

Switching Horses: Party Leader's Performance and Leadership Survival

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Abstract: Party leaders wield considerable influence as some of the most powerful political figures within parliamentary democracies. In pursuit of the party's objectives, they possess significant powers related to the day-to-day management of the party organization, formulation of policy preferences, and selection of candidates for public office. Simultaneously, parties hold leaders accountable for their actions, replacing them when their performance endangers the party's electoral opportunities. Previous studies on the factors influencing party leaders' survival primarily focused on stable institutional mechanisms that govern the relationship between the party leader and the party's decision-makers or the leader's electoral performance. However, party insiders often rely on other cues to assess a leader's potential success. We propose that opinion polls are one of those indicators. Specifically, we test that party leaders are likelier to exit office prematurely when their party's performance in public opinion polls is poor. Moreover, we anticipate that intra-party institutions and government status moderate the role of polls. Empirically, we employ survival analysis to test the effect of opinion polling on party leaders' survival in a sample of over 280 party leaders from 48 political parties in 8 parliamentary democracies since 1950. Our results confirm that better results in pre-electoral polls increase the chances of leadership survival.

Introduction

Already struggling in the polls, the first half of 2022 was particularly tumultuous for Pablo Casado, the party leader of Spain's conservative People's Party. His position weakened further due to internal conflicts with Madrid's regional leader, Isabel Diaz Ayuso. This infighting led to a significant erosion of his support within the party. Matters escalated when, on February 16, leaks suggested that Casado and the party's executive were involved in a plot to spy on Diaz Ayuso, aiming to damage her reputation. This scandal had a dramatic impact on Casado's public support: polling data from February 14 showed him leading the voting intention with 26.8 points, but this figure dropped sharply to 22.6 points by February 18, namely a 15.6% decline in just four days, as reported by *El Confidencial* in 2022¹. The crisis reached the point in which Casado was left with no viable option but to resign, prompting the party to convene a party congress to choose his successor. Another prominent example of how polls shape party leaders' survival in office is the former British conservative Prime Minister Liz Truss, who became the least popular Prime Minister in the history of polling in the United Kingdom (Middleton, 2023, p. 532). After her government introduced a series of polemic economic measures known as the "mini-budget," polls showed Labour led the Conservatives by 33 percentage points compared to their previous 11 points Labour advantage (Middleton, 2023, p. 532). After that, her premiership was considered unviable, and she was forced to resign as PM and party leader.

Both examples of party leaders' downfall provide insights into how parties react in uncertain environments, particularly, when they receive signals that the party will struggle in the near future. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of electoral results to understand party leaders' longevity (Andrews and Jackman, 2008; Ennsner-Jedenastik and Müller, 2014; Ennsner-Jedenastik and Schumacher, 2015). Nevertheless, elections happen every few years, and in between, parties behave within environments of imperfect information, particularly about the current and future resources the organization will hold. Electoral results are only one of the many signals that stakeholders use to analyze the state of their organization. The party's performance is partly a function of the leadership's quality and popularity (Bittner, 2011); as such, party members and elites need alternative tools to assess their leaders' performance and hold them accountable. This research addresses how party members and elites use public polling data to assess the health of their organization and keep party leaders accountable.

This study makes two contributions to the extensive literature on party leadership survival (Cross and Blais, 2012a; Cross and Pilet, 2015; Ennsner-Jedenastik and Schumacher, 2015; O'Brien,

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2015; Claessen, 2023), focusing on political parties. First, from a theoretical point of view, we provide a more dynamic understanding of party leadership survival than previous works, which mainly focused on steady institutional factors (Bueno de Mesquita *et al.*, 2003; Cross and Blais, 2012b, p. 2002; O'Brien, 2015) and long-term performance results such as general election results (Andrews and Jackman, 2008; Horiuchi, Laing and 't Hart, 2013). Following a principal-agent framework (Samuels and Shugart, 2010), we conceptualize party stakeholders –members, mid-level elites, or elites – as a principal constantly analyzing the performance of their agent – the party leader – to decide whether this shall be dismissed. In concrete, our primary theoretical argument implies that party stakeholders analyze the leader's capacity to secure votes, office, and policy for the whole organization and how these elements are distributed. Pre-electoral polls emerge as a plausible predictor of the future quantity of goods available to the party, thus our employment as a proxy. Overall, we consider that a leader's time in office reflects the satisfaction of the party stakeholders with the distribution of public and private goods within the party. Additionally, acknowledging the non-unitary nature of political parties (Katz & Mair, 1994), we anticipate that the relationship between polls and leadership survival will exhibit heterogeneous effects based on the selectorate within each party, along with potential influences of the party's government-opposition status at a given point in time. Second, empirically, we provide an encompassing analysis.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, we review the literature on intra-party institutions, electoral performance, and how they impact leadership. Then, we expand the current literature by theorizing how different elements within the party organization perceive the leader's performance. Namely, a bad poll performance will increase the likelihood of party leaders' early exit. In particular, when more exclusive selectorates are in charge of nominating the leader and when the leader has already been challenged in the past. Third, we introduce our data sources and methodology. Then, we proceed with the analysis and end with a conclusion.

Intra-party institutions, electoral results, and leadership survival

Party leaders are critical actors in the well-functioning of democracies, particularly in parliamentary ones (Samuels and Shugart, 2010). They often aspire to and attain the highest government positions, such as prime minister. They are instrumental in deciding ideological positions, policy formulations, party strategies, and writing the party's electoral manifestos. As the public face of their party, they communicate its message to voters and the media, both during and between election campaigns. From an electoral point of view, they are crucial in shaping their party's electoral success, as popularity influences vote choice (Bittner, 2011; Garzia, Ferreira da Silva and De Angelis, 2020). In addition, they oversee minister selection and candidate

nominations and monitor the behavior of party officials and elected representatives (Cross and Pilet, 2014; O'Brien, 2015). Importantly, they are responsible for keeping party unity. Notwithstanding, they engage with party members and activists. Parties with unstable leadership are not good vehicles for political representation. As Cross, Katz and Pruysers (2018) put it: “democratic government means party government, and democratic government means good government, thus, bad functioning of the party system stems from good performance and role of parties in a system, poor performance of government may indicate insufficient tardiness of government”.

Such normative concerns have generated extensive empirical literature on the survival of party leaders (Cross and Blais, 2012a; Enns-Jedenastik and Müller, 2014; Cross and Pilet, 2015). In particular, previous studies have focused on understanding the survival of party leaders as a function of performance and institutional factors. Performance factors refer to the leader's capacity to deliver votes, office, and policy (Andrews and Jackman, 2008; Horiuchi, Laing and 't Hart, 2013). For example, Andrews & Jackman (2008) connect party leader survival to changes in party seat share and office status, noting a lower risk of removal when the party gains seats and maintains office. Thus, a higher length of leadership increases when the perception of competence of the leader increases within the party structure, particularly regarding her competence vis-à-vis the general electorate (Bueno de Mesquita *et al.*, 2002; Chiozza and Goemans, 2004; Burke, 2012; Hollyer and Rosendorff, 2012; Horiuchi, Laing and 't Hart, 2013). In addition, Enns-Jedenastik & Schumacher (2015) propose that leaders can retain office if survival remains unaffected by electoral losses, emphasizing parties' prioritization of office over votes. Notably, the risk of removal increases for leaders who belong to political minorities, such as women, when parties face significant losses in parliamentary seats or office (O'Brien, 2015).

