THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY'S LEADERSHIP ELECTION OF 2016:

CHOOSING A LEADER IN GOVERNMENT

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Abstract

This paper examines the British Conservative Party's leadership election of 2016, held in the aftermath of the UK's referendum vote to leave the European Union. The paper analyses the contest using Stark's theoretical framework, which assumes that leaders are chosen according to a hierarchy of criteria: acceptability, electability and competence, in that order. The eventual victor, Theresa May, was indeed the strongest candidate on all three criteria. However, electability appeared subordinate to competence during the contest. Electability is usually regarded as more basic than competence because parties must first win elections before they can start governing. However, governing parties are already in office and new leaders chosen mid-term must begin governing immediately. Current competence in office may be a prerequisite for future electability. The paper reviews other post-war leadership elections in Britain and finds that competence normally superseded electability as a selection criterion in governing parties. This finding implies a modification of Stark's framework.

Key words: Conservative Party; EU referendum; leadership elections; prime ministers; Theresa May

Britain's historic referendum vote in June 2016 to leave the European Union (EU) unleashed an immediate wave of political instability in the country. The major casualty was the prime minister, David Cameron, who announced his resignation the day after voters had ignored his entreaties to remain in the EU. It triggered the start of a campaign to replace him as Conservative leader and prime minister in a contest that was expected to last two-and-a-half months but was over in two weeks. A process that was to include parliamentary and membership ballots was halted before the Conservatives' 150,000 members had a chance to vote, as a series of eliminations and withdrawals saw Theresa May become Britain's second female prime minister. As in all contested Tory leadership elections since 1989, 'Europe' was centre-stage (Heppell, 2008).

Research on leadership elections is plentiful. The field was once dominated by single-country (Punnett, 1992; Quinn, 2005, 2012), single-party (Denham and O'Hara, 2008; Heppell, 2008) and single-contest (Alderman and Carter, 2002; Cowley and Bailey, 2000; Cowley and Garry, 1998; Dorey and Denham, 2016; Jobson and Wickham-Jones, 2011) studies, particularly in the UK. A newer theoretical and comparative literature has sought to examine leadership selection under varying rules and in a range of countries (Cross and Blais, 2012; Cross and Pilet, 2015; LeDuc, 2001; Pilet and Cross, 2014; cf. Denham, 2016).

Although the Conservative contest of 2016 was truncated and represents a single case study, it is worthy of examination. First, it provides a rare example of a competitive leadership ballot organised by a governing party (Heppell, 2008; Alderman, 1996; Alderman and Carter, 1991). Second, it offers a chance to apply one of the most frequently used frameworks for analysing leadership elections – Stark's (1996) approach based on selection criteria – and to assess its applicability to leadership contests in government. As the second female prime minister and Tory leader, May's victory also drew attention to the issue of gender and party leadership. The final two candidates were both female and a controversial gender-based dispute arose on motherhood (see below). It is not the

purpose of this paper to undertake a systematic analysis of gender. However, the topic is important and with the rise of more female leaders throughout the UK, it clearly merits further research (see Beckwith, 2015; Murray, 2010; O'Brien, 2015; O'Neill and Stewart, 2009).

This paper makes two contributions. First, it examines the reasons for May's victory using Stark's framework, which assumes three principal selection criteria corresponding to a party's 'hierarchy of needs': uniting the party, making it electable and providing competent governance, in that order of importance. The paper shows that, overall, Stark's framework provides a convincing account of May's victory. But in the process, it makes a second contribution, demonstrating that the relative importance of electability and competence is normally reversed when governing parties choose new leaders. That is because electoral victory is not a prerequisite for entering government, as it is opposition parties. On the contrary, prime-ministerial competence may be a prerequisite for future electoral success for a governing party. May's victory was based on the Conservatives' twin needs for post-referendum unity and governing competence. Electability was not an explicit consideration.

The paper begins recounting the Conservative leadership election that followed the referendum. After considering the consequences of the selection rules, it applies Stark's framework. Finally, it shows that the prioritising of competence over electability has usually been a feature of other leadership transitions in government and implies a modification of Stark's schema.

The leadership election campaign

The Conservative leadership election of 2016 followed the EU referendum, one of the most extraordinary events in post-war British political history. The referendum represented the endgame of a 30-year conflict within the Conservative Party over European integration (Bale, 2010; Forster, 2002). This period took in the resignation of Margaret Thatcher as prime minister and a bitter struggle over the Maastricht Treaty between pro-Europeans and Eurosceptics under her successor,

John Major. With the Conservatives' return to opposition in 1997, they became more consistently Eurosceptic (Bale, 2010; Dorey et al., 2011; Heppell, 2013). On assuming the leadership in 2005, Cameron sought to modernise the Conservatives' image (Kerr and Hayton, 2015; Dommett, 2015) and as part of that, he urged the party to stop 'banging on about Europe' (Bale, 2010). However, once back in office in 2010, 'Europe' re-emerged. By now, the division was between 'hard' Eurosceptics who wanted a British exit from the EU – 'Brexit' – and 'soft' Eurosceptics who sought to reform it (Lynch and Whitaker, 2013). Partly to deal with these divisions, as well as to address the increasing electoral threat of the UK Independence Party, Cameron announced that if the Conservatives won the 2015 election, he would hold an in/out referendum (Lynch, 2015). With victory secured, Cameron negotiated with EU leaders in 2016 to reform the terms of the UK's membership, leading to some moderate although not decisive changes, and no concessions on the crucial principle of the free movement of labour (Clarke et al., 2017: 22-7). Cameron called a referendum for June in which he would campaign for Britain to stay in the EU.

Conservative MPs were split, with over 40% declaring for 'Leave' but more than half supporting 'Remain' (Heppell et al., 2017). Most ministers supported Remain, including the chancellor, George Osborne. Others who were considered possible Leavers eventually backed Remain, including the home secretary, Theresa May. Five members and attenders of cabinet backed Leave, the most prominent being the justice secretary, Michael Gove, a moderniser and erstwhile supporter of Cameron (*Guardian*, 20 February 2016). Outside of the cabinet, the ambitious former mayor of London, Boris Johnson, an economic and social liberal, also surprisingly campaigned for Leave after months of speculation about his intentions.

The referendum was closely-run but the result was still a shock. Britain voted to leave the EU by 52% to 48% (Clarke et al., 2017). The next day, Cameron announced he would resign as Conservative leader and prime minister once a replacement had been found.

The contest to replace Cameron would take place under the Conservatives' post-1998 selection rules, which combined parliamentary and all-member ballots (Alderman, 1999). Candidates required the nominations of two other MPs to enter the contest. If there were three or more nominees, there would be a series of ballots of Tory MPs in which they would vote for one candidate, with the one finishing last in each round being eliminated. This process would continue until the number of candidates had been whittled down to two and these would go forward to a postal ballot of party members. The parliamentary ballots would take one or two weeks but the membership ballot would last two months, as a series of hustings would be organised around the country (Denham and O'Hara, 2008; Heppell, 2008). The Conservatives ruled that members must have joined the party at least three months before the contest, to avoid an influx of UKIP supporters and others trying to influence the result (*Daily Telegraph*, 26 June 2016).

After Cameron's resignation, the expectation was that the contest would be a straight fight between Johnson and May, as the leading representatives of Leave and Remain respectively. Johnson had taken a high-profile position in the referendum and press commentary focused on his prime-ministerial ambitions. Johnson's decision to campaign to leave the EU may have been motivated by leadership calculations (Cohen, 2016). With most party members supporting Brexit, a Leaver who faced a Remainer in the membership ballot ought to have stood a good chance of victory.

