-enforces the point that all zones have to “pull together” to ensure that its orienting ideology is coherently expressed. An internal actor can thus threaten to change the function of certain zones and thereby threaten the viability of the party’s organizing logic. A party’s capacity to respond to electoral decline is therefore contingent on minimizing intra-party disputes.

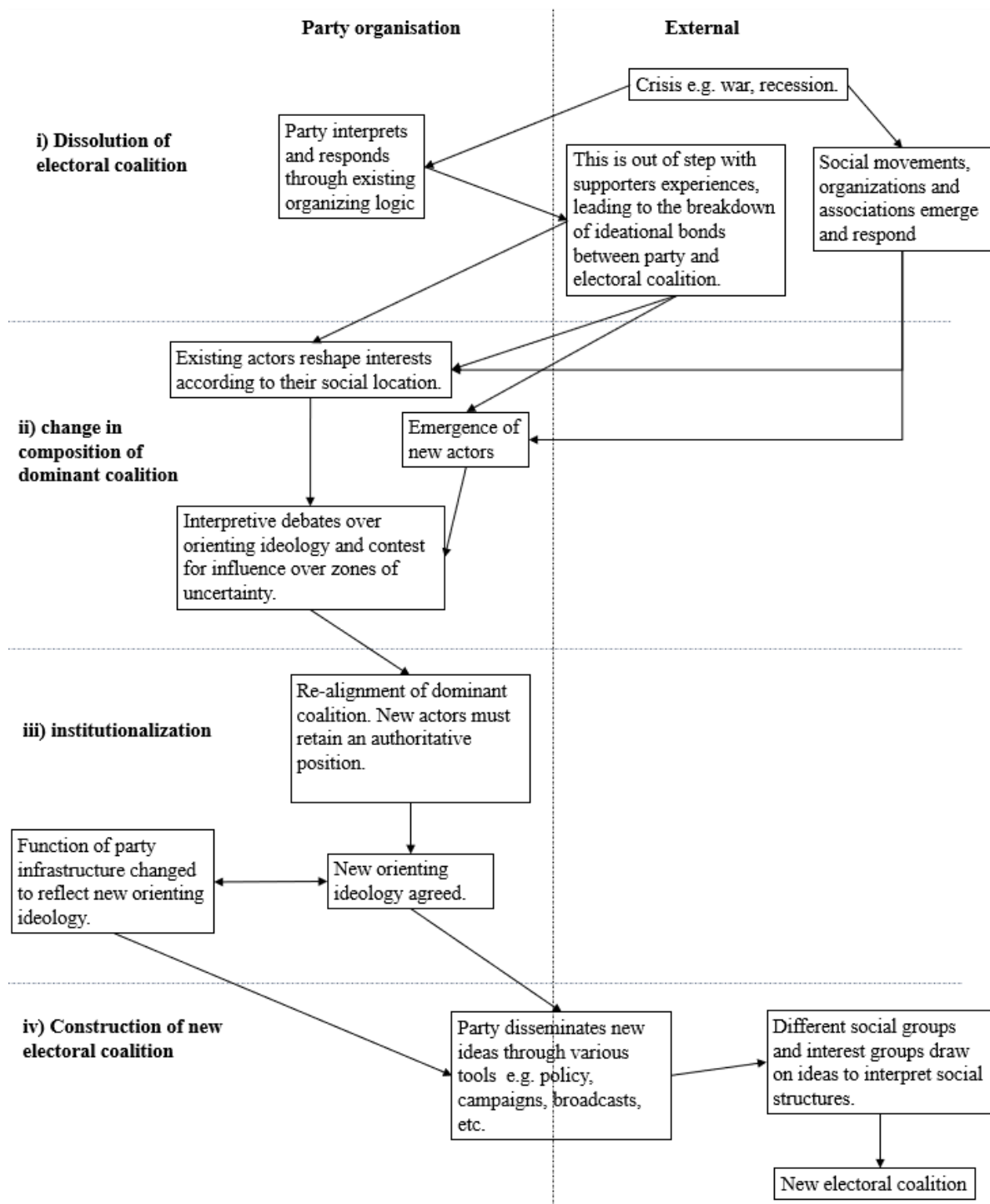
A party's organizing logic can be identified through analysis of the power games between different actors. This will occur in the party's dominant coalition, which is comprised of the actors that control vital infrastructures (Panebianco 1988, 37). At different points in time, a dominant coalition can be aligned and cohesive or it can be mis-aligned and incohesive depending on intra-party dynamics. The outcome of internal debates and conflicts will determine whether the party's organizing logic is coherent, which in turn strongly influences its capacity to respond to electoral decline.

Changing organizational logic amidst crisis

Central to my argument is the idea that broad changes in social structure, like globalization, can break up a party's electoral coalition, which parties must respond to through the construction of a new organizing logic. This process is visualized in Figure 2.

This process starts with the breakup of a party's electoral coalition. The likely catalyst is some form of exogenous crisis that could come from either an event like a recession, or from more long term transformation of society, like de-industrialization. This event disrupts the social structure of society and changes the material living conditions for a significant portion of the voting public (De Leon, Desai, and Tuğal 2015). These events can break up a party's ideational connection with its constituent support groups, because a party will be slower to interpret an exogenous shock than voters whose day-to-day life is upended. It is likely that the party will respond according to its pre-existing orienting ideology, which will be less relevant due to the way the shock has transformed social relations. The breakup of a party's electoral coalition creates an opportunity for challenger parties to capture parts of this former coalition, which is dependent on their capacity to diffuse their own organizing logic amongst social and interest groups.