On the other hand, institutional factors refer to how party organization settings shape power relations and provide higher decisional power to some elements of the organization than others. As Schattschneider (1942) famously says, “who can make the nominations is the owner of the party”. Thus, who selects the party leader –the selectorate– appears as the most visible difference (Hazan and Rahat, 2010; Sandri, Seddone and Venturino, 2014), which, as we will discuss below, also shapes the nature of the principal-agent relationship between the party and the leader (Bynander and t'Hart, 2007; Cross & Blais, 2012). For example, Katz & Mair (1993) argue that leadership replacements in which the parliamentary organization is the selectorate are swift and without the public eye noticing. The contrary is true when party leadership control is under the extra-parliamentary organization. In these cases, intra-party fights tend to be long and highly scrutinized by the media. Nevertheless, the differences between different selectors tend to be attributed to differences in preferences and information. First, different selectors tend to have

different preferences in each group (May, 1973). In particular, party grassroots and elites tend to be moderate, whereas middle-level elites and activists tend to be more radical (May, 1973). However, the empirical literature exploring this relationship raises considerable doubts about its validity (Norris, 1995; Van Holsteyn, Ridder and Koole, 2015; Wager *et al.*, 2021). Second, selectors hold different information and coordination capacities (Bueno de Mesquita *et al.*, 2003). The higher a person is on the party hierarchy, the more information, time, and resources the people will have about the different candidates and the more informed decisions they can make (Bueno de Mesquita *et al.*, 2003). For example, leaders chosen by fellow MPs tend to last less and face more challenges during their periods (Cross and Blais, 2012b), as potential challengers would face more obstacles to be considered valid candidates (Enns-Jedenastik and Müller, 2015).

The Impact of Leader's Performance on Party Leadership Survival

We understand the party-leader relationship as a principal-agent delegation relationship within the rational institutionalist framework, based on Samuels and Shugart's (2010) "neo-Madisonian framework." They consider the relationship between a party leader and its party to be between a principal and an agent (Müller, 2000; Samuels and Shugart, 2010). The party acts as a principal, and the leader acts as an agent. The party organization tasks the leader with a unique series of powers dedicated to competing for political office, winning votes, coordinating policy positions, and acting in the party's collective interest (Samuels and Shugart, 2010, p. 35). The leader keeps such office benefits if he or she can deliver on votes, office, and policy (Müller, 2000).

In the vein of the delegation approach, our argument takes a more dynamic approach between the leader and individual party selectors than the existing literature. We consider that the survival of party leaders at any moment is based on a four-step process. Firstly, we consider the leader's everyday performance critical, not only during electoral periods. Leaders also manage the party strategy between elections, engage with voters and the media, and commonly run the party's parliamentary group. They keep delivering on prospective votes, office, and policies, and stakeholders within the party are capable of assessing the current state of the party and the leader's performance. Moreover, the party's current status will constrain part of the leaders' performance. For example, opposition parties can hardly influence policies. This leads to the second step, party stakeholders –most prominently party selectors– form their perceptions of the leader's performance. Different selectors prioritize different aspects: for instance, rank-and-file party members may focus more on policy implementation, while party leaders might prioritize gaining government offices. In parallel, the same selectors may change their perception across time based on varying reference points. For example, party leaders who succeed long-standing popular leaders will be judged against higher expectations than those succeeding unpopular leaders

(Horiuchi, Laing and 't Hart, 2013). Third, once selectors have formed their perception of the leaders' current performance, they will assess it against the potential alternatives. This assessment involves comparing the leader's achievements against potential alternatives within the party, considering the uncertainty regarding the alternatives' potential performance and the transaction costs involved in a leadership change. The utility function of each selector can be conceptualized as the current performance of the leader (L) in terms of votes (v), office (o), and policy (p) against the potential alternative (A) performance minus the transaction costs (c). Nevertheless, as the performance of the alternative is highly hypothetical, unlike the current leader's, we need to add an uncertainty weight (u) to the alternative performance. The utility equation looks as follows:

$$v_L + o_L + p_L > (v_A + o_A + p_A) \cdot u - c$$

Selectors will prefer the standing leader, or the alternative based on the perceived (potential) performance and may consider several alternatives. For example, in some parties, the number of available options can be limited by party rules if these require that the leader holds a parliamentary seat, as is the case for the British Labour and Conservative parties (Sandri, Seddone and Venturino, 2015). Moreover, changing leaders will incur transition costs, such as publicizing internal party conflicts. Bringing intra-party disputes to the public eye signals disunity among voters, who often shy away from divided parties (Greene and Haber, 2015). Consequently, the fourth step involves the survival of the party leaders, which is a function of the individual selectors' collective assessment of these factors, ultimately determining whether a leader remains in their role for an extended period. When a higher number of party selectors grow unhappy with the leader's performance, it is more likely that a challenger to the leader will emerge. When the unhappiness is widespread, the leader will lose the challenge or be forced to resign.

Our previous argument leaves an important question unanswered: How can party selectors assess the performance of the leader? Previous research has explored the influence of electoral results on leadership survival. Here, we consider that party selectors have additional tools to assess the performance of the leader and the party in between elections. Namely, we consider that selectors will resort to public opinion polls that assess the party's vote intention. These are low-cost tools that provide hints on the party's electoral health. More importantly, party members and elites can infer the prospective payoffs of the leader in terms of votes, office, and policy. This is not to say that polls are the only tool party selectors will use, as they can use additional ones such as local or regional election results, but polls will constitute one of their primary sources. For several reasons, they can be used as a proxy for anticipating the party's future situation. First, on theoretical grounds, where information costs are reduced, making decisions regarding government is more accessible (Downs, 1957), and polls inherently increment available

information for parties. Following this, media can also impact what issues get into the agenda and what the public considers relevant for an election (Skalaban, 1988). Polls can even be directly linked with bandwagon effects (Marsh, 1985) and the influence of social desirability bias (Finkel et al., 1991), but the evidence for this is not as strong, as some authors suggest potential adverse reactions from the public to increased political exposure (Ceci and Kain, 1982). Most importantly, polls can directly impact which candidate the citizens vote for (Robinson, 1973; Skalaban, 1988). The direct influence of polls upon voting decisions through bandwagon, underdog, or defeatism effects is quite a consensual reality in electoral studies (Mendelsohn & Crespi, 1970; McAllister & Studlar, 1991; West, 1991). Additionally, with the extension of audiovisual means of communication, the proliferation of polls has also affected candidate behavior and party organizations. Some describe it as a sensation of “continuing elections” in which parties and leaders are constantly scrutinized as the public's reaction to political action can be measured daily (Mendelsohn & Crespi, 1970). Therefore, we consider that polls influence the strategic considerations of party selectors, as they allow them to overcome imperfect information settings and obtain an estimate of the prospective electoral support of the organization. This debate leads to our first hypothesis:

H1: *A leader's poor performance in public opinion polls is associated with a higher chance of leadership substitution.*

Nevertheless, as discussed above, parties are non-unitary actors, and different types of selectors differ in their preferences, levels of information, and coordination capacities (May, 1973; Bueno de Mesquita *et al.*, 2003). The selectorate is often divided into party members, party activists or middle-level elites, and party elites. Regarding preferences, members and elites tend to be considered more moderate than activists (May, 1973), and thus, they should prioritize votes and office objectives above policy. Conversely, regarding information and coordination capacities, the higher a person is on the party hierarchy, the higher the information they will have on the organization's performance, and the more likely a small number of members of the elites can coordinate to pose a challenge to the leader. Therefore, in our second hypothesis, we propose that the impact of polls will be stronger than the selectorate is more exclusive.