May had long been considered a Eurosceptic and after siding with Remain, she took a backseat role in the referendum, not criticising colleagues or making controversial claims. That turned out to be crucial to her presentation of herself as a unifier. May emphasised her competence, having run the home office for six years. As part of her pitch to Leavers, she stated unequivocally at her campaign launch that 'Brexit means Brexit' (*Guardian*, 1 July 2016).

As a fellow economically and socially liberal moderniser, Osborne had once been considered Cameron's heir. However, during the referendum campaign, he was accused by critics of running 'project fear', an attempt to scare voters into voting to remain in the EU by presenting a catalogue of devastating economic outcomes if Britain left (Clarke et al., 2017: 42-6). Osborne's reputation never recovered among Leave-supporting MPs and it was no surprise when he decided against running.

Instead, Stephen Crabb, the work and pensions secretary and a Remainer, surprisingly declared his candidacy. Two socially conservative Leavers also declared: Liam Fox was a former defence secretary, while Andrea Leadsom was a junior energy minister who had increased her profile during the referendum. Leadsom extolled her business experience and argued that the Conservatives should be led by a Leaver (*Guardian*, 7 July 2016).

The biggest shock came with the entry into the contest of the high-profile Leaver, Gove. It was assumed that Gove would support Johnson, but hours before Johnson's campaign launch, Gove said he had 'come, reluctantly, to the conclusion that Boris cannot provide the leadership or build the team for the task ahead'. These doubts related to Johnson's 'focus and grip', his ability to negotiate Brexit, and his failure to secure Leadsom's support (*Guardian*, 1 July 2016). Gove announced that he would run for the leadership himself, despite previously insisting that he was not suited for the job (*Guardian*, 25 June 2016). His social liberalism distinguished him from the other Leave candidates.

Gove's move triggered a wave of defections among MPs from Johnson (*Guardian*, 1 July 2016). Given that May was expected to win most Remain MPs and guarantee herself a place in the top two, Johnson had to beat Gove to reach the membership ballot. It appears that he quickly calculated that he could not do it. At what was to have been Johnson's launch event to become leader and prime minister, he declared, '[h]aving consulted colleagues and in view of the circumstances in parliament, I have concluded that person cannot be me' (*Guardian*, 1 July 2016). However, the ruthlessness of

Gove's move shocked his colleagues, with some accusing him of 'treachery' (*Daily Telegraph*, 1 July 2016). With Fox's candidacy struggling, Leadsom increasingly became the focus of support for Leavers, winning Johnson's endorsement in the process.

The timescale for the parliamentary ballots was tight. Cameron announced his decision to stand down on 24 June, nominations opened on 29 June and closed a day later, the first ballot would take place on 5 July, and the second two days after that. Campaigning largely occurred behind closed doors, with two hustings for Conservative MPs (*Daily Telegraph*, 5 July 2016). The candidates debated the post-Brexit landscape, including when to trigger the two-year leaving period, with May and Gove preferring 2017, and Leadsom wanting sooner (*Guardian*, 4 July 2016). Gove and Leadsom wished to provide guarantees that EU citizens living in the UK would be allowed to remain, but May wanted reciprocal guarantees for UK citizens in other EU states (*Guardian*, 30 June 2016). Crabb wanted to retain access to the EU single market, but Gove, May and Leadsom prioritised ending the free movement of labour (*Daily Telegraph*, 1 June 2016; *Guardian*, 29 June 2016).

Polling showed a clear shift in party members' preferences after the referendum. A YouGov poll of individual Conservative members in February had found Johnson by far the most preferred candidate (Table 1). EU preferences structured leadership preferences, with Johnson heavily preferred by Leavers while Remainers supported May or Osborne. But YouGov's post-referendum poll in June found May had overtaken Johnson, while Osborne's support had collapsed. Remainers heavily preferred May, while Leavers more narrowly preferred Johnson. His withdrawal left May as the strongest candidate among Remainers and Leavers. The dramatic way in which members' preferences appeared to change in such a short period pointed to the possibility that they were taking cues from party elites in media coverage.[1] Indeed, MPs, including many Leavers, quickly gravitated to May (Jeffery et al., 2017). They included most of the cabinet, with the prominent Brexiteer, Chris Grayling, her campaign manager. The first parliamentary ballot gave May an overall

majority of votes cast, winning 165 of 329 MPs (Table 2). She finished far ahead of Leadsom on 66 and Gove on 48. Fox, with just 16 votes was eliminated and he pledged his support for May, despite being a Leaver. Crabb, who won 34 votes, was entitled to contest the next round but withdrew and endorsed May (*Guardian*, 5 July 2016).

[TABLES 1 AND 2]

The second ballot was two days later with interest surrounding whether Gove could overtake Leadsom. His campaign chief texted May's supporters asking them to consider voting for Gove to eliminate Leadsom, whose inexperience and popularity with activists left him 'seriously frightened' (*Guardian*, 7 July 2016). The calls had little effect and Gove lost support, winning 46 MPs to Leadsom's 84. May finished far in front with 199. She would face Leadsom in the all-member ballot.

In the following days, Leadsom faced increasing scrutiny. She was accused of exaggerating her business accomplishments (*Guardian*, 6 July 2016) and gave a controversial interview in which she appeared to imply that she, as a mother, had a greater stake in the future than the childless May (*Times*, 9 July 2016). Four days after reaching the membership ballot, Leadsom announced she was withdrawing, citing the fact that she won the support of only 25% of MPs (*Daily Telegraph*, 11 July 2016). After a meeting of the backbench 1922 committee and the Conservative board, the contest was terminated, with no elevation to the all-member ballot for Gove. On 11 July, May was declared leader of the Conservative Party and two days later, she was appointed prime minister.

Selection criteria

Research on UK leadership elections has increasingly analysed them in terms of selection criteria related to parties' 'hierarchy of needs' (Stark, 1996). From this perspective, parties have three principal goals, which are, in order of importance, internal unity, electoral victory and policy

implementation. Unity is the primary goal because united parties have the best chance of winning elections, and the latter is a prerequisite for entering government to implement policies. Extending this argument to leadership elections, the selectorate, whether it consists of MPs, party members, or others, typically assesses the candidates by criteria matching these goals. In divided parties, a successful candidate must be broadly *acceptable*, whether ideologically or personally, to a range of intra-party opinion. In reasonably united parties, unity will not be the over-riding immediate goal and so selection of a leader will turn on the second criterion of *electability*, i.e. who can best deliver electoral success. If the candidates are matched on that criterion, the decision will hinge on the third criterion of *competence*, i.e. who would make the best prime minister (Stark, 1996, pp. 125-126).

This framework has a good record explaining leadership elections in Britain. Stark demonstrated that it explained all contests bar one between 1963 and 1995. While some victors such as Tony Blair (Labour in 1994) were dominant on all three criteria, others were weaker on electability but won as unity candidates to overcome internal divisions, such as Michael Foot (Labour in 1980). The one case Stark's framework could not explain was the Conservative contest of 1975, when an institutional mechanism was vital. The option of second-ballot entry discouraged major candidates following Thatcher into challenging Edward Heath but enabled her to build momentum (Stark, 1996, p. 127). Quinn's (2012) updating of Stark for the 1997-2010 period found it performed similarly well. Some candidates were dominant on all three criteria (e.g. Cameron in 2005), while others won on acceptability rather than electability (e.g. Iain Duncan Smith in 2001). It was less successful with the Labour leadership election of 2015, when a struggle between the left and 'moderates' saw a quest not for unity but factional dominance (Quinn, 2016).