Figure 2: The process of constructing a new electoral coalition



As a result of the breakdown of its electoral coalition, a party will need to develop a new organizing logic. This is not an easy task because a party that has enjoyed prolonged stability will have an engrained way of thinking as its dominant coalition will have institutionalized their world-view and strategic insights across the party's zones. A party in this position will need new ideas but this is not necessarily going to be acknowledged by pre-existing actors that may see alternative worldviews as a threat to their own standing. While many of these actors will update their interests according to their own place in the social order outside of the party, this can itself create disorder within the dominant coalition. At the same time, the exogenous crisis can create space for social movements to politicize certain issues or promote actors from previously non-partisan organizations, like the army, into positions of political significance. To gain political authority in the state, these actors must join or create a political party. If they choose to do this in the party of interest, they must gain influence over infrastructures as this provides them with resources to deploy in internal party debates.

Interpretive debates will provoke an internal re-alignment as, depending on their interests, existing actors either oppose or align with new actors. It is necessary for the party to institutionalize the new dynamic of its dominant coalition. This involves the resolution of interpretive debates through either domination or accommodation. It is key that in the recomposed dominant coalition, new actors hold a position of influence. Institutionalization of the dominant coalition is perhaps the most important mechanism in this process because it is the hardest to achieve. Without this process the party cannot agree on its orienting ideology, which will be reflected in the failure of its zones to pull together. This can be observed through a party's incoherence on a policy issue, prolonged factional disputes spilling into the public domain, attempts at removing the party leader. These behaviors are likely to prove damaging and provide space for more parties with more coherent organizing logics to construct rival electoral coalitions that incorporate some elements of the party's support. However, if the party

can institutionalize its new dominant coalition, this will provide the opportunity for its zones to be molded around its orienting ideology. Depending on both the zone in question and the specific nature of the organizing logic the change to be observed could be quite subtle: we could see new forms of party financing, new types of members recruited and promoted to internal positions, new communication strategies, new alliances formed with social movements, a redefinition of what credibility is, and new party rules created. This stage is critical as it enables the organizing logic to be diffused and therefore provides the basis for the party to construct a new electoral coalition.

This process can be summarized through four stages that will be observable: the first is the emergence of new types of actors into positions of internal authority; the second is more pronounced internal debates over the ideological fabric of the party; the third is the resolution of these debates through either domination or alignment between new and existing actors; the fourth is a shift in function of infrastructures through institutional change or the introduction of new institutions. Moreover, in terms of sequencing, we would expect to see this occur before an uptick and change in structure of the party's support base.

It is important to note here that the coherence of an organizing logic is necessary but not sufficient for the construction of a new electoral coalition. The period of crisis provides an opportunity for a number of parties to compete for control of the same social groups. Yet, the successful parties will do so through the coherence of their organizing logic, as they are equipped with the ideational and material resources that can shape the needs and demands of a diverse range of groups into a single coalition. So long as there is external stability, once a party has formed an electoral coalition it can be hard for it to be broken purely through the actions of a challenger party. As such, if a party under observation sees its coalition broken apart as a result of a crisis, its window for reconstruction is contingent on the actions of other parties and the overall resolution and return to social order. If it misses this window it is

possible that the party could develop a coherent organizing logic, yet it will lack the external conditions that would enable it to construct a new coalition.

Application to waves of SD party decline

Based on this ideational-organizational conceptual approach, I offer a unique explanation of SD party decline. My argument is premised on the capacity of parties to construct new organizing logics at different points in time. In the 1990s SD parties constructed the Third Way as an organizing logic to respond to the way in which globalization reconfigured social relations. The specific programmatic features of the Third Way varied according to national context, however they broadly shared a commitment to globalization, enacted through an embrace of supply-side economic approaches including targeted social investments rather than redistributive spending (Blair and Schroeder 1998; Hall 2002). However, this was not a simple programmatic shift premised purely on electoral calculation, but instead the product of the interpretive debates that occurred inside parties between actors whose authority stemmed from their control over infrastructures. More specifically, the Third Way should be recognized as a victory for specific types of actors, typically politicians and advisors, whose social backgrounds come from more middle-class occupations over more ‘traditional’ political elites, including politicians and trade union leaders, whose continued social and professional connections with the declining working class led them to oppose ideological change.

The financial crises that rocked Europe between 2009 and 2012 tore apart the claim to credibility and competency, fundamentally reshaping the economic security for significant SD constituencies. Despite this, SD parties drew on supply-side Keynesianism to support austerity measures (Mudge 2018; Bremer and McDaniel 2019), which had deleterious consequences for their relationship with their target voters (Mudge 2018). However, I argue that SD parties have failed to construct a new organizing logic because pro-Third Way actors could not be displaced

from their positions of authority in their dominant coalition. This is explained by the way in which these actors had institutionalized their position as veto-players and the relative weakness of actors inside SD parties that opposed the Third Way approach. While SD parties may have dropped the Third Way moniker for strategic reasons, its ideological underpinnings continue to form the basis of their orientation to social change. As a result, they fail to adapt to the social relations of the period.

4. Methodological considerations

I test this argument through Bayesian process tracing of the British Labour party during the two waves of decline, specifically under the leaderships of Tony Blair and Jeremy Corbyn. While the puzzle of SD decline is clearly a cross-national phenomenon that has impacted almost all European SD parties, the ideational-organizational conceptual framework does not lend itself to large-n analysis. It emphasizes the identification of specific causal mechanisms through analysis of organizational processes, where data collection is typically derived from qualitative sources.