H2: *The impact of a leader's poor performance in public opinion polls is stronger when the selectorate is more exclusive.*

Finally, it has been previously considered in the literature that holding government office has a relevant impact on leadership survival, as it signals stronger success than just electoral results. Additionally, being in government increases the economic and informational resources available

for the party during the electoral campaign (Andrews and Jackman, 2008; Enns-Jedenastik and Müller, 2015). Therefore, we expect lousy poll results to boost the chances of replacement when the party is in opposition, but if the party is in office, the effects of polls should be limited. Therefore, our last hypothesis aims to analyze this phenomenon:

H3: *The impact of a leader's poor performance in public opinion polls is stronger when the party is in opposition.*

Data and Method

Testing our hypotheses requires two types of data. First, we need data on party leaders' tenure, which includes information on how long they stayed in office, how they were selected, and how they left office. Thus, we rely on the *Comparative Study of Party Leaders (COSPAL)* dataset (Pilet, Cross & Pruyssers, 2021). Second, we require information on the public pre-electoral polls released in a country across time as a means by which party selectors hand assess the performance of party leaders. For such purpose, we employ Jennings & Wlezien's (2017) dataset on pre-electoral polling. Combining the available countries in both datasets, we obtain reliable information for Australia, Canada, Germany, Israel, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. We selected the main parties in each system, considering both major and somehow minor parties, gathering data on 42 parties and 283 leaders over 67 years. Appendix A lists the parties and leaders studied.

We structured our data as a monthly panel for each leader. Thus, each observation corresponds to a month of tenure of a party leader, which leads to 9685 observations. Nevertheless, not all leaders leave party office in the same way, as some leave voluntarily while others do not. We only consider those leaders who were considered “formally removed” or “resigned under pressure.” In contrast, we consider those who left due to “force majeure,” “term limit,” or “voluntary resignation” as right censored – as well as those leaders still in office at the end of 2017. Therefore, the dependent variable receives the value of 1 for the months that the party leader left office due to any of the specified reasons, while the rest receive the value of 0. To statistically model the removal of party leaders, we resort to Event History Analysis, the standard modeling strategy in this type of study (Enns-Jedenastik & Muller, 2015; Enns-Jedenastik & Schumacher, 2021; Claessen, 2023). Specifically, we employ a semi-parametrical function of a Cox Proportional Hazard Regression model to assess how each covariate influences the probability of leadership survival (Cox, 1972; Hollyer & Rosendorff, 2012;). This model offers the advantage of making minimal assumptions about the distribution of duration times and accommodates changes in each covariate over time.

Our primary independent variable consists of the performance of the party leader. We employ Jennings & Wlezien's (2017) dataset on pre-electoral polls to determine the performance of each party leader in each month of their tenure. Their dataset contains 30,916 national polls assessing citizens' vote intentions among 271 parties in 351 general elections in 45 countries between 1942 and 2017. We complemented the existing dataset with more than 4225 new polls for Australia, Germany, Norway, Spain, and Israel (not included in the original dataset). To align their data with our panel dataset, we computed a monthly average of poll results for the party of the leader. We then linearly interpolated the results for the months when no poll was available through a nearest-neighbor approach (27,25% of the total). Other studies have used Bayesian methods like dynamic linear models to adapt this data (Walther and Hellström, 2018). Still, we chose a more straightforward approach, like nearest neighbor linear interpolation, for the following reasons. Our focus is not on predicting election outcomes but examining how parties react to them. We consider that party members and elites primarily rely on the polls published in the media without delving into more nuanced interpretations, like accounting for seasonal poll variations. We assume that they concentrate mainly on the information that is publicly available in the media. In this context, a linear interpolation reflects party members' and elites' behavior more accurately. Concretely, we operationalize polling results as the percentual change relative to each leader's first month in office. This is done to consider possible differences in effects between bigger and smaller parties, as it is unreasonable to assume that a one-point reduction in the absolute vote intention for a party will affect a party that consistently has a 30% voting intention and another that displays a 5%. Moreover, to assess the reliability of the polling data, we include a control variable stating how many polls have been used to produce the estimate – taking the value of 0 for interpolated data. Appendix B lists how many polls have been used for each leader and the share of interpolated months over the leaders' tenure. We only kept those leaders for which we have original monthly data on at least 30% of the months they have been in office.

Regarding our interaction variables, we take the selectorate variable from COSPAL and reorganize it into three categories: primary, congress, and party elite. Primary refers to those parties that choose their leader in ballots open to all members or citizens. Congress consists of the party conference where delegates select the leader. Finally, the elite category consists of parties whose selectorate consists of either the party's parliamentary caucus or an executive body smaller than the party convention, like the party council or the party executive committee. Then, to determine whether a party is in government at that moment in time, we construct a binary variable.

In our models, we use a series of well-known factors typically associated with leadership survival according to previous literature (Claessen, 2023; Andrews & Jackman, 2008; Enns-Jedenastik

& Müller, 2015; Enns-Jedenastik & Schumacher, 2021 and Quiroz Flores & Smith, 2011) based on individual and party characteristics. To isolate potential individual-based effects in our analysis, we have included age and gender as well as two measurements shaping the political performance of the individual. The first is the *Grace Period*, representing the time between the selection of the leader and the first general election the leader faces, as the leader is less likely to exit during this period (Claessen, 2023). Second, we control for the fact of the party leader acting as *Prime Minister*. So, it accounts for potential attrition effects or "immunities" resulting from prior head-of-government experience.