Acceptability and unity

Stark predicts that divided parties usually seek unifiers as leaders. The Conservatives were split in the aftermath of the EU referendum, with prominent figures having campaigned to leave and in the

process destroyed Cameron's premiership. It was essential that the party healed its wounds. Perceptions of the importance of unity, and of who would most likely deliver it, changed in the months before the contest. Table 3 shows data on selection criteria from YouGov polls of Conservative members in February, June (after the EU vote) and July 2016. Although the members did not ultimately vote in the contest, their preferences were a major consideration for most of the campaign, as the belief was that they *would* vote. Moreover, as a more Eurosceptic body than Conservative MPs, any evidence of a swing to the pro-Remain May would be indicative of the forces propelling her to victory. The data show that the most important criterion throughout several months of polling, from the EU renegotiation in February to the parliamentary ballots in July, was which candidate would make the most competent prime minister. The importance of electability – being able to win in 2020 – fell in importance between February and July. These two issues are discussed in the following subsections. The biggest increase was for uniting the party, cited by 46% of members in February but rising to 65% in July when the referendum divisions were laid bare.

[TABLES 3 AND 4]

As the relative importance of these criteria changed, so did the members' evaluations of the candidates. Table 4 shows that on the criterion of uniting the party, Johnson was far ahead of May and Osborne in February, but May had reversed the position by June, and by July (when Johnson was out of the running) fully 61% considered her best able to unite the party. The referendum campaign had destroyed Osborne's chances of becoming leader.

The referendum also harmed Johnson's prospects. In campaigning for Brexit, he hoped to pick up Leave supporters, but left a trail of collateral damage in his wake. Relations between him and Cameron became strained during the campaign (Cockerell, 2016). There was also a widespread perception that Johnson was opportunistic in campaigning for Brexit and did not really believe in it

(d'Ancona 2016b). Remainers increasingly saw him as a divisive and untrustworthy figure. Some Leavers had also grown distrustful, particularly after a newspaper article Johnson published in the *Daily Telegraph* at the start of the leadership contest, in which he appeared to row back from opposition to freedom of movement (Johnson, 2016).

In destroying Johnson's hopes, Gove ended his own. As a prominent Leave campaigner, Gove's profile rose during the referendum and unlike Johnson, his desire for Brexit was long-standing. But while he may have been an ideologically acceptable leader in the aftermath of Leave's victory, his ruthlessness in dispatching Johnson shone a spotlight on his character. In appearing untrustworthy, Gove had made himself personally unacceptable to the MPs who would need to work with him.

The declining reputations of Osborne, Johnson and Gove were evident in YouGov's polls of Conservative members (Table 5). Johnson initially enjoyed the highest net positive ratings among the rivals, although all were very high. After announcing that he would campaign for Brexit, Johnson's ratings took a hit in late February but were still the highest of the contenders. After the referendum, they slumped and by July his net positive rating was +17, down from +77 six months earlier. In the same period, Osborne's plunged from +56 to -1, while Gove's also fell, moderately at first but massively after his assault on Johnson. From +60 in February, he fell to -20 in July.

[TABLE 5]

Only May managed to avoid this wreckage of reputations. Having announced that she would vote to remain in the EU, she stood aside from the fray, not participating in the referendum mudslinging. Her net positive ratings were +65 in February and +63 in July, a plateau rather than a sudden surge. Although Leadsom had emerged to pose some threat, May was the most plausible candidate left standing. As a Eurosceptic Remainer, she was best placed to unite the party (*Guardian*, 25 June

2016). While for some Leavers, only a leader who campaigned for Brexit was acceptable, they represented no more than 30% of the membership (Table 3).

Although unity was the key consideration, it is certainly true that ideology, especially in relation to Europe, played a role in the parliamentary votes. An academic analysis of the publicly-stated preferences of MPs found that in the final ballot, Remainers, who constituted the majority of the parliamentary party, voted solidly for May. Leavers divided between Leadsom and Gove, with the secondary issue of social policy having some effect: social conservatives were more likely to back Leadsom over Gove. However, one-third of Leave-supporting MPs were estimated to have voted for May. That reflected her greater cross-over support among the factions and confirmed her status as the unity candidate (Jeffery et al., 2017).

It would be misleading, however, to characterise the contest as a simple ideological fight between Leavers and Remainers. Although Remainers rallied behind May, the fragmentation of the Leave vote between the three final candidates indicated other factors were at work. All of the prominent Leavers had serious weaknesses. Gove was divisive, as was the non-running Johnson. Leadsom was inexperienced, while showing signs of becoming a divisive figure. Fox was never more than an also-ran. Moreover, May did not run as a 'Remainer', but as someone who accepted the referendum result and wanted to take it forward. If Remain-supporting Conservative MPs had wanted a kindred spirit as leader, they could have persuaded Osborne to stand, but he too was damaged. Only May – the 'reluctant Remainer' – could unite the factions. The desire for unity trumped narrow ideological considerations. An appealing and unifying Leaver could have won, but no such candidate emerged.

Electability

Electability appeared to be the dog that did not bark during this leadership contest. It declined in significance after the referendum, being the fourth most important criterion ('best able to win in

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2020') for selectors in July, a long way behind unity and competence (Table 3). Indeed, whereas in February, it was cited by 52% of members as important, that fell to 36% in July.

There were two important reasons for this change. First, with the Conservatives divided over the referendum, unity was the priority, as was someone who could be an effective prime minister, given that the party faced up to four years of governing before the next election. Secondly, Labour's travails seemingly made the prospect of a Conservative defeat less likely, as Labour MPs were locked in battle with their leader, Jeremy Corbyn, and his leftwing grassroots supporters (Quinn, forthcoming). With Labour in turmoil, the Tories would not necessarily need (in May's words) a 'showy' leader to win the next election. A united party under a respected leader would contrast with Labour's divisions.

The downgrading of electability disadvantaged Johnson. He consistently out-polled his rivals on the criterion of 'understands how to win elections' (Table 4), even after his reputation had been damaged (he led May on this measure 48-21 in June, although May surged ahead after Johnson's withdrawal). On the related question of media performance, Johnson's leads were even greater. His perceived electability stemmed from two mayoral victories in Labour-leaning London.

Johnson had once appeared the heir apparent to the Tory leadership when the party's electoral prospects looked uncertain during the early years of the coalition government. With Corbyn's election as Labour leader in 2015, the Conservatives' electoral chances looked brighter. There would therefore be less need to take a risk on a colourful character like Johnson when others would have equally good chances of winning the election expected in 2020. Indeed, the rise in Osborne's stock during this period and the sense that *he* had become the heir apparent provided some of the context in which Johnson decided to campaign for Brexit. Given that Osborne and May both declared for Remain, Johnson required something that distinguished himself from two colleagues

with greater ministerial experience. Fronting the Leave campaign could theoretically deliver up to half the parliamentary party, enough to put him on the membership ballot. In contrast, had Labour posed more of an electoral threat, it is possible that Johnson's perceived electability would have been sufficiently appealing in its own right. It might even have left him scope to campaign to remain in the EU – if he so desired – provided he were confident of navigating the parliamentary ballots in a future leadership contest.

Competence and experience

Evaluations of candidates' relative competence and experience played a crucial role in the contest. That was because the Conservatives were not merely choosing a party leader but also a prime minister. The new leader would need to start governing from day one and would be responsible for negotiating Brexit. Thus, the most commonly cited criterion for choosing a leader mentioned by party members was that of who would make the most competent prime minister, ahead of unity and far ahead of electability (Table 3).