By limiting the scope, the intention of this article is to demonstrate the viability of an ideational-organizational explanation of SD decline relative to existing theories. The critical case method is most appropriate as it requires two factors: a theory or argument that says under reasonably-well defined conditions *a* causes *b*; and a case which conforms in every relevant instance to the conditions of this argument but where the outcome is not as predicted (Hancké 2009, 68–72). As outlined above, there are two sets of existing explanations. The first, is that due to the socio-structural impact of the transformation of advanced industrial societies to knowledge economies, SD parties can only construct a viable social base through investment-oriented economic positions and liberal socio-cultural positions. This can almost characterize the British case, where Labour’s electoral revival in the 1990s is typically described through its adoption of a ‘median-voter strategy’ that re-oriented the party’s program to reflect the

interests of the middle-classes (Wickham-Jones 2005; Evans and Tilley 2017); in the 2010s, Labour's deviation from this strategy under Jeremy Corbyn's radical economic populist agenda would theoretically explain the party's defeat, however this explanation struggles to explain why the Labour party enjoyed unprecedented growth in its vote share under Corbyn at the 2017 General Election before an abrupt decline just two years later. The Corbyn period is also difficult for the other set of explanations to describe, in which the legacy of the Third Way explains decline in the 2010s, as we would expect that his programmatic left-wing turn would lead to sustained success. As such, the complexities of the British case, particularly in the Corbyn period, make this a critical case of contemporary European Social Democratic decline. The generalizability of this case study and the external validity of my approach is discussed in the final sections of the article.

I analyze evidence gathered through fieldwork, interviews, systematic newspaper analysis, and documentary analysis of archival material (see Appendix A for interview list and for a description of my interview techniques). Through my data collection I evaluated over 150 pieces of evidence across the Blair and Corbyn leaderships. Each piece of evidence is evaluated according to whether it speaks more loudly for a given explanation relative to a rival (Fairfield and Charman 2022). This cumulative process allows us to evaluate the overall weight of evidence for each explanation, and therefore determine which explanation is most plausible. Due to space constraints, in this paper I focus on explicating the causal mechanisms beyond my explanatory framework, however Appendix B provides an overview of Bayesian process tracing and an example of my treatment of evidence and reasoning.

5. Tony Blair & New Labour

Between 1946 and the mid-1970s, the Labour party enjoyed unprecedented electoral success. Internally, a dominant coalition comprised of trade union leaders and the leaders of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) enabled the party to promote a Keynesian organizing logic

(Russell 2005, 12–13). Through a combination of policy enactments, campaign techniques and social infrastructure, the party emphasized the common interests of the manual working class, low-skilled service workers, public sector workers and socio-cultural professionals around their shared status as wage earners (Evans and Tilley 2017, 148–52). Over the course of the 1970s, the stagflation crisis and the inability of Labour to prioritize and ensure wage restraint discredited the Keynesian organizing logic and limited the efficacy of the party’s emphasis on wage earners (Mudge 2018, 337). The socio-structure of British society transformed across the 1970s and was accelerated by Thatcherite reforms in the 1980s: : between 1971 and 1991 the proportion of manual workers in the British economy declined by 17% and trade union membership fell by two-thirds (Russell 2005, 27). There was a concomitant collapse in support for the ‘collectivist trinity of public ownership, trade union power and social welfare’ amongst working class cohorts (Crewe 1982). Nevertheless, internal conflict between increasingly militant trade union leaders and parliamentary elites trying to shift the party’s economic approach to inflation prevented the party from constructing a new organizing logic (Russell 2005, 14). Labour failed to form government between 1979 and 1997 and its vote share was consistently in the low 30s, 12% below its post-war average.

In this section I show that Labour’s capacity to adapt to this shift was driven by ideational and organizational changes made by the party across this period. By the time Labour returned to office in 1997, its support base was overwhelmingly middle class. By the 2001 General Election, voters were as likely to see Labour as a middle-class party as a working class party (Evans & Tilley, 2017 161). I demonstrate that this success was caused by the party’s adoption of a median voter strategy. Instead, it was premised on building institutional and ideational links with the business community, whose endorsement proved critical in demonstrating Labour’s competency and shared interests with middle class voters. While a rightward shift on economic policy was critical to this process, this was an extension of

ideational and material infrastructures that were constructed under Blair's leadership. According to Minkin (2014, 670), the party leadership 'moved behind the back of the TUC' to work in harmony with business to delay or circumvent union policy. Prior to the 1997 election, the party published a separate manifesto for business, the policy for which came outside traditional party structures and included support for the Conservatives' spending policies, a vow to not increase the top rate of income tax, and a pledge to not borrow to finance spending (Minkin 2014, 670). At the 2001 General Election, *the Times* endorsed Labour for the first time in its history. I demonstrate that the construction of this pro-business infrastructure was contingent on internal victories won by "modernizer" MPs and advisors and their capacity to remove party activists, trade union leaders and even soft-left MPs from influence within the party's dominant coalition.

Change in composition of Dominant Coalition

It was in the aftermath of the 1983 General Election that "modernizers" emerged within the party organization: Blair and Brown were elected to parliament, and in 1985 Peter Mandelson was appointed the Director of Communications. While these figures lacked sufficient power to fully embed a Third Way orienting ideology, the new party leader, Neil Kinnock, who came from the party's soft-left, formed an alliance with these young modernizers as he believed their ideas would enable Labour to respond to the re-alignment of British society (Kogan 2019, 68–70). This alliance gave modernizers increased influence over the party's external relations as after Labour's 1987 General Election defeat, Blair and Brown were promoted to key posts in the Shadow Cabinet, and along with Mandelson they influenced the "policy review" which publicly committed the party to make policy on the basis of market researcher rather than the perceived ideological influence of trade union leaders (Kogan 2019, 79). As a result, Labour's manifesto for the 1992 General Election was markedly more right-wing (Crewe 1991, 43).