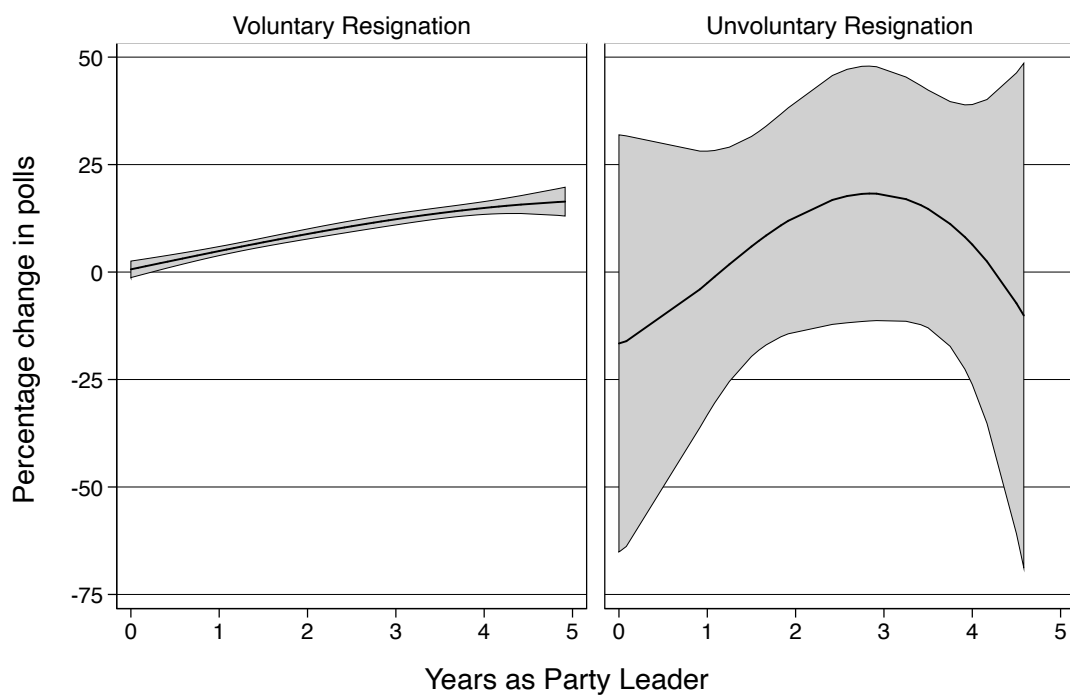
Our party-level characteristics account for organizational arrangements that influence replacement probabilities of party leaders through means other than just evaluating leadership performance through polls. First, we include *Term Limit restrictions* in party statutes, as this directly affects the time a leader can be in office. We created a dummy coded as 1 if the party has statutory restrictions to term length requiring the leader to face re-selection every 24 months or more and 0 if not. Second, we account for *Vote Share* in the previous general election to control for party size and political relevance. Third, following the same logic as the previous variable, we include *Seat Share*, as a good performance in terms of office has proved to increase leaders' tenure (Andrews and Jackman, 2008; Enns-Jedenastik and Schumacher, 2015). Fourth, we include a dummy variable indicating whether the leader's selection has been challenged to measure the degree of *Internal Party Competition*. Fifth, we included a binary variable indicating general election years. Finally, we have included a series of fixed effects to account for idiosyncratic facts. We included a series of dummies for party families reflecting ideology, traditional party organization settings, and country-fixed effects.

Results

In total, we study 280 party leaders belonging to 48 political parties. On average, each party leader stays 70 months in office. While some leaders remain in office for a short period, like Kim Campbell, who was only for six months as leader of the Canadian Progressive Conservative Party, others like Felipe González, Willy Brandt, or Helmut Kohl stay more than 20 years as leaders of their respective parties. Nevertheless, 50% of leaders end their time in office within 50 months, a little more than four years. If we only look into those who "formally removed" or "resigned under pressure," 50% of them leave within 48 months, and the average duration is 60 months – slightly lower than the overall average. But what is the relation between poll performance and leadership duration? Figure 1 plots the average polls performance against duration of leadership during the first five years in office – we restrict the plot to the first five years for visualization purposes because most leaders exist within that period. Leaders who depart on their terms enjoy

significantly better poll numbers. On average, such leaders see their poll performance increase by up to 22.5 percent between their first and fifth years in office. In contrast, leaders who resign under peer pressure generally experience poorer poll results as there are no statistically significant differences between their start and end. The data suggest that while there's a modest improvement in poll performance during the early years of leadership, this uptrend reverses after the third year. By this point, performance often declines, sometimes falling below the levels observed at the beginning of their term. Overall, we find preliminary evidence that party leaders with better poll performance stay longer in office and do not leave involuntarily.

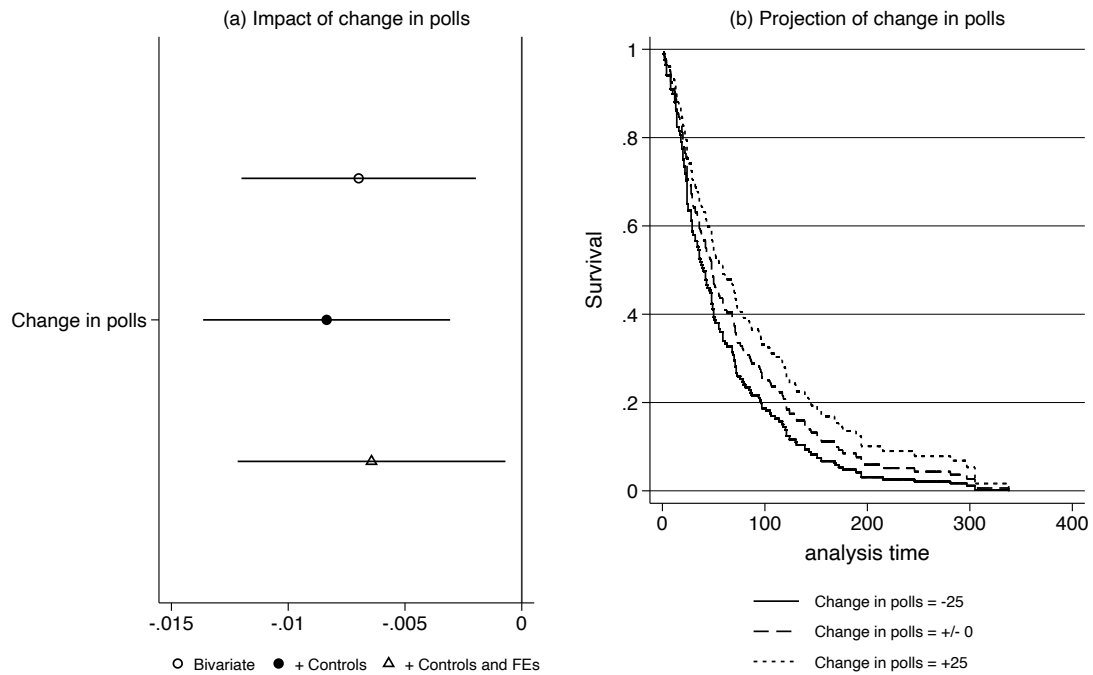
Figure 1. Change in the polls during the first five years as party leader.



Note: Fractional polynomial average with 95% CI.

