

# Leadership Turnovers And Their Consequences

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## Motivation: The case of the German SPD in 2017

- ▶ When Martin Schulz took over as chancellor-candidate and party leader the SPD experienced an electoral revival.
- ▶ The party gained in the polls and at some point Schulz was as popular as the incumbent Merkel.
- ▶ After an electoral decline from 42.6% of the seats in the Bundestag in 2004 to 23.5% in 2009 the SPD felt like they actually had a shot at the chancellorship again.
- ▶ What happened?
  - ▶ On election day: Worst electoral defeat (yet).
  - ▶ Shortly after the election: Another leadership change (15th since 1946).

## Motivation: The case of the German SPD in 2017

- ▶ From the existing literature we know that party leaders are increasingly more important for political parties:
  - ▶ politics has become more candidate-centric (Wattenberg 1991)
  - ▶ and more “presidentialized” (Pogutke and Webb 2005)
  - ▶ they are the central actors running parties’ election campaigns (Scarrow et al. 2000)
  - ▶ their traits and features are important for a party’s electoral success (Butler and Stokes 1974, LeDuc 2001, McAllister 2007, Aarts et al. 2011, Bittner 2011).
- ▶ So we know that party leaders like Schulz matter for the performance of political parties but we do not know:

# Research Questions

- 1) Is party leader tenure shorter in social democratic parties?
- 2) What determines the duration of leadership tenure across different party families?
- 3) How does leader turnover (and especially the frequency of leadership turnover) affect party performance both in the short-term (opinion polls) and long-term (election results)?

# Our Leadership Data

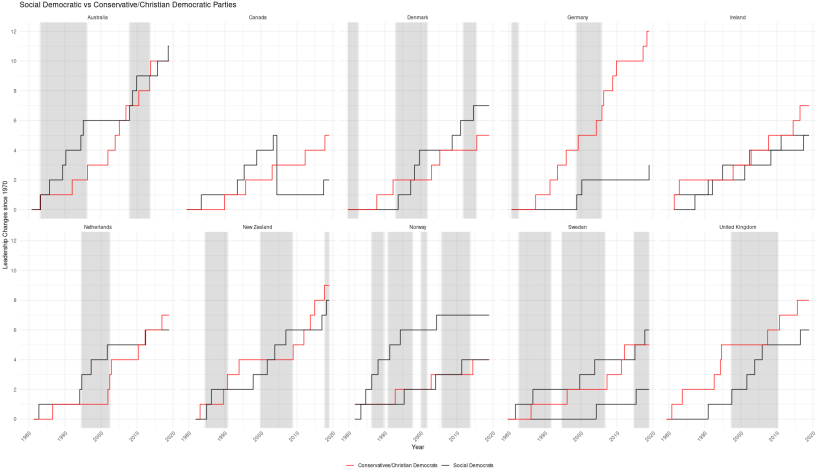
- ▶ Novel data set based on Keesing's World Archives, secondary literature, and newspapers.
- ▶ 40 political parties, ten advanced parliamentary democracies between the early 1990s and 2019.
- ▶ Included are:
  - ▶ Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom
  - ▶ Any party that received at least 5 percent of the votes in two elections was included
  - ▶ Coding of party leaders depending on party and in discussion with country experts.

# The Leadership Data

- ▶ Important: We code the dates of appointment, announcement of resignation, and actual resignation separately
- ▶ There can be substantial gaps between these leadership events, potential to conflate effects of resignation and appointment.
- ▶ Leaders that died in office and dual leadership cases are excluded from the analysis.

Is party leader tenure shorter in social democratic parties?

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Note: Shaded area indicates years in which the Conservative/Christian Democratic party was the Social Democrat.

Figure 1: Social Democratic parties vs Conservative parties.



What determines the duration of leadership tenure?

## What determines the duration of leadership tenure?

- ▶ From the previous graph it does not appear that Social Democratic parties are different from other parties when it comes to leader tenure and turnover.
- ▶ The German SPD stands out as an extreme case (Seawright and Gerring 2008).
- ▶ We want to know: are there any systematic differences that explain variation in leader tenure?

## What determines the duration of leadership tenure?

- ▶ DV: time in office (in months) from appointment to resignation announcement.
- ▶ IV: Change in vote share, change in six month cum. poll change, government loss, leader age, member vote, unanimous/acclamation.
- ▶ Model: Cox proportional hazard model with robust variance estimator.
- ▶ Quick reminder: Negative hazard ratios or relative risks mean lower likelihood of experiencing event, positive hazard ratio or relative risk mean higher likelihood of experiencing event.