Kinnock also used internal dissent as a pre-text to remove left-wing activists from the dominant coalition and weaken trade union influence. In 1988 his only challenger for the leadership, Tony Benn, received just 11.4% of the vote and, tellingly, just 0.8% of support from affiliated unions. This signaled the end of the activist-union alliance. Kinnock's control over party rules was cemented when he introduced One Member, One Vote (OMOV) rules for elections to the party's National Executive Committee (NEC). This had long been opposed by the left and by trade unions as they feared it would dilute their influence over electoral contests. In the subsequent elections to the NEC, Blair and Brown were elected in place of Benn and other left-wingers like Ken Livingstone.

Nevertheless, these ideational and organizational changes proved insufficient to rebuild Labour's electoral base as the party lost its fourth successive election in 1992. Business representatives endorsed the Conservatives in *The Times*, which, through his interviews, Minkin (2014, 125-6) says the modernizers saw as important in 'consolidating Tory support from Middle England'. Modernizers interpreted Labour's defeat as evidence that the internal alliance with the soft-left prevented Labour from coherently diffusing the Third Way, which was evidenced through manifesto commitments to increase the top income tax rate and to expand welfare spending.

The modernizer's institutionalize a new orienting ideology

In 1994, after the sudden death of John Smith, Tony Blair became party leader. While this clearly increased the modernizers influence within the party organization, it was not sufficient by itself to negate the influence of the trade unions and institutionalize the modernizers' Third Way orienting ideology. One of Blair's strategists, Phillip Gould (2011, 240-42), wrote a memo that described the party's organizational structure as as 'too diffuse, with power shared between the NEC, the PLP, the conference, the unions and the constituency associations'(see also interviews in Minkin 2014, 118-19). Gould (2011, 240) advocated for a 'unitary system

of command' that would give the 'clarity and flexibility' to 'adapt ... at the pace required by modern politics.' This can be interpreted as evidence that modernizing elites believed Labour's organizational structure would have to be adapted in order for the Third Way organizing ideology to prove effective.

The key mechanism for the institutionalization of Blair's orienting ideology was the 'informal cross-departmental taskforce' that, according to one party staffer, came to control communications infrastructure by cultivating a 'new culture of cynical management' (Cruddas and Harris 2006, 12; see also Minkin's elaboration of Blair's "rolling coup" Minkin 2014, 147–53). This taskforce emerged through the interlinking of party staff in the bureaucracy with those in the leader's office, which was achieved through the unprecedented influence that Blair had over the party General Secretary: within a month of Blair's selection as party leader, the incumbent General Secretary, Larry Whitty, who was seen as a strong supporter of the party-union link resigned; and under Blair, the position of General Secretary changed hands five times, which was a far higher rate than under previous party leaders. Blair's control over the General Secretary enabled him to influence staffing decisions and promote new types of advisors to key bureaucratic positions. A survey of staff recruited in the New Labour period were more likely to have work experience outside the party, and also more likely to seek non-party employment in the future than pre-existing staff (Webb and Fisher 2005, 8–9). This change represented an institutional and ideational shift in the social networks that connected key party elites to the outside world, and meant that key decision-makers were less connected to traditional Labour networks. A large number of staff were recruited from 'non-partisan' think tanks like Demos and the Institute for Public Policy Research, which signified an 'utterly different source' of knowledge production (Mudge 2018, 345). While interviews with former staff members and secondary sources point to a culture that emphasized 'the need for flexibility' amongst party personnel, where the singular focus was to 'delivery for Tony'

(Webb and Fisher 2005, 12; Minkin 2014, 154–55; Cruddas and Harris 2006, 12 interviews with Julie Lawrence and Ann Black).

This taskforce proved critical in the downsizing of union influence. As noted above, Blair became a member of the NEC in 1992, and there is evidence that he was influential in the negotiations that saw unions decrease their share of conference delegates to 70%, as he pushed for an agreement where an increase in the party's membership to over 300,000 would trigger a reduction in the proportion of union delegates at conference to 50%, and an increase in the proportion of CLP delegates to 50% (Minkin, 2014, 128–130). This threshold was passed in June 1995. The NEC determined that delegates from CLPs would be elected by OMOV, which decreased the capacity of left activists to win these positions. Prior to a conference, delegates were invited to briefing meetings with high profile MPs and ministers to pressure their vote, and during the conference they would be 'whipped' by party staff (Minkin, 2014, 344–47; Russell, 2005, 197; Cruddas and Harris, 2006, 12).

Even after negating the unions' influence, the modernizers pushed further. The Partnership in Power reforms of 1997 created an alternative policymaking structure that sat outside the authority of party conference (Russell 2005, 202–4; Seyd 1999, 391–92). Essentially, the National Policy Forum (NPF) would follow a workshop format to develop policy documents, which would then be discussed by a Joint Policy Committee and the NEC, before being voted on by the annual conference. In reality, the party conference held little scope to influence the policy documents (Russell, 2005, 202–4; Seyd, 1999, 391–2). As Paul Kenny, General Secretary of the GMB, described the process, 'when you got to the National Policy Forum, you would sit there for two days and all the unions would put forward particular areas of policy. You'd get nothing' (in Kogan, 2019, 119). Even after these reforms, the trade unions were still the primary financiers of the party. As such, they maintained control of an important infrastructure. However, the way that this enabled internal influence was through delegates to

the party conference and to the NEC and the reforms achieved by Blair ensured that unions could never have a majority on these institutions. This demonstrates the critical means by which trade unions were removed from the dominant coalition.