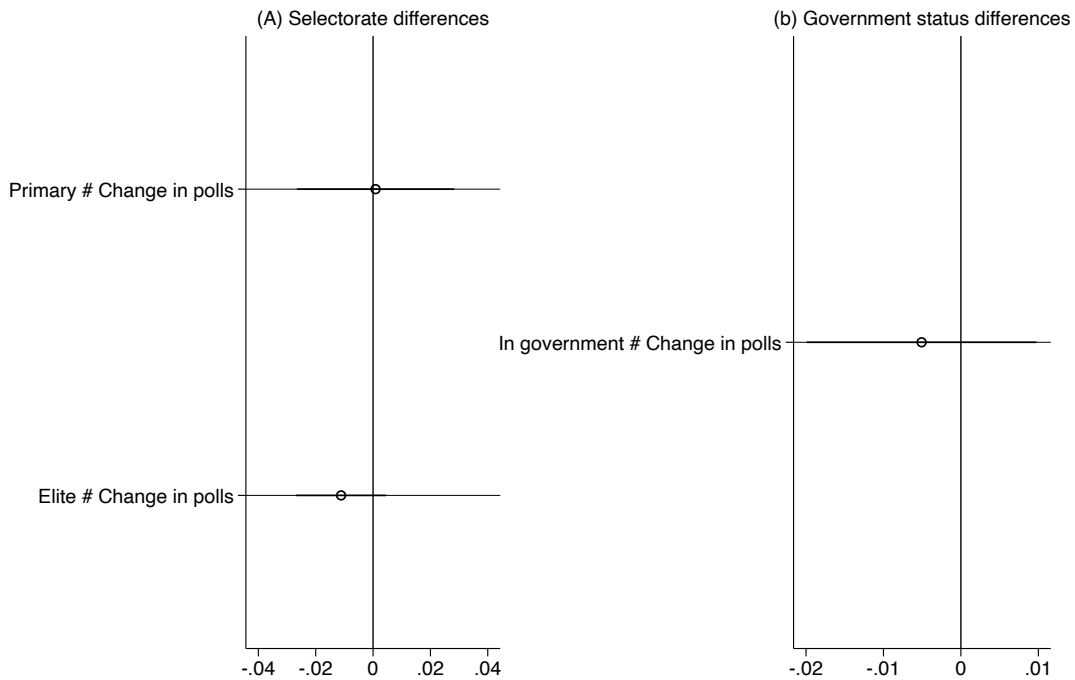
We pass now to the multivariate analysis. Figure 2 reports the main results. On the one hand, Panel A plots the impact of polls on leadership survival across different model specifications (the full models are available in Appendix 3). We consistently find that better poll performance decreases the risk of early leadership termination when considering the relationship in a bivariate manner or when adding the control variables and the fixed effects. The impact of poll performance is better assessed in Panel B as this plots post-estimation survival curves. Holding all else equal, the survival curve of leaders with a 25% decrease in polling performance is lower than their peers without any significant change. At the same time, those whose party increases 25% at the polls are less likely to exit prematurely than the rest. Hence, we find strong support for our first hypothesis, that is, leaders whose party performs better at the polls are less likely to exit office prematurely.

Figure 2: Impact of polls on party leaders' survival.



Note: Panel A shows selected coefficients with 95% CI from Models 1 to 3 in Appendix 3. Panel B survival curves grouped by the change in the polls.

Figure 3: Impact of polls on party leaders' survival conditional on selectorate and government status.



Note: Both panels plot selected coefficients based in models 4 and 5 in Appendix 3.

Now we pass to assess the reminding hypotheses. Individuals in the higher echelons of a party had to dedicate time and effort to get there, expecting to be rewarded with a series of benefits, basically internal power and office. These individuals depend much more on party performance than other party members, as a big part of their income is expected to come from sources only the party can provide. Therefore, they will be much more sensitive to polling results, as these portray a possible future situation of the party. Thus, what private goods can they expect after the next election? If they foresee a lousy situation for the party, their income and position may be endangered. Hence, if the power to select or replace the leader resides in their hands, this evaluation of the party's future situation will directly influence the chances of survival of that given leader. Therefore, we expect that lousy poll performance will have a higher impact on the leader's change of early exit when the selectorate is more exclusive. Panel A in Figure 3 plots the results of an interaction between poll performance and selectorate type, taking party conferences as reference point (full model are available in Appendix 3). However, we do not find any statistical differences in the impact of polls when the party uses different types of selectorates. Contrary to the expectations set by Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2002, 2003) regarding the influence of goods distribution on political survival through the selectorate's lens, our study found no significant evidence supporting this relationship. Our analysis reveals that poll results, indicators of the

party's prospects, do not impact leadership stability, whether the selectorate is the party elite, party activists, or the whole party membership. This null finding challenges prior assumptions about the selectorate's role in leadership survival, as discussed in the literature (Enser-Jedenastik & Müller, 2015; Katz & Mair, 1994; Maravall, 2007), suggesting a more complex or potentially different mechanism at play. Thus, we do not find support for hypothesis 2.

Moreover, we test to what extent the impact of polls is higher when a party is in opposition. Our results do not support that idea. Contrary to expectations, we found no significant relationship between the prospective electoral success of the party, measured through polls, and the security of a leader's position. This finding contradicts previous beliefs about a "grace period" of decreased likelihood for leadership replacement, as discussed in the literature (e.g., Claessen, 2023; Enser Jedenastik & Schumacher, 2021). Our study suggests that factors other than projected party performance may play a more critical role in leadership stability, calling into question the direct impact of electoral prospects on leadership security. This contributes to the broader discourse on political leadership and party dynamics, indicating a need for further research to understand the conditions under which leaders are replaced, diverging from the views of Andrews & Jackman (2008) and challenging the notions of leadership risk tied to party success proposed by Maravall (2008). Thus, we do not find support for hypothesis 3.

To close this section, we must acknowledge a series of limitations in our study. First, our analysis focused solely on the party organization leaders of parties, omitting consideration of electoral leaders or candidates for prime minister. Future research should explore how both items related to each other and whether the impact of polls is the same on the party leader when the same person does not hold both offices simultaneously. However, despite some prominent examples such as the Basque Nationalist Party keeping both positions always separated, in most cases both offices are developed concurrently. Second, our study's scope is mainly confined to Western Europe and Westminster democracies. Expanding our analysis to include democracies from Eastern Europe and Asian countries would enhance the representativeness and generalizability of our findings. Finally, we propose incorporating a case study to delve into specific countries or parties, examining how situations of imperfect information impact them. Such an approach would contribute to a deeper understanding of the causal mechanisms underpinning the phenomenon we have scrutinized.

Conclusion

Understanding the factors that sustain leaders in their positions is critical to unraveling the dynamics of party behavior and competition within democratic systems. As the most visible and

influential figures in their organizations, leaders naturally aim to extend their tenure. The processes by which they are selected, replaced, and the strategies they employ are crucial for the functioning of our democracies. Furthermore, the issue of whether organizations led by elites are more attuned to public opinion raises questions about the democratic integrity of leaders chosen through primary elections. When political leaders become isolated from internal mechanisms of accountability, there's a risk that the political focus shifts from serving the citizens to prioritizing the survival of the leaders. Therefore, exploring and understanding the underlying causal mechanisms that drive party behavior is not merely an academic endeavor; it is essential for assessing the quality and values of our democratic systems. Our results show that leaders whose party perform poorly at the polls is more likely to leave office prematurely. Thus, denoting how parties use polls to keep their leaders accountable and replace them in the worst-case scenario. Future works should also study how parties use polls in the short term to correct party strategies. Nevertheless, we do not find support for our second and third hypotheses, which state that the impact of polls should be stronger when the selectorate is more exclusive or when the party is in opposition. This inquiry into the nature of political leadership and party dynamics touches upon fundamental aspects of how democracies function and their ability to represent and respond to the will of the people.

