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?
Is party leader tenure shorter in social democratic parties?

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Countries</th>
<th>European PR Systems</th>
<th>Westminster Systems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ΔVote Share</td>
<td>-0.108**</td>
<td>-0.200**</td>
<td>0.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.041)</td>
<td>(0.065)</td>
<td>(0.050)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ΔPolling$_{6 \text{ Months, cum.}}$</td>
<td>-0.035</td>
<td>-0.111*</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.025)</td>
<td>(0.059)</td>
<td>(0.046)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Government</td>
<td>1.234**</td>
<td>0.333</td>
<td>3.933**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.432)</td>
<td>(0.538)</td>
<td>(0.837)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Age</td>
<td>0.132**</td>
<td>0.135**</td>
<td>0.218**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.022)</td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
<td>(0.059)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member Vote</td>
<td>-0.205</td>
<td>-0.139</td>
<td>-1.941**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.356)</td>
<td>(0.499)</td>
<td>(0.559)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanimous/Acclam.</td>
<td>-0.145</td>
<td>0.278</td>
<td>-3.438**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.399)</td>
<td>(0.477)</td>
<td>(1.505)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>4375</td>
<td>3045</td>
<td>1330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
<td>-131.054</td>
<td>-63.623</td>
<td>-29.086</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: 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?

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>1</th>
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<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All countries</td>
<td>All except SPD</td>
<td>European PR</td>
<td>European PR except SPD</td>
<td>Westminster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔVote Share</td>
<td>NCE</td>
<td>NCE</td>
<td>NCE</td>
<td>NCE</td>
<td>NCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*SocDem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔPolling, Months, cum.</td>
<td>NCE</td>
<td>NCE</td>
<td>ΔPolling: -0.222**</td>
<td>ΔPolling: -0.159**</td>
<td>NCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Soc Dem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction: 0.161**</td>
<td>Interaction: 0.129**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Gov.</td>
<td>NCE</td>
<td>NCE</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Soc Dem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Age</td>
<td>NCE</td>
<td>NCE</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Age: 0.101**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Soc Dem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction 0.140**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member Vote</td>
<td>NCE</td>
<td>NCE</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Soc Dem</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unan./Acc.</td>
<td>NCE</td>
<td>NCE</td>
<td>Unanimous: -0.185</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Soc Dem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction: 1.290*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* 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
Short-term consequences of leadership replacement

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

- 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.