May and Osborne were the most senior and longest-serving ministers considered as early candidates, given their respective six-year stints as home secretary and chancellor of the exchequer. Each also had extensive experience in opposition, in May's case going back to 1999. She had a strong record at the home office, a difficult department to run. Meanwhile, Osborne had gained praise for his stewardship of the economy and for a long time had looked likely to be Cameron's successor. However, he faced questions over his conduct during the referendum and had become a divisive figure, indicating that competence, while important, remained below unity and acceptability in the ranking of criteria.

Among the other candidates, Gove had been a cabinet minister for six years, although not in the highest-ranking departments. Johnson had never served in government, but had been London

mayor for eight years. Gove's attack on Johnson related to his fitness to be prime minister. That concern had already been evident in the unease that some Leavers felt about the prospect of Johnson becoming prime minister and leading the Brexit negotiations (*Guardian*, 27 June 2016). But Gove's suitability was also questioned. One Johnson-supporting MP with experience of working with Gove accused him of having 'an emotional need to gossip, particularly when drink is taken, as it all too often seemed to be', an undesirable attribute in a prime minister (*Daily Telegraph*, 4 July 2016).

Leadsom had been only a junior minister and became the first serious candidate (i.e. excluding the 'stalking-horse' candidacy of Sir Anthony Meyer in 1989) without any cabinet experience to contest a leadership election in a major UK party when it was in government (Johnson would have joined her had he run). It led one observer to dismiss her campaign as 'nonsense on stilts' (d'Ancona 2016a). Indeed, in terms of cabinet service, Leadsom, Crabb and Fox were the three least experienced post-war leadership candidates in contests for vacancies held by a governing party.

On key competence indicators, party members initially saw little between Johnson, May and Osborne but shifted strongly to May after the referendum. In February, the three were evenly matched on who would make the strongest leader, with May and Osborne slightly ahead of Johnson on ability to handle a crisis and being willing to take tough decisions (Table 3). By June, May enjoyed strong leads over Johnson and Osborne on all these indicators. By July, she had even greater leads over Gove and Leadsom and crucially was seen as the candidate best able to negotiate Brexit.

Overall, May was the strongest candidate on all three criteria, a perception that strengthened during the contest. Her victory owed to her being acceptable to Remainers and Leavers in a bitterly divided party. Providing unity was vital but neither Osborne nor Gove could do it and Johnson would have struggled to convince Remainers. May, who had desisted from so-called 'blue-on-blue' attacks on colleagues during the referendum, convincingly posed as the unifier. Meanwhile, her superiority on

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competence was enough to see off Leadsom, whose inexperience worried many selectors. May was also fortunate in seeing the implosion of the only candidates who could rival her for experience, Osborne and Gove. Finally, May appeared solid on electability although it rarely emerged as an issue in the contest.

With the proviso of the diminished importance of electability, the Stark framework achieved a 'hit' in explaining the 2016 Conservative leadership contest. The three selection criteria that Stark identified shaped selectors' views of the candidates, and in this contest, as in many others, questions over party unity ruled out a number of otherwise strong-looking candidates. Some of these points were raised in contemporaneous media commentary, reflecting the accuracy of Stark's selection criteria. This leadership election joins a long list of 'hits' for the approach.

The Conservatives' 2016 contest therefore stands in contrast with the 2015 Labour leadership election, which was a clear 'miss' for Stark (Quinn, 2016). In that case, Corbyn won despite being weaker than the leading candidates on unity, electability and competence. However, we should be wary of assuming that these criteria have diminished importance in today's political environment. Occasionally, divided parties in the midst of electoral defeat may look for a dramatic break with the past and they might achieve it if a previously subordinate faction seizes control. That is what happened in the Labour Party in 2015, just as it did in the Conservative Party in 1975 – another rare 'miss' for Stark (Stark, 1996, p. 127). Yet, once these ascendant factions take control, they quickly rediscover the importance of internal unity, as has become evident in the Labour Party under Corbyn, with the left's insistence that 'moderate' MPs unite behind the leader (Quinn, forthcoming).

Selection institutions

Inherent in Stark's focus on selection criteria is the diminished importance of institutions (Stark 1996, pp. 131-138). That implies that the composition of the selectorate – MPs, party members or

other actors – is less significant than the shared criteria they use when choosing. The Conservatives' hybrid system of parliamentary and membership ballots can put that idea to the test. Despite the 2016 contest being cut short, polling of party members was extensive. It was difficult to discern any difference in the leadership preferences of MPs and party members. May was the strong choice of MPs but she was also preferred by the members, indicating that she would have won under most selection systems, whether pure parliamentary or all-member ballots.

The abrupt end of the Conservative contest after the parliamentary ballots prevented the direct delivery of the first British prime minister by an all-member ballot. However, that does not mean that the selection system was unimportant. On the contrary, its structure shaped the actors' choices (Alderman, 1999). One influence it may have exerted was in Johnson's decision to campaign for Leave. As noted above, some critics alleged that Johnson made this choice for strategic reasons. In particular, given the division of Conservative MPs on the Leave-Remain cleavage, it would have looked likely in February 2016 (when Johnson made his decision to opt for Leave) that the next leadership election would see one Leaver face-off against one Remainer. Given the dearth of other serious Leave candidates, Johnson may have felt confident of reaching the all-member ballot and then winning it among the Leave-oriented membership.

These calculations were rendered otiose by Gove's intervention. The destruction of both politicians' leadership ambitions were more explicable in terms of their (un)suitability to be prime minister and thus relates back to selection criteria rather than institutions. Given that only one Leaver was likely to reach the membership ballot, Johnson was faced with the prospect of, at best, finishing third in the final parliamentary ballot. Had all nominated candidates been permitted to advance to the all-member ballot (as in the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats), and not only the top two, Johnson might feasibly have remained in the contest in the hope of overhauling Gove and Leadsom.

Had Leadsom contested and won the all-member ballot, the election would have reflected the 'law of curvilinear disparity', whereby activists are assumed to be more ideologically 'radical' than MPs (May, 1973). Disagreement between MPs and members is a perennial danger of membership ballots (Quinn, 2016). In Labour's case, with the election of Corbyn, it led to questions over the leader's authority among his MPs (Dorey and Denham, 2016; Quinn, forthcoming). Leadsom's withdrawal ensured that the Conservatives avoided a similar scenario, which would have been even more serious given that the party was in government.

Stark modified

The importance of competence in the 2016 Conservative contest was self-explanatory given that the leadership transition occurred in government. That raises the question of whether Stark's framework requires modification for governing parties. Stark assumed that competence was third in the hierarchy of selection criteria after acceptability and electability. Competence follows electability because parties must win elections before they can govern. However, a governing party is, by definition, already in office. The Conservatives in 2016 had up to four years before facing the voters. Competence may therefore be a more pressing criterion than electability for governing parties.

Looking at newly-elected post-war leaders in the two main parties offers support for this hypothesis. Figure 1 shows the combined past cabinet and shadow-cabinet experience of 21 new Conservative and Labour leaders under a range of different selection systems. Fourteen were first selected as opposition leaders and seven as prime ministers. The five most experienced politicians on becoming leader were all chosen by governing parties and thus became prime minister immediately. Ten of the 11 least-experienced new leaders were chosen in opposition (Major being the exception). The average combined cabinet and shadow-cabinet service of the prime ministers was 180 months, compared with the opposition leaders' 75 months.