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Online appendix:
**Switching Horses: Party Leader’s Everyday Performance
and Leadership Survival**

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Contents

A Appendix 1: Distribution of leaders according to country, party and years	2
B Appendix 2: Distribution of polls according to party leaders	3
C Appendix 3: Main Analysis	8

A Appendix 1: Distribution of leaders according to country, party and years

Country	Party	Number of Leaders	Period start	Period end
Australia	Australian Democrats	10	1978	2004
Australia	Australian Greens	3	2005	2015
Australia	Labor Party	13	1965	2013
Australia	Liberal Party	16	1965	2015
Canada	Bloc Québécois	4	1991	2011
Canada	Conservative Party	3	2004	2017
Canada	Liberal Party	8	1968	2013
Canada	New Democratic Party	7	1971	2017
Canada	Progressive Conservative Party	7	1967	2003
Germany	AfD	4	2013	2017
Germany	B '90/Die Grünen	9	1993	2013
Germany	CDU	7	1965	2000
Germany	CSU	4	1988	2008
Germany	FDP	9	1965	2013
Germany	PDS-Die Linke	8	1990	2012
Germany	SPD	8	1965	2017
Israel	Herut	1	1983	1983
Israel	Kadima	3	2006	2012
Israel	Labor	14	1969	2017
Israel	Likud	3	1993	2005
Israel	Shas	2	1990	2013
Norway	Ap	5	1965	2002
Norway	FrP	4	1974	2006
Norway	H	10	1962	2004
Norway	KrF	8	1955	2011
Norway	SP	10	1955	2008
Norway	SV	10	1961	2012
Norway	V	11	1964	2010
Portugal	CDS	8	1974	2007
Portugal	PC	3	1974	2004
Portugal	PS	8	1974	2011
Portugal	PSD	14	1975	2010
Spain	CDC	5	1977	2018
Spain	Ciudadanos	1	2006	2006
Spain	PCE	6	1978	2016
Spain	PNV	8	1977	2013
Spain	PP	6	1977	2018
Spain	PSOE	6	1976	2017
United Kingdom	Conservative	8	1965	2016
United Kingdom	Labour	8	1976	2015
United Kingdom	Liberal	8	1967	2017
United Kingdom	SDP	3	1982	1987

B Appendix 2: Distribution of polls according to party leaders

Country	Party	Leader	Year start	Duration	# of polls	Polling average	Months with polls
Australia	Australian Democrats	Don Chipp	1978	97	97	-7.735818	81.4433
Australia	Australian Democrats	Janine Haines	1986	42	108	1.721207	92.85714
Australia	Australian Democrats	Cheryl Kernot	1993	55	186	43.96374	98.18182
Australia	Australian Democrats	Meg Lees	1997	40	172	1.679438	100
Australia	Australian Democrats	Natasha Stott Despoja	2001	17	42	-14.53846	47.05882
Australia	Australian Greens	Bob Brown	2005	76	411	9.08092	100
Australia	Australian Greens	Christine Milne	2012	36	44	-11.00245	66.66666
Australia	Australian Greens	Richard Di Natale	2015	1	0	0	100
Australia	Labor Party	Arthur Calwell	1965	85	29	-.2579296	32.94118
Australia	Labor Party	Gough Whitlam	1967	130	54	-.9682617	33.84615
Australia	Labor Party	Bill Hayden	1977	61	58	17.92612	75.40984
Australia	Labor Party	Bob Hawke	1983	106	207	-11.59044	92.45283
Australia	Labor Party	Paul Keating	1991	50	154	9.678705	100
Australia	Labor Party	Kim Beazley	1996	68	303	18.60284	100
Australia	Labor Party	Simon Crean	2001	24	97	.8821869	100
Australia	Labor Party	Mark Latham	2003	13	58	1.123479	100
Australia	Labor Party	Kim Beazley	2005	22	97	6.336246	100
Australia	Labor Party	Kevin Rudd	2006	42	228	-2.509891	100
Australia	Labor Party	Julia Gillard	2010	37	175	-13.70489	100
Australia	Labor Party	Bill Shorten	2013	1	0	0	100
Australia	Labor Party	Kevin Rudd	2013	3	0	-7.800622	100
Australia	Liberal Party	Billy Snedden	1972	26	9	2.097111	34.61538
Australia	Liberal Party	Malcolm Fraser	1975	95	93	-8.291045	75.78947
Australia	Liberal Party	Andrew Peacock	1983	29	25	6.253375	82.75862
Australia	Liberal Party	John Howard	1985	44	105	-1.614096	95.45454
Australia	Liberal Party	Andrew Peacock	1989	10	23	-1.382796	90
Australia	Liberal Party	John Hewson	1990	49	150	12.19955	100
Australia	Liberal Party	Alexander Downer	1994	8	24	-4.819993	100
Australia	Liberal Party	John Howard	1995	151	635	1.746786	100
Australia	Liberal Party	Brendan Nelson	2007	12	74	-2.888362	100
Australia	Liberal Party	Malcolm Turnbull	2008	14	72	-2.668881	100
Australia	Liberal Party	Tony Abbott	2009	69	208	9.96768	82.6087
Australia	Liberal Party	Malcolm Turnbull	2015	1	0	0	100
Canada	Bloc Québécois	Michel Gauthier	1996	12	7	-11.98595	58.33333
Canada	Bloc Québécois	Gilles Duceppe	1997	177	1266	-10.96132	60.45198
Canada	Liberal Party of Canada	Pierre Trudeau	1968	194	186	-15.7174	77.83505
Canada	Liberal Party of Canada	John Turner	1984	72	65	-27.99523	61.11111
Canada	Liberal Party of Canada	Jean Chretien	1990	160	86	8.745079	46.25