Under this new institutional structure, the party leadership was only really accountable to the PLP (Russell, 2005, 278–81). This is important as even with the modernizer's takeover of the party organization, the majority of Labour MPs were still from the party's soft-left. However, the only mechanism that MPs had to hold over the leadership was to rebel on parliamentary votes. As each vote was a managed affair, professionals in the machine could engage in horse trading or strong arming over most MPs to ensure that they voted according to the leadership's line. As such, the actual means by which soft-left MPs could influence decision-making was limited.

This section has presented considerable evidence to suggest that Labour's adaptation to the socio-economic re-alignment of British society was driven by ideological change inside the party. Organizational shifts that centralized power around the party leader, and thereby limited the capacity for opponents to influence the dominant coalition, was a critical step in the party building policy-making and strategic infrastructures through which they gained the endorsement of the business community and the eventual loyalty of middle-class voters.

6. Jeremy Corbyn

By the time Jeremy Corbyn became party leader in 2015, the middle class base that had been constructed under Blair had eroded. The financial crisis of 2007-08 had destroyed Labour's claim to be competent economic managers (Gamble 2010), while it exposed a greater swathe of middle class people to the economic insecurity that had emerged through socio-economic transformation towards a knowledge economy. In the 2010s, a clear post-industrial vs urban geographic cleavage and an education cleavage had come to structure British society, with stark differences in terms of economic investment, access to secure employment and housing costs

(Jennings and Stoker 2016; Rodríguez-Pose 2018). As decreasing the salience of class as an identity had been a characteristic of the Third Way strategy, UKIP, the Scottish National Party and the Conservatives had used nationalist appeals to win over former Labour voters on the post-industrial and low-education side of these cleavages (Evans and Tilley 2017, 6). In this political economic context, it was no longer viable for Labour to secure middle class voters through the endorsement of the business community, as it was unclear they would receive such an endorsement nor that the increasingly fragmented middle classes would follow it.

Strategy papers and internal memos reveal the strategy for adapting and rebuilding that Corbyn sought to implement. One strategy paper written by his Cabinet Secretary in 2017 suggests Labour could achieve a vote share of 40% in a General Election through support from public sector workers, former manual working-class supporters that had switched to UKIP, the SNP or non-voting, the young and by squeezing the Liberal Democrats (see Cowley and Kavanagh 2018, 91–92). While Corbyn’s advisors acknowledged that the material interests of these voters differed, it was believed that an anti-system and radical economic appeal that framed different inequalities – from tuition fees and high rents that young, upwardly mobile middle class voters paid to the precarious employment and lack of social investment in post-industrial regions – to austerity and the concentration of wealth (interview Steve Howell, August 2019). In effect, by drawing on a populist economic narrative to explain supporters’ everyday experience it was envisaged that Labour would mobilize a new coalition. To some extent Labour succeeded at this task, as this support base did comprise the 40% vote share that Labour won over Corbyn. In this section I show that this 2017 result was contingent on the sequencing of organizational dynamics inside the Labour party, and demonstrate that the inability of Corbyn to institutionalize this populist orienting ideology inside the dominant coalition prevented the party from strategically responding to changes in its external environment, in particular Brexit.

Change in composition of Dominant Coalition

Corbyn became party leader in the aftermath of the 2015 election defeat. Corbyn's election was contingent on the actions of a number of other actors.

Under existing leadership selection rules, a candidate needed to gain the support of 15% of the PLP to appear on the ballot. According to the Director for Strategic Planning at the time, this rule was designed as a 'safe barrier to any outsider – especially from the hard left' (McHugh 2015). Corbyn would not have been able to pass the nomination threshold without the support of a small number of MPs who misunderstood their gatekeeping role as they nominated Corbyn to broaden the ideological tenor of the leader selection campaign but did not actually support his candidature (Kogan 2019, 221–27; Nunns 2018, 62–63; interview with Jon Cruddas MP). This strategic misstep indicates that these MPs mis-read the preferences of the party membership who overwhelmingly supported Corbyn, which is also acknowledged by prevailing party elites (see Ayesha Hazarika in Kogan 2019, 244).

Corbyn's victory was also contingent on the mobilization of an insurgent coalition that united trade unions with outside social movements. Following the 2010 General Election, trade union leaders had sought to regain internal influence by developing political strategies where they would nominate pro-union candidates in selection contests. Statements by union leaders indicate that the motivation for this was their lack of influence on party policy (Kogan 2019, 186–87; McCluskey 2021, 135–37; Nunns 2018, 23–24). These figures sought to support candidates that distinguished themselves from the party establishment, and nine trade unions endorsed Corbyn and many provided material resources to his campaign (Nunns 2018, 156–61). Most remarkably, Corbyn's campaign inspired the membership to double in size to 500,000. It is likely that many of these new or re-joining members had participated, even loosely, in the social movements, like Stop the War!, Occupy the 2010 student protests against tuition fees, and the People's Assembly Against Austerity. In the aftermath of the leadership

campaign, “Momentum” was created to organize and direct this mass support (interview with Jon Lansman, April 2019).

These various factors signaled a shift in the composition of the dominant coalition, however Corbyn faced significant difficulty in institutionalizing this dynamic.