[FIGURE 1]

The contrast is even starker when only cabinet experience is considered. Figure 2 compares months spent in the cabinet prior to becoming party leader of those first elected as prime ministers (top seven cases) and opposition leaders (bottom 14 cases). Time spent heading the three great offices of state – the treasury, the foreign office and the home office – is indicative of seniority and is shown by the black bars, with time in other posts shown in grey. The prime ministers are much more experienced, unsurprisingly as they were already in government, but the difference is considerable. On average, the prime ministers had already served 96 months in government, 70 of which were in the great offices, indicating experience and seniority. All seven prime ministers came to the post directly from a great office, with five having recently been foreign secretary (Table 6). Opposition leaders had served 26 months in government on average, with four months in the great offices. Five had no previous cabinet experience at all. Even these averages are inflated by Michael Howard, a senior figure chosen by the Conservatives as a stop-gap leader during a crisis in 2003 (Heppell, 2008, pp. 155-170). The seven prime ministers also had more frontline *opposition* experience, having previously served in the shadow cabinet for 85 months on average, compared with the opposition leaders' 48 months.

[FIGURE 2 AND TABLES 6 AND 7]

The relationship between new leaders and 'great office' jobs is much weaker for those who came to the leadership in opposition than those who did so in government (Table 7). Of the 14 new opposition leaders, only six were previously shadowing a 'great office'. Seven held more junior shadow-cabinet positions, although some had done so after leaving government a few months earlier, while Corbyn had never held any frontbench post. Shadowing a 'great office' is not the same measure of competence that a governmental post in one of these offices is because it does not

come with the pressure of taking vital decisions. It suggests that the fact that all new leaders in government came straight to the job from a 'great office' *was* a competence evaluation and not merely a function of being in government at the time.[2]

As with experience, a similar relationship is evident with age. The average age of leaders chosen in opposition is 49 while that of the prime ministers is 58. Eleven of the 12 youngest new leaders were selected in opposition (Major being the exception). Three new opposition leaders were over 60, but each was exceptional. One was Howard and the other two, Foot and Corbyn, were left-wing selections amid Labour splits. Otherwise, the trend towards younger leaders is a phenomenon of opposition, when parties refresh themselves and present new faces to voters.

Selection criteria and seven prime ministers

Competence and experience are important considerations in the selection of new governmental leaders. Among the seven leaders who took over in office, acceptability was the priority in divided parties, but competence usually trumped electability as the second criterion. Being a competent prime minister is also a prerequisite for future electability, reversing the relationship in opposition.

Two leaders, Anthony Eden and Gordon Brown, assumed the premiership as heirs apparent without serious competition. In 1955, Eden was chosen in the system known as 'the magic circle', based on confidential consultations between Tory power-brokers and parliamentarians, from which a leader 'emerged' (Punnett, 1992). He had served as foreign secretary on three occasions and had been considered Churchill's successor since the war (Bale, 2012, p. 51). Brown was unopposed in Labour's electoral college in 2007. He had been chancellor in the Blair government for a decade and was the heir apparent throughout (Seldon, 2008). The successions of Eden and Brown were made possible by their long records of distinguished service at the top of government. There appeared little real consideration of whether more electable candidates were available, although there had been

speculation about a cabinet-level challenge to Brown. Competence and experience were more crucial factors in their successions. In neither case was there serious opposition to their elevations because their respective parties were not deeply split, other than the Blair-Brown tensions in the Labour Party (Allen, 2011).

The accessions of Harold Macmillan and Alec Douglas-Home, both through the 'magic circle', can be understood in terms of acceptability, with competence also important. With Eden's resignation following the Suez crisis, Macmillan, was an obvious replacement, although he faced a strong rival in Rab Butler. Macmillan was chancellor while Butler previously held that role and was now Eden's unofficial deputy. Although there was some surprise at the choice of Macmilllan, the criterion of acceptability appeared crucial. While Butler had numerous backbench enemies, Macmillan had few. Most of the cabinet also supported Macmillan (Ramsden, 1998, p. 329; Bale, 2012, pp. 52-53).

A host of candidates hoped to succeed Macmillan in turn in 1963. Reginald Maudling, the chancellor, was initially considered before falling away (Bale, 2012, p. 54). That left Butler, who was now first secretary of state, and Lord Hailsham (Quentin Hogg), leader of the House of Lords. However, both appeared unacceptable to the other's supporters (Ramsden, 1998, pp. 377-380). The foreign secretary, the Earl of Home, was persuaded by Tory power-brokers to put his name forward as someone acceptable to the whole party. Having agreed to renounce his title so as to sit in the House of Commons, Alec Douglas-Home became Conservative leader and prime minister. He was not the strongest candidate on electability (Hailsham was) and narrowly lost the 1964 general election (Stark, 1996, pp. 126-127). But he had served eight years in the cabinet, including three as foreign secretary. His experience and seniority underlined his credibility.

When Harold Wilson resigned as prime minister in 1976, Labour was divided along left-right lines, but the right was stronger in the parliamentary party, which formed the selectorate. Callaghan

became the principal candidate of the right, after a poor showing in the first ballot by Roy Jenkins, with his main rival now the left-winger, Michael Foot. Callaghan was strongest on all three criteria (Stark, 1996, pp. 127-128). He was a moderate acceptable to most Labour MPs and was also close to the trade unions. He was more electable than Foot and had enormous governmental experience, serving in all three great offices. At a time when Britain was facing severe economic and industrial problems, the experienced Callaghan was an obvious choice.

John Major also triumphed because of his strength on all three criteria. By 1990, the Conservatives elected their leaders in parliamentary ballots (Punnett, 1992). After Thatcher resigned following her underwhelming first-ballot showing against Michael Heseltine, Major, along with the foreign secretary, Douglas Hurd, joined the contest (Heppell, 2008). Heseltine's advantage had been his electability at a time when Thatcher was deeply unpopular, but he was implacably opposed by her backbench supporters (Cowley and Garry, 1998). Major was more acceptable and won most of Thatcher's first-ballot supporters, leaving Hurd trailing. Opinion polls also showed Major rivalling Heseltine for electability (Stark, 1996, p. 130). Major trumped Heseltine on competence, having served in two great offices of state, albeit briefly. Heseltine's most prestigious department was defence and he had been out of the cabinet for four years. Major ultimately won because of his acceptability but his strength on electability and competence reinforced his position.

Finally, as shown earlier, May's victory was secured by her strength on acceptability. Osborne and Gove were too divisive, while Johnson was damaged. The lower-profile Leadsom was perhaps less divisive, but her inexperience was a crucial weakness with the impending Brexit negotiations. It was on competence, not electability, that May crushed Leadsom.

On the basis of these seven cases, competence at least rivals and sometimes supersedes electability in government. The necessity of governing immediately appears the principal reason. Electability

was a consideration in the victories of Callaghan and Major. In the latter case, the Conservatives trailed Labour badly in the polls and a general election was no more than 18 months away. Electoral difficulties for the governing party can make electability an immediate priority, otherwise competence takes precedence.

Rather than dismissing the importance of electability, however, it is more likely that there is a different relationship between competence and electability for governing parties than there is for opposition parties. The two concepts are certainly distinct: a candidate could be competent and seen as a 'safe pair of hands', without possessing any great electoral appeal. Ironically, that would be the charge that was *later* directed at May, during the 2017 general-election campaign. It is also possible for a candidate to enjoy some, perhaps superficial, electoral appeal while having little governmental experience. But more commonly, governing parties will believe their future electoral prospects depend substantially on delivering successful policy outcomes in office in the here-and-now. It is likely that considerations of competence and electability are therefore more inter-related in the selection of leaders in government than for those chosen in opposition. One might argue that electability thus reclaims its place as the second priority in selection, if present-day competence is seen to serve future electability. However, that move seems an unnecessarily dogmatic attempt to salvage the original Stark rank-ordering. On the contrary, this point draws our attention to the importance of competence in a governing context and how it assumes greater prominence in selectors' minds simply because of its immediacy and its longer-term impact on electability.[3]

Conclusion

The Conservative leadership contest of 2016 suggested some modification is required of Stark's framework. Competence as a prime minister is a more immediately pressing criterion when a party is already in government and may take precedence over – or even be a prerequisite for – electability. Leaders chosen in government are generally older, more experienced and more senior, presumably

leaving them better prepared for the difficulties of governing. On the other hand, the three most experienced new leaders, Callaghan, Brown and Eden, all endured short and difficult tenures as prime minister. New leaders taking over mid-term in government often face difficult in-trays and might not receive much latitude from voters. These three experienced leaders offer inauspicious precedents for May, who is fourth on the list and quickly faced holding together a fractious party.