Canada	Liberal Party of Canada	Paul Martin	2003	36	252	-14.88488	63.88889
Canada	Liberal Party of Canada	Stephane Dion	2006	28	464	-15.65963	100
Canada	Liberal Party of Canada	Michael Ignatieff	2009	24	497	-15.15524	100
Canada	Liberal Party of Canada	Bob Rae	2011	22	94	24.72014	95.45454
Canada	Liberal Party of Canada	Justin Trudeau	2013	1	8	0	100
Canada	New Democratic Party	David Lewis	1971	50	30	-18.47826	60
Canada	New Democratic Party	Ed Broadbent	1975	172	197	18.08587	83.13953
Canada	New Democratic Party	Audrey McLaughlin	1989	70	50	-40.95626	57.14286
Canada	New Democratic Party	Alexa McDonough	1995	87	40	13.32211	42.52874
Canada	New Democratic Party	Jack Layton	2003	110	1265	12.37429	78.18182
Canada	New Democratic Party	Thomas Mulcair	2012	66	334	-11.54195	66.66666
Canada	Progressive Conservative Party	Robert Stanfield	1967	101	59	-27.6263	57.42574
Canada	Progressive Conservative Party	Joe Clark	1976	87	113	2.830081	96.55173
Canada	Progressive Conservative Party	Brian Mulroney	1983	120	105	-34.60387	60.83333
Canada	Progressive Conservative Party	Kim Campbell	1993	5	3	27.14659	60
Canada	Progressive Conservative Party	Jean Charest	1993	59	38	51.51552	55.93221
Canada	Progressive Conservative Party	Joe Clark	1998	54	21	-12.87412	37.03704
Germany	B '90/Die Grünen	Marianne Birthler	1993	42	77	-2.442583	92.85714
Germany	B '90/Die Grünen	Röstel, Gunda	1996	24	171	-26.10894	95.83334
Germany	B '90/Die Grünen	Radcke, Antje	1998	18	275	-7.566719	100
Germany	B '90/Die Grünen	Künast Renate	2000	8	123	-9.9780765	100
Germany	B '90/Die Grünen	Roth, Claudia	2001	20	368	-9.419014	100
Germany	B '90/Die Grünen	Beer Angelika	2002	21	359	3.600919	100
Germany	B '90/Die Grünen	Roth, Claudia	2004	49	807	-18.92793	100
Germany	B '90/Die Grünen	Özdemir, Cem	2008	59	997	46.86758	100
Germany	CDU	Konrad Adenauer	1965	194	74	4.556882	38.14433
Germany	CDU	Ludwig Erhard	1966	14	14	-3.409091	100
Germany	CDU	Kurt G. Kiesinger	1967	52	52	-7.13141	100
Germany	CDU	Rainer Barzel	1971	20	20	-2.717391	100
Germany	CDU	Helmut Kohl	1973	305	642	-7.4737	97.70492
Germany	CDU	Wolfgang Schäuble	1998	17	259	10.00776	100
Germany	CDU	Angela Merkel	2000	1	15	0	100
Germany	FDP	Erich Mende	1965	97	97	-5.670103	100
Germany	FDP	Walter Scheel	1968	79	79	-19.97187	100
Germany	FDP	Hans-Dietrich Genscher	1974	124	203	-20.90502	100
Germany	FDP	Martin Bangemann	1985	43	81	63.50626	100
Germany	FDP	Otto Graf Lambsdorff	1988	56	94	37.84906	94.64286
Germany	FDP	Klaus Kinkel	1993	23	43	-24.85796	95.65218
Germany	FDP	Wolfgang Gerhardt	1995	70	646	54.0345	95.71429
Germany	FDP	Guido Westerwelle	2001	120	1709	-1.181636	84.16666
Germany	PDS-Die Linke	Lothar Bisky	1993	92	203	-17.68788	48.91304

Germany	PDS-Die Linke	Lothar Bisky	2003	47	806	82.43324	100
Germany	PDS-Die Linke	Gesine Löttsch	2010	24	362	-20.43712	100
Germany	PDS-Die Linke	Katja Kipping	2012	1	18	0	100
Germany	SPD	Willy Brandt	1965	281	385	-6.625148	100
Germany	SPD	Hans-Jochen Vogel	1987	47	78	.3230733	97.87234
Germany	SPD	Björn Engholm	1991	24	44	-10.41144	91.66666
Germany	SPD	Rudolf Scharping	1993	28	51	3.80679	92.85714
Germany	SPD	Oskar Lafontaine	1995	48	376	20.67353	95.83334
Germany	SPD	Gerhard Schröder	1999	51	867	1.474581	100
Germany	SPD	Franz Müntefering	2004	19	349	11.47287	100
Germany	SPD	Matthias Platzeck	2005	4	67	-3.692397	100
Germany	SPD	Kurt Beck	2006	28	429	-8.414464	100
Germany	SPD	Franz Müntefering	2008	14	228	-4.888526	100
Germany	SPD	Sigmar Gabriel	2009	88	803	22.21183	53.40909
Israel	Kadima	Tzipi Livni	2008	42	0	-11.11555	30.95238
Israel	Kadima	Shaul Mofaz	2012	1	0	0	100
Israel	Labor	Shelly Yehimovic	2011	26	0	-.933059	57.69231
Israel	Labor	Isaac Herzog	2013	43	0	-32.4063	67.44186
Israel	Labor	Avi Gabay	2017	1	0	0	100
Norway	Ap	Trygve Bratteli	1965	118	102	-7.242192	86.44068
Norway	Ap	Reiulf Steen	1975	71	57	9.843787	80.28169
Norway	Ap	Gro Harlem Brundtland	1981	139	269	10.32999	92.08633
Norway	Ap	Torbjørn Jagland	1992	120	288	19.71247	95.83334
Norway	Ap	Jens Stoltenberg	2002	1	2	0	100
Norway	FrP	Carl Ivar Hagen	1978	338	609	216.9194	69.82249
Norway	FrP	Siv Jensen	2006	1	5	-1.29e-06	100
Norway	H	Sjur Lindebrække	1962	95	59	-14.52234	62.10526
Norway	H	Kåre Willoch	1970	48	48	2.705942	100
Norway	H	Erling Norvik	1974	71	57	12.38796	80.28169
Norway	H	Jo Benkow	1980	51	46	5.318323	90.19608
Norway	H	Erling Norvik	1984	19	17	3.820272	89.47369
Norway	H	Rolf Presthus	1986	20	38	-4.290768	85
Norway	H	Jan P Syse	1988	38	117	-14.48442	97.36842
Norway	H	Kaci Kullman Five	1991	35	95	-.8585694	100
Norway	H	Jan Petersen	1994	121	276	-5.58747	95.86777
Norway	H	Erika Solberg	2004	1	1	0	100
Norway	SP	John Austrheim	1967	72	59	22.17348	81.94444
Norway	SP	Dagfinn Vårvik	1973	47	41	-.7338668	87.23404
Norway	SP	Johan Jakob Jakobsen	1979	143	202	-26.40711	72.02797
Norway	SP	Anne Enger Lahnstein	1991	96	245	46.07916	94.79166
Norway	SP	Odd Roger Enoksen	1999	48	110	-4.565696	100