## Explaining leader duration across regions

	All Countries	European PR Systems	Westminster Systems
$\Delta$ Vote Share	-0.108** (0.041)	-0.200** (0.065)	0.029 (0.050)
$\Delta$ Polling <sub>6 Months, cum.</sub>	-0.035 (0.025)	-0.111* (0.059)	-0.003 (0.046)
Lost Government	1.234** (0.432)	0.333 (0.538)	3.933** (0.837)
Leader Age	0.132** (0.022)	0.135** (0.040)	0.218** (0.059)
Member Vote	-0.205 (0.356)	-0.139 (0.499)	-1.941** (0.559)
Unanimous/Acclam.	-0.145 (0.399)	0.278 (0.477)	-3.438** (1.505)
N	4375	3045	1330
Log-likelihood	-131.054	-63.623	-29.086
<i>Note:</i> Robust standard errors in parentheses; * p<0.1, ** p<0.05			

## Different effects for Social Democrats?

- ▶ Previous results explain determinants of leader replacement across regions/electoral systems.
- ▶ Now: Are the results consistent across party families?
- ▶ We interact our independent variables with a *Social Democratic* dummy variable to see if conditional effects exist.
- ▶ We only present conditional effects across all models.
- ▶ *NCE* indicates no conditional effects, *NA* indicates that variables could not be included in the model.

## Different effects for Social Democrats?

	1	2	3	4	5
	All countries	All except SPD	European PR	European PR except SPD	Westminster
$\Delta$ Vote Share * SocDem	NCE	NCE	NCE	NCE	NCE
$\Delta$ Polling <sub>6</sub> <i>Months, cum.</i> * Soc Dem	NCE	NCE	$\Delta$ Polling: -0.222** Interaction: 0.161**	$\Delta$ Polling: -0.159** Interaction: 0.129**	NCE
Lost Gov. * Soc Dem	NCE	NCE	NA	NA	NA
Leader Age * Soc Dem	NCE	NCE	NA	Age: 0.101** Interaction 0.140**	NCE
Member Vote * Soc Dem	NCE	NCE	NA	NA	NCE
Unan./Acc. * Soc Dem	NCE	NCE	Unanimous: -0.185 Interaction: 1.290*	NA	NA
<i>Note:</i> We report only statistically significant conditional coefficients. NCE indicates no conditional effects, and NA indicates not available. Robust standard errors in parentheses; * p<0.1, ** p<0.05.					

## How does leader turnover affect party performance?

- ▶ Existing literature provides contradicting evidence. They can attract attention to a party and cause electoral gains (Pedersen and Schumacher 2015, Somer-Topcu 2017, Fernandez-Vazquez and Somer-Topcu 2019).
- ▶ They can also be destabilizing (especially if frequent) and disruptive (Harmel et al. 1995, Gilmore 1988, Rowe et al. 2005).
- ▶ *Important:* There is research on the consequences of leader turnover but no research on the frequency of turnover.

## Short-term consequences of leadership replacement



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- ▶ In order to examine the short-term consequences of turnover we use polling data from Wlezien and Jennings (2016).
- ▶ DV: Difference in polling using two months lags (theoretical and empirical reasons).
- ▶ IVs:
  - ▶ *Leader Appointment*: Did a leader take office in this months? (0,1)
  - ▶ *In Between Elections*: Cum. number of changes between elections (0-3)
  - ▶ *10 Year Changes*: Running cum. number of changes in ten year periods (0-8)
- ▶ Controls: Lagged change in polls, change in election results, government participation, member vote, and unanimous/acclamation.
- ▶ Unit of analysis: monthly party observations

# Short-term consequences of leadership replacement

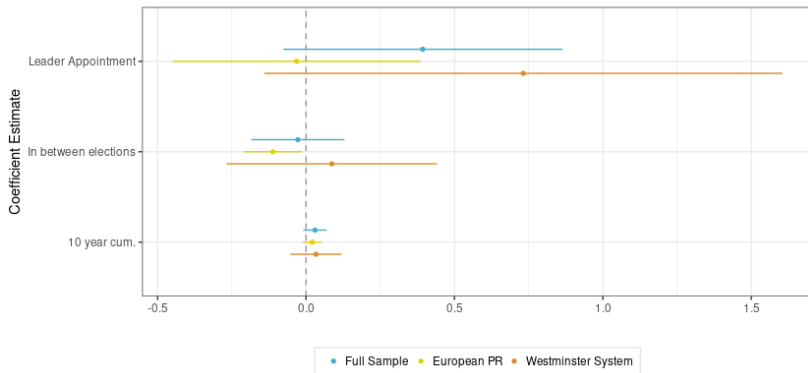


Figure 2: The polling effects of leadership changes.