It may reasonably be asked whether governing parties are wise to downgrade the importance of electability in leadership selection. Less than a year after taking over, May called an early general election, which she was expected to win handsomely but she ended up losing her government's majority. May proved to be a poor campaigner, something that might have become evident had she been forced to contest the all-member ballot with Leadsom. There is something to be said for leadership campaigns road-testing candidates, as Corbyn was in 2015 and 2016.

Leaders chosen in opposition are usually less experienced. The task confronting opposition leaders is different to that facing prime ministers. They often come to power needing to unite divided parties after election defeats. A new opposition leader must make the party appear relevant and show it has changed if it is to improve its electoral performance. Electability and change go hand-in-hand (Harmel and Janda, 1994). New leaders seek to embody that change and can achieve it more successfully if they were not leading figures under the old regime. Hence, electability supersedes experience. If leaders are chosen soon after their party has suffered electoral defeat, they typically gain a few years' experience in the role, honing their leadership skills before entering government after a future election victory. New leaders chosen in government, by contrast, are invariably central figures under the old regime and may struggle to convince as agents of change. If they are to prove their electability, it will more likely be through careful statesmanship than the promise of change.

Notes

1. I thank an anonymous referee for this point.

2. I thank an anonymous referee for this point.

3. I thank an anonymous referee for this point.

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Table 1 Polling of Conservative members on leadership preferences (%)

	February			June			July		
	All	Leave (61%)	Remain (28%)	All	Leave (63%)	Remain (36%)	All	Leave (66%)	Remain (34%)
Johnson	38	41	33	29	41	8	-	-	-
May	21	24	20	44	33	65	54	40	80
Osborne	20	15	30	5	2	9	-	-	-
Javid	11	11	10	-	-	-	-	-	-
Morgan	1	1	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fox	-	-	-	5	7	1	5	7	1
Leadsom	-	-	-	4	6	1	20	30	2
Crabb	-	-	-	3	2	4	5	4	8
Gove	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	13	2
Head-to-head									
Johnson	55	62	44						
Osborne	36	29	53						
Johnson				38	56	8			
May				55	38	84			
May							72	60	94
Gove							21	31	2
May							63	49	92
Leadsom							31	45	4

Sources: YouGov (2016a, 2016c, 2016d).

Notes: Weighted samples of Conservative Party members (February N = 1,005; June N = 1,001; July N = 994). All figures %. 'Don't knows' and 'would not votes' excluded from candidate preferences. 'Don't knows' (11%) excluded from EU vote preferences for February.

Q1. Thinking about all the candidates standing in the Conservative leadership election, who would be your first choice as the next Conservative leader and Prime Minister?

Q2. If the final two candidates are [candidate A] and [candidate B], who will you vote for?

Table 2 Conservative leadership election: parliamentary ballots

| | First ballot | | Second ballot | |
	MPs	%	MPs	%
May	165	50.2	199	60.5
Leadsom	66	20.1	84	25.5
Gove	48	14.6	46	14.0
Crabb	34	10.3	-	-
Fox	16	4.9	-	-

Notes: Crabb withdrew voluntarily after first ballot. One MP did not vote.

Table 3 Members' perceptions of most important selection criteria (%)

	February	June	July	Δ Feb-Jul
Make the most competent PM	69	64	74	+5
Best chance to win in 2020	52	44	36	-16
Able to unite party	46	64	65	+19
Having good policy ideas	45	33	41	-4
Continue direction/policies of Cameron	19	23	19	0
Campaigned to leave EU	19	30	30	+11
Change of direction/policies from Cameron	5	4	5	0
Campaigned to remain in EU	4	4	4	0

Sources: YouGov (2016a, 2016c, 2016d).

Notes: Weighted samples of Conservative Party members (February N = 1,005; June N = 1,001; July N = 994). All figures %. 'Don't knows' and 'something else' excluded from criteria.

Q. Which two or three of the following criteria do you think are most important in deciding who should be the next leader of the Conservative party?

Table 4 Members' perceptions of leadership candidates on selection criteria (%)

	February			June				July		
Candidate who would be/would best	BJ	TM	GO	BJ	TM	GO	AL	TM	AL	MG
Strongest leader	30	29	26	29	44	5	4	63	14	8
Understand how to win elections	49	8	28	48	21	10	3	51	12	13
Best media performer	73	6	8	62	13	3	7	36	24	9
Understand economy	10	4	70	9	10	54	12	36	32	11
Unite Tory Party	42	17	15	16	46	3	9	61	17	3
In touch with ordinary people	36	14	6	26	18	2	9	29	17	7
Reflect your views	32	21	23	24	28	9	10	42	20	14
Take tough decisions	22	34	31	18	46	12	5	58	15	15
Most intelligent	40	12	25	37	22	13	6	34	14	32
Most able to handle crisis	21	33	28	18	49	9	5	64	12	8
To negotiate Brexit	-	-	-	22	32	8	11	44	25	16

Sources: YouGov (2016a, 2016c, 2016d).

Notes: Weighted samples of Conservative Party members (February N = 1,005; June N = 1,001; July N = 994). All figures %. 'Don't knows', 'none' and minor candidates excluded from candidate preferences. BJ = Johnson; TM = May; GO = Osborne; AL = Leadsom; MG = Gove.

Q. Thinking about some of the potential candidates to be the next leader of the Conservative party, who do you think... [respondents selected one name from those available]

Table 5 Net positive opinions of potential leadership candidates among Conservative members (%)

	5-20 Feb	23-26 Feb	27-29 June	1-4 July	Δ Feb-Jul
Johnson	+77	+62	+28	+17	-60
May	+65	+57	+59	+63	-2
Osborne	+56	+54	+13	-1	-57
Gove	+60	+56	+41	-20	-80
Leadsom	n/a	n/a	n/a	+34	n/a

Sources: YouGov (2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d).

Notes: Weighted samples of Conservative Party members (5-20 February N = 1,005; 23-26 February N = 1,005; June N = 1,001; July N = 994).

Q. Generally speaking, do you have a positive or negative opinion of the following people? (Net positive = % saying very/fairly positive minus % saying very/fairly negative. Neutral responses and 'don't knows' excluded.)

Table 6 Previous jobs of new leaders selected by governing parties

PM	Previous job in Govt	Tenure (months)	Next previous job	Tenure (months)
Eden (1955)	Foreign secretary	42	Shadow foreign secretary*	75
Macmillan (1957)	Chancellor	13	Foreign secretary	8
Douglas-Home (1963)	Foreign secretary	39	Leader of the House of Lords	40
Callaghan (1976)	Foreign secretary	25	Shadow foreign secretary	23
Major (1990)	Chancellor	13	Foreign secretary	3
Brown (2007)	Chancellor	121	Shadow chancellor	58
May (2016)	Home secretary	74	Shadow work & pensions secretary	16

Sources: Butler and Butler (2011); BBC website (*passim*).