Norway	SP	Åslaug Haga	2003	63	234	20.91054	98.4127
Norway	SP	Liv Signe Navarsete	2008	1	9	-6.01e-07	100
Norway	SP	Lars Peder Brekk	2008	2	13	-5.599997	100
Norway	SV	Theo Koritzinsky	1983	48	45	56.76152	85.41666
Norway	SV	Erik Solheim	1987	121	341	61.86601	95.86777
Norway	SV	Kristin Halvorsen	1997	178	549	52.86102	82.02247
Norway	SV (SF)	Torolv Solheim	1969	24	16	31.98529	66.66666
Norway	SV (SF)	Finn Gustavsen	1971	30	30	143.718	100
Norway	V	Gunnar Garbo	1964	72	49	24.69388	68.05556
Norway	V	Lars Sponheim	1996	168	146	-33.48556	32.14286
Norway	V	Trine Skei Grande	2010	1	9	1.58e-06	100
Portugal	CDS	Manuel Monteiro	1992	72	79	81.58372	100
Portugal	CDS	Paulo Portas	1998	85	116	-1.580858	98.82353
Portugal	CDS	José Ribeiro e Castro	2005	23	28	-16.92546	100
Portugal	CDS	Paulo Portas	2007	1	1	0	100
Portugal	PS	António Almeida Santos	1985	32	32	10.34007	100
Portugal	PS	Vítor Constâncio	1986	18	18	-9.235208	100
Portugal	PS	Jorge Sampaio	1989	16	30	20.21598	100
Portugal	PS	António Guterres	1992	86	99	23.47874	100
Portugal	PS	Eduardo Ferro Rodrigues	2002	32	39	17.71589	100
Portugal	PS	José Sócrates	2004	81	244	10.7142	97.53086
Portugal	PSD	Aníbal Cavaco Silva	1985	117	118	33.40333	88.88889
Portugal	PSD	Fernando Nogueira	1995	13	20	-13.49776	100
Portugal	PSD	Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa	1996	34	34	4.656	100
Portugal	PSD	José Manuel Durão Barroso	1999	68	80	7.92825	98.52941
Portugal	PSD	Pedro Santana Lopes	2004	4	22	-5.927712	100
Portugal	PSD	Luís Marques Mendes	2005	29	36	9.623312	100
Portugal	PSD	Luís Filipe Menezes	2007	8	14	9.364189	100
Portugal	PSD	Manuela Ferreira Leite	2008	21	56	4.187799	95.2381
Portugal	PSD	Pedro Passos Coelho	2010	1	7	-4.34e-06	100
Spain	CDC	Jordi Pujol	1977	297	0	89.75854	45.79124
Spain	CDC	Artur Mas	2000	176	0	-21.61357	75
Spain	IU	Gaspar Llamazares	2000	94	28	4.00859	97.87234
Spain	IU	Cayo Lara	2008	91	289	21.26526	57.14286
Spain	PCE	Gerardo Iglesias	1982	73	2	77.54468	35.61644
Spain	PCE	Julio Anguita	1988	145	127	51.94849	74.48276
Spain	PNV	Román Sudupe	1984	8	0	-1	62.5
Spain	PNV	Jesús Insausti	1985	12	0	9.444448	41.66667
Spain	PNV	Xabier Arzalluz	1986	215	0	80.9332	63.25581
Spain	PNV	Josu Jon Imaz	2004	46	0	-6.889428	97.82609
Spain	PNV	Iñigo Urkullu	2007	61	0	-20.56006	77.04918

Spain	PP	Manuel Fraga	1977	122	26	218.0525	46.72131
Spain	PP	Antonio Hernández	1987	17	2	12.52451	58.82353
Spain	PP	Manuel Fraga	1989	14	6	7.272726	35.71429
Spain	PP	José María Aznar	1990	169	275	36.40008	82.24852
Spain	PP	Mariano Rajoy	2004	169	1125	1.254335	85.79881
Spain	PSOE	Felipe González	1976	246	99	-3.562455	59.7561
Spain	PSOE	Joaquín Almunia	1997	36	56	-2.287323	94.44444
Spain	PSOE	José Luis Rodríguez	2000	139	705	19.5064	98.56115
Spain	PSOE	Alfredo Perez Rubalca	2012	29	169	-1.578816	100
Spain	PSOE	Pedro Sánchez	2014	26	401	-.4606271	92.30769
United Kingdom	Conservative	Edward Heath	1965	114	286	-2.407516	99.12281
United Kingdom	Conservative	Margaret Thatcher	1975	189	922	-1.65801	100
United Kingdom	Conservative	John Major	1990	78	512	-19.75517	100
United Kingdom	Conservative	William Hague	1997	50	213	24.72688	100
United Kingdom	Conservative	Iain Duncan-Smith	2001	25	79	11.1	100
United Kingdom	Conservative	Michael Howard	2003	25	163	-3.173258	100
United Kingdom	Conservative	David Cameron	2005	131	2676	-1.261669	100
United Kingdom	Conservative	Theresa May	2016	1	8	0	100
United Kingdom	Labour	James Callaghan	1976	55	177	-7.803277	100
United Kingdom	Labour	Michael Foot	1980	34	169	-28.29049	100
United Kingdom	Labour	Neil Kinnock	1983	105	765	10.57576	100
United Kingdom	Labour	John Smith	1992	24	98	9.68126	100
United Kingdom	Labour	Tony Blair	1994	155	765	-10.04406	99.35484
United Kingdom	Labour	Gordon Brown	2007	39	515	-15.16728	100
United Kingdom	Labour	Ed Miliband	2010	59	1936	2.276573	100
United Kingdom	Labour	Jeremy Corbyn	2015	1	9	-8.67e-07	100

C Appendix 3: Main Analysis

	(1) Model 1	(2) Model 2	(3) Model 3	(4) Model 4	(5) Model 3
Change in polls	-0.00698** (0.00256)	-0.00725** (0.00258)	-0.00683* (0.00298)	-0.00479 (0.00333)	-0.00596 (0.00318)
Primary		-0.347 (0.340)	-0.658 (0.460)	-0.575 (0.460)	-0.663 (0.461)
Conference		Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Elite		0.122 (0.206)	0.0925 (0.441)	0.343 (0.470)	0.0785 (0.445)
age		0.0341** (0.0114)	0.0425*** (0.0126)	0.0420*** (0.0126)	0.0428*** (0.0126)
gender		0.477 (0.254)	0.440 (0.288)	0.436 (0.290)	0.459 (0.289)
Has been Prime Minister		-0.209 (0.346)	-0.100 (0.365)	-0.123 (0.366)	-0.131 (0.368)
Grace Period		-0.843** (0.275)	-0.862** (0.289)	-0.867** (0.289)	-0.860** (0.289)
Term Length restriction in the party		-0.0484 (0.231)	-0.364 (0.539)	-0.322 (0.538)	-0.331 (0.541)
Disputed Leadership		0.0434 (0.202)	0.0885 (0.232)	0.0828 (0.232)	0.103 (0.233)
Vote percentage last national election		0.0283 (0.0179)	0.0133 (0.0216)	0.0142 (0.0216)	0.0154 (0.0218)
Seat Share last national election		-0.0218 (0.0155)	-0.0242 (0.0175)	-0.0255 (0.0176)	-0.0250 (0.0175)
Not in government		Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
In government		-0.535 (0.291)	-0.784* (0.315)	-0.811* (0.315)	-0.772* (0.316)
Number of polls per month		0.0157* (0.00776)	0.0224** (0.00867)	0.0224* (0.00872)	0.0229** (0.00869)
Primary X Change in polls				0.000866 (0.0140)	
Elite X Change in polls				-0.0111 (0.00801)	
In government X Change in polls					-0.00507 (0.00757)
Party Family FE	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	9685	9685	9685	9685	9685

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$