Institutionalization

From the outset, Corbyn faced ferocious opposition from both the PLP and the party bureaucracy. Due to a lack of supporters within the PLP, Corbyn was forced to appoint a Shadow Cabinet with only four MPs categorized as loyal (Cowley and Kavanagh 2018, 74). This made it hard for Corbyn to impose his radicalism on party policy as his Shadow Cabinet publicly opposed him on issues from welfare benefits to the war in Syria (Cowley and Kavanagh 2018, 75; Jones 2020, 76–77). The PLP used the outcome of the 2016 “Brexit” referendum as a pretext to attempt to remove Corbyn. Over half of the Shadow Cabinet resigned, and at a PLP meeting, a motion of no confidence was passed by a margin of 172 to 40. Corbyn refused to resign and appointed a smaller Shadow Cabinet that was primarily filled by inexperienced MPs from the party’s left. The PLP triggered a new leadership contest and there was significant debate over whether party rules enabled Corbyn to automatically appear in the contest. All affiliated trade union leaders issued joint statements opposing the actions of the PLP and voted on the NEC to ensure that Corbyn would appear on the ballot (LabourList 2016). This action was decisive, as the actual electorate comprised the mass membership that continued to overwhelmingly support Corbyn.

At the snap election of May 2017 Labour increased their vote share by over 10%. BES data shows that this is only partially explained by the coalescing of the Remain vote, while campaign effects and support for Labour’s economic program are also highly significant (Mellon et al. 2018). Constituency-level data shows that Labour increased its support in areas with a greater proportion of people employed in routine occupations, and achieved substantially

higher votes in constituencies that had high proportions of emergent services workers (Jennings and Stoker 2017). There is therefore evidence to show that Labour did succeed in constructing an electoral coalition that crossed the place and education based divides that increasingly characterized British society.

The sequencing of the above organizational developments is critical to understanding this development. By failing in their attempt to remove Corbyn as leader, his internal opponents acknowledged that they had ‘lost the argument and in so doing also absolutely toxified ourselves’ and as a result Corbyn would have to be afforded the space to ‘fail on his own terms’ (various Labour MPs quoted in Kogan 2019, 293). Moreover, Corbyn now had a Shadow Cabinet that, while inexperienced, was more coherent on key policy areas. This alleviated the constraint that had prevented Corbyn from orienting party policy earlier in his leadership.

Moreover, during the campaign, Corbyn’s elite supporters ensured that the party’s external relations infrastructure would be shaped according to his orienting ideology. This was notable as there was significant pushback from members of the party bureaucracy, especially with regards to the direction of party funds to fund social media campaigns rather than traditional direct mail. Primary and secondary evidence suggests that bureaucratic staff blocked investment in Labour’s digital strategy until just a month before election day (Heneghan 2020; Cowley and Kavanagh 2018, 170; The Labour Party 2020 interview with Steve Howell, August 2019). It was only after the union UNITE, the party’s largest funder, intervened to direct how its money would be spent that Labour began to fully invest in digital media (Cowley and Kavanagh 2018, 168). At the same time, Momentum was pivotal in generating enthusiasm in both online and traditional campaigns as it developed digital content, from viral media viewed by over 15million voters, to mobile apps that helped to mobilize younger voters (Cowley and Kavanagh 2018, 297 interview with Laura Parker, September 2019). In this sense, Corbyn’s

earlier victory and his support from union leaders were pivotal to constructing the infrastructure required to mobilize Labour's support base.

In the aftermath of this election result, it was conceivable that Corbyn was in a position to fully institutionalize his orienting ideology across the party structure. The party conference of 2017 voted to expand the number of seats on the NEC, with one extra seat given to the trade unions and three extra seats to be elected by the mass membership. In effect, this gave Corbyn supporters a majority on the NEC. He removed the incumbent General Secretary, Iain McNicol, and key party bureaucrats whose tenure dated back to the Blair period also resigned.

However, as Corbyn sought to reshape party infrastructure the different interests between his supporters began to emerge. There was significant debate over how the new General Secretary should be elected. The Political Director of UNITE, Jennie Formby, was the frontrunner, but was opposed by Jon Lansman, the head of Momentum who argued against replacing 'a right-wing command and control structure with a left-wing command control structure' (in Kogan, 2019, 328). However, Lansman was encouraged to stand down by Corbyn and Formby was elected to the position by the NEC (interview with Jon Lansman, April 2019). Equally, grassroots activists, including Corbyn, had long campaign to force MPs to seek reselection by their CLPs ahead of every General Election. However, this would reduce the power of trade union leaders to promote their own supporters. Prior to the 2018 party conference, the big-five unions negotiated a compromise with LOTO that would not fundamentally change the process by which MPs were selected. This angered key Momentum officials, and Corbyn himself has acknowledged that the unions were the major impediment to institutional change in this area (interviews with Laura Parker and Jon Lansman, April 2019; Jeremy Corbyn interviewed in Burtenshaw 2020).

As a consequence, there was a strong alliance between Corbyn and his advisors at LOTO with UNITE. While this group proved powerful and controlled a number of

infrastructures, they lacked the capacity to direct the party's ideational response to the changing external environment.

Capacity to construct a new electoral coalition

In the years between the 2017 and 2019 elections, Brexit only increased in salience. This was difficult for Labour as it faced an unenviable strategic calculus as the core of its 2017 vote base had voted "Remain" at the referendum, while the majority of the constituencies that it represented had supported Leave. Hence, a strong argument can be made that the reason for Labour's decline was not ideational-organizational factors, but the importance of Brexit in structuring political competition. While it is likely that with Brexit as the salient issue there is little that Corbyn could have done to sustain his electoral coalition, I show that organizational factors precluded Corbyn from both adopting a Brexit policy that was in line with his anti-system orienting ideology, nor from executing a strategy through which Labour would have sought to resolve Brexit and decrease the salience of the issue.