* Eden was a member of the Conservatives' consultative committee in opposition and spoke on foreign affairs. The role of the shadow cabinet was not formalised until the 1960s.

Table 7 Previous jobs of new leaders selected by opposition parties

PM	Previous frontbench job	Tenure (months)	Next previous frontbench job	Tenure (months)
Gaitskell (1955)	Shadow chancellor	50	Chancellor (Govt)	12
Wilson (1963)	Shadow foreign secretary	15	Shadow chancellor	71
Heath (1965)	Shadow chancellor	9	President of the Board of Trade (Govt)	12
Thatcher (1975)	Shadow environment secretary	11	Education secretary (Govt)	45
Foot (1980)	Shadow leader of the House of Commons*	18	Leader of the House of Commons (Govt)*	37
Kinnock (1983)	Shadow education secretary	51	None	0
Smith (1992)	Shadow chancellor	60	Shadow trade & industry secretary	33
Blair (1994)	Shadow home secretary	24	Shadow employment secretary	32
Hague (1997)	Shadow Welsh secretary	1	Welsh secretary (Govt)	22
Duncan Smith (2001)	Shadow defence secretary	3	Shadow social security secretary	24
Howard (2003)	Shadow chancellor	22	None†	21
Cameron (2005)	Shadow education secretary	7	Party policy review coordinator (shadow cabinet post)	14
Miliband (2010)	Shadow energy & climate change secretary	4	Energy & climate change secretary (Govt)	19
Corbyn (2015)	None	0	None	0

Sources: Butler and Butler (2011); BBC website (*passim*); print and online biographies.

* Foot concurrently held the post of deputy leader of the Labour Party. † Career hiatus – Howard had previously been shadow foreign secretary for 24 months.
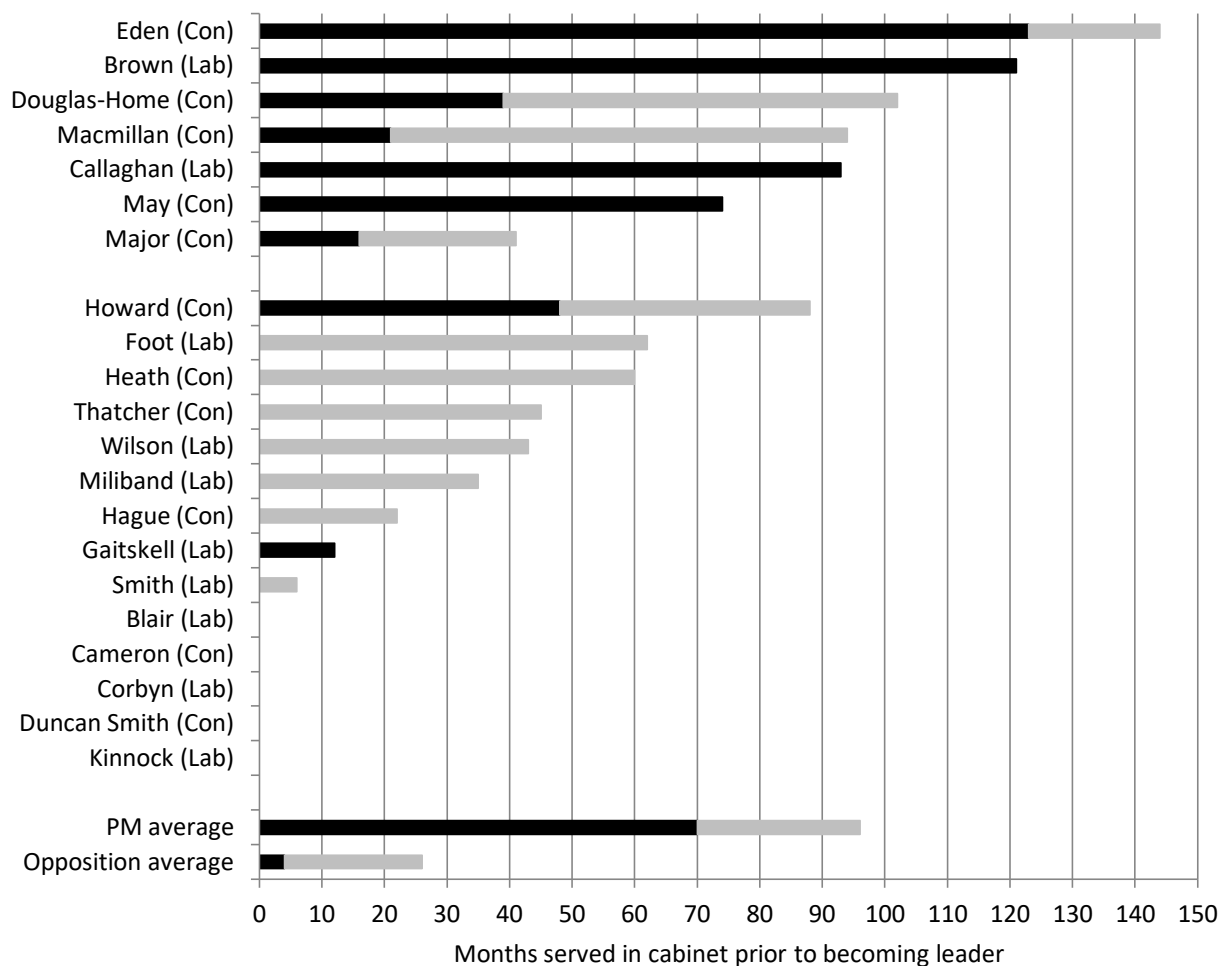
Figure 1 Cabinet and shadow cabinet experience of new Conservative and Labour leaders
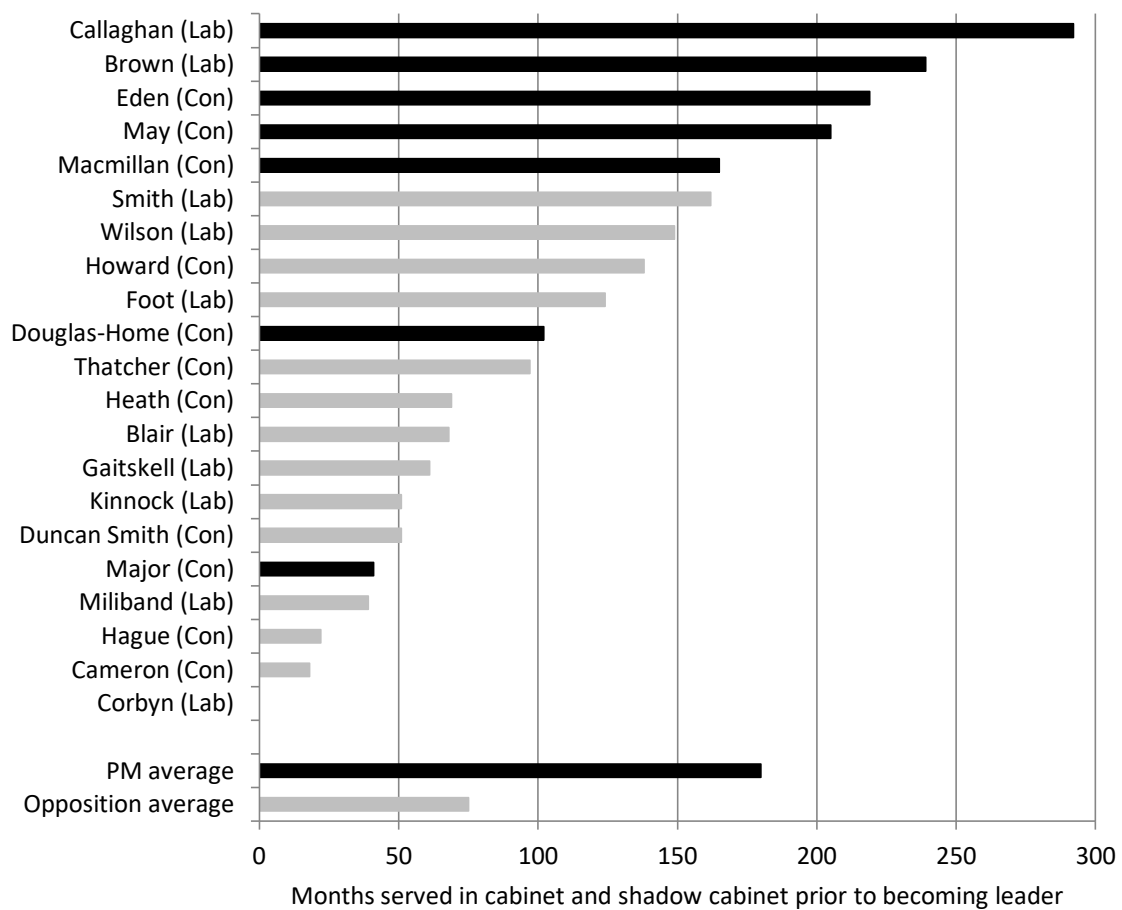
Sources: Butler and Butler (2011); BBC website (*passim*). See online supplementary materials for further details.