## Short-term effects of turnover conditional on party family

- ▶ In order to examine the conditionality of short-term effects on party family we interact the key independent variables (Leader Appointment, In Between Elections, and 10 Year cum.) with a *Social Democratic* indicator to test for conditional effects.

# Short-term effects of turnover conditional on party family

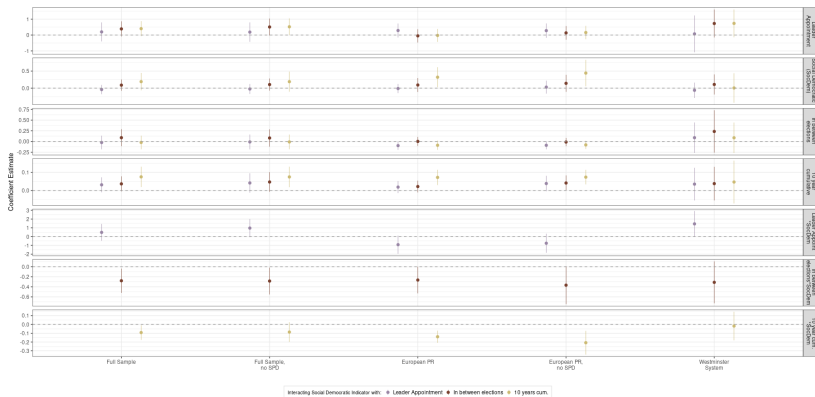


Figure 3: The polling effects of turnover conditional on party family.

## Electoral effects of turnover

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- ▶ To examine the long-term electoral effects of leadership changes we use elections results as the outcome variable.
- ▶ DV: Difference between a party's most recent election result and the polling performance one month before the most recent leader appointment.
- ▶ IVs: *In Between Elections* and *10 Year Changes*
- ▶ Controls: Lagged change in electoral performance, government participation, member vote, unanimous/acclamation, time between leader change and election day, time between announcement of resignation and appointment of new leader.
- ▶ Unit of analysis is party-election.

# Electoral effects of turnover

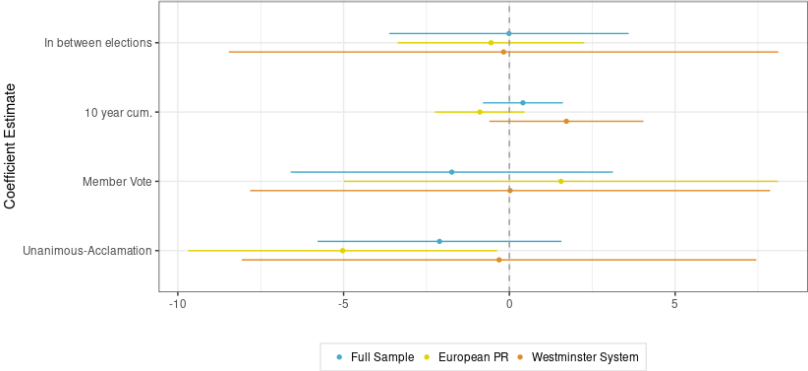


Figure 4: Electoral effects of turnover.

## Electoral effects of turnover conditional on party family

- ▶ Similar to the examination of short-term effects we interact the key independent variables with a *Social Democratic* indicator to test for conditional effects.



# Electoral effects of turnover conditional on party family

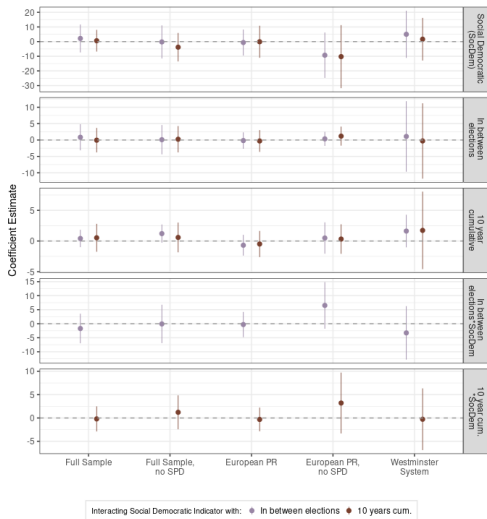


Figure 5: Electoral effects of turnover conditional on party family.

# Conclusion

- ▶ What are the key takeaways?
  - ▶ Social Democratic parties are not different or distinct to other political parties when it comes to causes and consequences of leader turnover.
  - ▶ There are minimal effects of leadership changes on performance.
  - ▶ There exists variation across electoral systems (European PR/Westminster System).
  - ▶ Implication: Presidentialization of parties might not be as severe in the electorate.