Evidence, including internal memos and interviews with advisors at LOTO, suggest that in the immediate aftermath of the 2017 election, Corbyn's office sought to remove Brexit from the issue agenda by amending, and ultimately supporting, the Conservatives' legislation (Jones 2020, 186, 195, 204–7; Pogrund and Maguire 2020, 134–36; 194–96). In early 2018, Corbyn's office developed a policy that would see the UK withdraw from the single market and customs union, pursue an independent trade policy and create its own state aid rules (Pogrund and Maguire 2020, 192). However, at a meeting of the Shadow Cabinet Brexit subcommittee on February 12, the Shadow Brexit Secretary, Keir Starmer, threatened to resign in response (see statements from anon. Starmer advisor Pogrund and Maguire 2020, 72). This pushback appears to have led Labour to change course, as in a speech on the 26th of February, Corbyn stated that Labour would 'seek to negotiate a new comprehensive UK-EU customs union' (Corbyn 2018). This shows that shortly after the 2017 General Election, Labour sought

to get ahead of the issue by seeking a parliamentary route to passing Brexit legislation in the hope that it would decrease the salience of the issue. It is also important to note a potential counterfactual where if bi-partisan Brexit legislation were to pass, it is unlikely that the 2019 General Election would have taken place in the dynamics that it did. In this way, pro-Remain elements of the PLP acting to constrain Corbyn supporting this legislation is significant.

After Corbyn was constrained in early 2018 he lost the capacity to formulate a cohesive Brexit policy. Starmer devised six ‘red lines’ that any Conservative legislation would have to pass in order to guarantee Labour’s support, however LOTO and Labour MPs in Leave voting constituencies felt that these red lines were devised to prevent it from supporting any Brexit deal (Pogrund and Maguire 2020, 210–13).

Labour’s internal decision-making was complicated by the mobilization of a mass campaign that pushed for a second referendum. Interviews with the organizers of the People’s Vote campaign, many of whom had worked at Labour HQ and LOTO during the New Labour period, show that part of their motivation was to reduce Corbyn’s popularity (see quotes from Tom Baldwin in Jones 2020, 189; and Tom Watson in Pogrund and Maguire 2020, 164–67). The People’s Vote mobilized marches of over a million people in the summer of 2018, which made it harder for Corbyn to appear the anti-system politician that was a source of his popularity.

Prior to the 2018 party conference, organizers from another pro-second referendum group, many of whom had participated in Momentum and Corbyn’s leadership campaigns, mobilized support amongst the party membership. 151 CLPs submitted motions to the conference calling on Labour to support a second referendum position (Kogan 2019, 390; interview with Luke Cooper, February 2020). Interviews with Corbyn staff reveal their frustration that the significant elements of the grassroots campaign that had supported Corbyn were now making it harder for the leader to strategically respond to changes in the party’s

environment (see quotes from Ian Lavery, Alex Nunns, Andrew Murray and James Schneider in Jones 2020, 185–92).

At the party conference, Corbyn and the trade union leaders utilized their position as the arbiter of party rules to prevent the members from pushing for a second referendum. A compromise was reached where, in lieu of outright support for a second referendum, Labour would push for a general election but ‘keep all options on the table, including campaigning for a public vote’ (Kogan 2019, 392–93; Poggrund and Maguire 2020, 138–41; Watts 2018). This is the strategic ambiguity position that would characterize Labour’s subsequent policy and discourse around Brexit. The fragility and capacity for – potentially deliberate – misinterpretation that underpinned this position was revealed a day after the conference when Len McCluskey, John McDonnell and Keir Starmer gave contradictory statements on whether Labour actually supported a second referendum with Remain as an option (Kogan 2019, 393).

The problem with this position was that, after a year and a half of near constant Brexit debate, data from the BES and opinion polling shows that by the 2019 election, 70% of voters described themselves as experiencing ‘Brexit fatigue’ (YouGov 2019). Labour’s position did not seek to move the country forward but rather to continue the debate. Evidence that Labour’s strategic ambiguity position did not capture this sentiment is found in the 28% of 2017 Labour voters defecting to another party at the 2019 General Election (Fieldhouse et al. 2021). As has already been suggested, with Brexit as the salient issue it was unlikely that Corbyn could have done much to respond to the issue and maintain his pre-existing coalition. Yet it is still notable that intra-party dynamics prevented Corbyn from executing a strategy through which he potentially may have decreased the salience of the issue. Once the opportunity passed, these dynamics similarly prevented Labour from adopting a coherent position. This meant that the party’s organizing logic was completely incoherent with regards to the pertinent social divides, and the party declined.

7. Discussion

Our understanding of contemporary SD decline is shaped by voter-led accounts that point to the shifting preference base of a potential voter-coalition and the re-alignment of party systems. While acknowledging the relevance of these factors, by contextualizing this wave of decline in the broader history and development of SD parties, my analysis introduces the ideational and organizational contingencies that condition how and whether a given party responds to such exogenous constraints. We can directly consider the evidence introduced in the previous section and how they demonstrate the applicability of my theory.