Black = prime ministers; grey = opposition leaders.

Figure 2 Cabinet experience of new Conservative and Labour leaders

Sources: Butler and Butler (2011); BBC website (*passim*). See online supplementary materials for

further details.

Black = great offices of state; grey = other cabinet positions.

Appendix: Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet Experience (Months) of Incoming Conservative and Labour Leaders, 1955-2016

	Age	Cabinet posts	Shadow cabinet	Months of Experience			
				Cabinet	Great offices of state	Shadow cabinet	Total: Cab + Shad Cab
Governing parties							
A. Eden (CON: Apr 1955, magic circle)	57	Min w/out Portfolio Jun-Dec 35 Foreign Dec 35-Feb 38, Dec 40-Jul 45, Oct 51-Apr 55 Dominion Sep 39-May 40 War May-Dec 40	CC[1]: Jul 45-Oct 51	144	123	75	219
H. Macmillan (CON: Jan 1957, magic circle)	62	Resident NW Africa Dec 42-May 45 Air May-Jul 45 Housing Oct 51-Oct 54 Defence Oct 54-Apr 55 Foreign Apr-Dec 55 Chancellor Dec 55-Jan 57	CC[1]: Nov 45-Oct 51	94	21	71	165
A. Douglas-Home (CON: Oct 1963, magic circle)	60	Commonwealth Apr 55-Jul 60 Leader HoL Mar-Sep 57, Oct 59-Jul 60 Foreign Jul 60-Oct 63	-	102	39	0	102
J. Callaghan (LAB: Mar-Apr 1976, MP ballot)	64	Chancellor Oct 64-Nov 67 Home Nov 67-Jun 70 Foreign Mar 74-Apr 76	PC: Nov 51-Oct 64; Jul 70-Mar 74	93	93	199	292
J. Major (CON: Nov 1990, MP ballot)	47	Chief sec Jun 87-Jul 89 Foreign Jul 89-Oct 89 Chancellor Oct 89-Nov 90	-	41	16	0	41
G. Brown (LAB: Jun 2007, electoral college)	56	Chancellor May 97-Jun 07	PC: Jul 87-May 97	121	121	118	239
T. May (CON: Jul 2016, MP-member ballots)	59	Home May 10-Jul 16	CC: Jun 99-May 10	74	74	131	205

Opposition parties							
H. Gaitskell (LAB: Dec 1955, MP ballot)	49	Chancellor Oct 50-Oct 51	PC: Nov 51-Dec 55	12	12	49	61
H. Wilson (LAB: Feb 1963, MP ballot)	46	Trade Sep 47-Apr 51	PC: Apr 54-Feb 63	43	0	106	149
E. Heath (CON: Jul 1965, MP ballot)	49	Nat S/Labour Oct 59-Jul 60 Lord Privy Seal Jul 60-Oct 63 Trade Oct 63-Oct 64	CC[1]: Oct 64-Jul 65	60	0	9	69
M. Thatcher (CON: Feb 1975, MP ballot)	49	Education Jun 70-Mar 74	CC: Jan 67-Jun 70; Mar 74-Feb 75	45	0	52	97
M. Foot (LAB: Nov 1980, MP ballot)	67	Employment Mar-74-Apr 76 Leader HoC Apr 76-May 79	PC: Jul 70-Mar 74 DL: May 79-Nov 80	62	0	62	124
N. Kinnock (LAB: Oct 1983, electoral college)	41	-	PC: Jul 79-Oct 83	0	0	51	51
J. Smith (LAB: Jul 1992, electoral college)	53	Trade Nov 78-May 79	PC: Jul 79-Jul 92	6	0	156	162
T. Blair (LAB: Jul 1994, electoral college)	41	-	PC[2]: Nov 88-Jul 94	0	0	68	68
W. Hague (CON: Jun 1997, MP ballot)	36	Wales Jul 95-May 97	-	22	0	0	22
I. Duncan Smith (CON: Jul-Sep 2001, MP-member ballots)	47	-	CC: Jun 97-Sep 01	0	0	51	51
M. Howard (CON: Nov 2003, MP-member ballots)	62	Employment Jan 90-Apr 92 Environment Apr 92-May 93 Home May 93-May 97	CC: Jun 97-Jun 99; Sep 01-Nov 03	88	48	50	138
D. Cameron (CON: Oct-Dec 2005, MP-member ballots)	39	-	CC: Jun 04-Dec 05	0	0	18	18
E. Miliband (LAB: Sep 2010, electoral college)	40	Ch Duchy Lan Jun 07-Oct 08 Energy & climate Oct 08-May 10	Interim: May-Sep 10	35	0	4	39
J. Corbyn (LAB: Sep 2015, all-member ballot)	66	-	-	0	0	0	0

Sources: Butler and Butler (2011); BBC website (*passim*).

Notes:

End dates for the most recent cabinet or shadow-cabinet service normally indicate the date of the candidate's participation in the relevant leadership election.

During 1940-1945, the UK was governed by a war cabinet, whose membership was more restricted than normal peace-time cabinets. Eden (war, May-Dec 40) and Macmillan (Resident NW Africa, Dec 42-May 45) are credited with cabinet jobs even though these were not in the war cabinet during those periods. They involved running a department or ministry that did come with a cabinet post before and after the war, or a major overseas posting.

Shadow cabinet: CC = Consultative committee (Conservatives); PC = Parliamentary committee (Labour); DL = Deputy leader (Labour); interim = interim shadow cabinet appointed by Labour's interim leader, Harriet Harman, in 2010.

1. Membership of the Conservative leader's Consultative Committee, based on Butler and Butler (2011, p. 157). It is assumed that Eden's membership began with the end of the transitional government in July 1945 and continued up to entry into government in October 1951. Macmillan's membership is assumed to have begun in November 1945 after his return to parliament in a by-election. Heath is assumed to have served from October 1964 to July 1965.

2. Blair was not recorded as having entered the shadow cabinet in 1988 by Butler and Butler (2011) but various online and published sources indicate that he did. These latter records are accepted.