The strongest alternative explanation to understand Labour's successful response to the first wave of decline is the parsimonious account that is centered on the adoption of a median voter strategy and the programmatic shift to reflect the preferences of middle class voters. Evidence for this explanation is found in Labour's four successive electoral defeats between 1979 and 1992, which the secondary literature widely interprets as the party's failure to come to grips with the electoral reality of the decline of class voting (Crewe 1982; 1991). It was only when Blair came to power that the party truly adopting a median voter strategy, which was thus reflected in the shift in the composition of the party's voter-base and its impressive victory in 1997. However, the evidence that I have introduced in section 5 suggests a more nuanced appraisal is necessary. The right-ward shift of the party's program and the use of focus groups to form party policy in the wake of the 1988 policy review is significant evidence that the party adopted a median voter strategy under Kinnock, but that this was insufficient in and of itself, to construct a new support base for the party under changed socio-economic conditions. My explanation does acknowledge that such a strategy was significant to the party's capacity to win-over significant middle class support, however it introduces the endorsement of the business community as a critical factor in this. More to the point, simply adopting pro-business policy programs was insufficient to gain the endorsement of these interest groups as Kinnock

had attempted to do this prior to the 1992 General Election. Instead, I demonstrate that the repurposing of party infrastructure, in particular the party's external relations, was pivotal in constructing tangible links between Labour and business groups. Labour was only in a position to do this by, effectively expelling left activists from critical decision-making bodies like the NEC. While Kinnock was the leader that made these initial steps, it was the complete overhaul of the party's policymaking structure under Blair that internally and publicly downsized the influence of trade union leaders and created inputs for business leaders. Blair was only in a position to do this because of his successive interpretive victories and his of formal rules and communications infrastructures to gain hegemony within the dominant coalition. This analysis demonstrates that while Kinnock made efforts to adopt a median voter strategy, the organizational alignment of party infrastructure around the Third Way orienting ideology was only completed in the Blair period and it was this factor that enabled the party to fully complete the construction of a new organizing logic.

Of course, the connections with the business community and the organizational basis for the Third Way provide supportive evidence for the other set of explanations of SD decline, which identify the rightward trajectory of economic policy as a long-term drag on the party's relationship with society. On the whole, the evidence that I have collected across both periods provides evidence that is generally supportive for this explanation. However, the reason that the Corbyn period makes the British Labour party such a critical case is the capacity of the party to mobilize a voter coalition at the 2017 General Election that was qualitatively different from the New Labour period. Indeed, opinion polling generally indicates that Corbyn sustained support from more than 40% until April 2019, just over six months before the General Election of that year. While this again supports this explanation, the fact that Labour took an even more radical program to the 2019 General Election and its vote-share collapsed suggests other factors are at play. Evidently it suggests that more than program or policy adoption is needed to sustain

connections with social groups. The increased salience of Brexit between 2017 and 2019 is a factor that clearly has explanatory power in this period of the case. Yet, as I discussed more fully above, the evidence that I presented suggests that Corbyn's efforts to decrease the salience of the issue by maneuvering party policy in a direction that would have enabled it to pass bipartisan legislation with the Conservatives was quashed due to organizational disputes. Indeed, the weight of evidence supports my ideational-organizational explanation over rivals due to the sequencing of events across the Corbyn period. Specifically, I demonstrate that the 2017 General Election fell within a brief window in which Corbyn and his supporters were internally united and controlled key infrastructures, which they reshaped to support his radical, economic populist agenda. This window was opened by the 2016 failure of parliamentary elites to remove Corbyn from his position and closed with the fragmentation of his internal support base over organizational reforms in 2018. These reforms failed to give Corbyn the tools to discipline the PLP, which in turn gave internal opponents the capacity to instrumentalize Brexit to paralyze the party. The evidence, in particular the interpretive debates that played out at the 2018 Party Conference, suggests that the organizational dynamics explains the incoherence of Labour's policy position, which arguably amplified the salience of the issue. On the whole then, while the legacy of the Third Way may have some explanatory value over the Corbyn period, I have demonstrated that there were clear organizational contingencies for the party to develop and institutionalize the ideas that were required to construct the organizing logic that would have moved the party forward.

This analysis suggests that exogenous constraints can only explain SD decline if they are coupled with an analysis of the ideational and organizational capacity of party responsiveness.

8. Conclusion

Through the critical case of the British Labour party, this paper has provided a causal process through which the structure of a party's organization provides it with the ideational capacity to construct an electoral coalition. Through the ideational-organizational conceptual approach that I have developed, we should identify the relationship as more than a mirroring of voter preferences.

While this approach does equip us with a more nuanced understanding of the significant implications of intra-party dynamics on party competition and socio-economic change, a trade off is that a larger comparison is not possible. The implication of my conceptual approach is that there will be significant cross-national variation in the specific organizing logics that a party constructs, as historical and sociological specificities will influence the interests of actors and their relative power. For instance, the relationship between unions and parties varies significantly as does the pace of union decline. We would expect that this would lead to differences in the internal influence of union leaders across SD parties. Further research can extend this framework through wider cross-national comparisons. Certainly, I believe that this can be used to explain variation in the extent of the decline of most contemporary SD parties. In the German SPD, Kevin Kühnert, the former chairman of the leftist youth-wing Jusos, has become General Secretary of the party and an elected politician. What role did the alignment of this faction with the more moderate and professionalized wing of the party play in restoring the party to a credible electoral position at the 2022 elections? In France, can the complete collapse of the PS be explained by the defection of alternative party actors in the mid-2000s? Exploring internal party relations through the prism of the change and institutionalization of the dominant coalition can help us to better understand the coherence of the ideas that contemporary SD parties use to engage with their varied electorates.

It is also possible that this framework can be extended to the study of Conservative and Christian Democratic parties. There is variation in the extent to which these parties have accommodated the rise of the far-right, to what extent can this be explained through the structure of their party organizations? One line of enquiry would be to explore variation in the composition of the dominant coalition – do more de-centralized parties enable the rise of far-right ideas to become institutionalized as the orienting ideology of these parties?

9. References

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