Leftism defeated: party organisation and social democratic erosion

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Over the last decade, Social Democratic parties across Europe have suffered significant decline in terms of vote and seat shares. This trend is commonly explained through increased party competition, the increased salience of non-economic issue dimensions and the diversification of voter preferences. These explanations treat the causes of party decline as entirely exogenous, the implication is that however these parties respond to structural and ideational problems, they are hapless bystanders to the rapid changes in society and the concomitant political effects. In this paper, I question this assumption by adopting an organisational framework to identify why Social Democratic parties have proved relatively unresponsive to the causes of their decline. Specifically, I question why these parties have retained cartel organisational structures, when the rise of anti-system politics demands that these parties transition to a new form of organisation. I develop an organisational power hypothesis, that identifies path dependent constraints in the original process of cartelisation, that through changes to the function of the party on the ground has made it significantly more difficult for Social Democratic parties to change structures. I test this theory by comparing it to a Party Re-alignment theory, which is rooted in a behaviouralist understanding of party change. I engage in case case analysis of the British Labour party in the period 2015-2020. I analyse evidence from 28 interviews with party elites, along with internal reports, media accounts and secondary sources. I trace the process by which attempts at organisational change failed. I show that under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, party elites made attempts to transform the party's approach especially on economic policy. However, these attempts were constrained because they failed to build internal coalitions that were sufficient to supplant the embedded dominant coalition. This paper has implications for our understanding changes in the electoral position of contemporary Social Democratic parties in Europe.

27/04/2022

Introduction

Social Democracy is in a state of crisis. The 2010s was the worst decade for Social Democratic parties since at least the 1930s, as they suffered record lows in terms of vote share, seat share and total share of the electorate (Benedetto et al., 2020). This is often explained through structural factors, with emphasis placed on the way in which processes like de-industrialisation, globalisation and the expansion of education have reduced the size of the industrial working class as an electoral base and encouraged substantial preference shifts amongst different groups of voters (Gingrich & Häusermann, 2015; Kitschelt, 1994; Oesch, 2006). Structural change is also said to have opened up space for challenger parties to re-align the dimensional structure of party systems in ways that reduce the space available for Social Democratic parties (Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Oesch & Rennwald, 2018; Rovny & Polk, 2019; De Vries & Hobolt, 2020). An alternative series of explanations focuses on the financial crisis and demonstrates that Social Democratic parties almost uniformly supported austerity policies (Bremer, 2018), despite the unpopularity of these measures (Hopkin & Blyth, 2018; Horn, 2021).

What emerges from these explanations of Social Democratic decline is an intrinsic assumption that the problems that confront these parties are exogenous; that Social Democratic parties are largely hapless to prevent the deleterious effects of de-industrialisation or the financial crisis. This is curious because a number of analyses have prescribed that Social Democratic parties make programmatic or strategic shifts to better respond to the external sources of their decline (Abou-Chadi & Wagner, 2019, 2020; Kitschelt, 1994; Schwander, 2019; Spoon & Klüver, 2019, 2020). Yet few studies have questioned why these parties have largely failed to implement these proposed shifts. Likewise, the clear unpopularity of Social Democratic support for austerity has been demonstrated (Hernández & Kriesi, 2016; Horn, 2021), in particular the negative effects of these measures on the wage-earners that comprise the majority of Social Democratic voters (Hopkin & Blyth, 2018), and yet there has been less focus on why these parties supported, and often continue to support, fiscal retrenchment (cf. Bremer & McDaniel, 2019). The puzzle of why

Social Democratic parties failed to change, despite clear pressures to do so, is in need of more direct analysis.

I argue that this puzzle is best addressed through an organisational conceptual framework. Parties are not unitary actors; it is not the parties that decide to update their programs, shift strategy or support austerity, but rather specific actors inside parties that make these decisions (Ziblatt, 2017). To this end, an organisational approach understands a party's program and electoral strategy to be linked to an underpinning ideology, which itself is tied to the way in which historically specific actors co-ordinate their interests across party institutions (Mudge, 2018; Panebianco, 1988). Thus analytical emphasis is placed on the types of actors that hold influence inside a party at a given point in time, how their interests are constructed, and the institutional configurations that structure power relations (Harmel & Tan, 2003; Panebianco, 1988; Schumacher et al., 2013; Strøm, 1990). As such, different organisational models – mass, catch-all, cartel – reflect different institutional dynamics through which various actors' interests are co-ordinated to provide the party with specific ideological and material resources through which it connects with the outside world. The transition between organisational models occurs as structural shifts and critical junctures in society – from wars and economic depressions to technological advancements – force parties to acquire new resources to engage with the electorate, which can only be provided by new types of actors (Mudge, 2018).

Under this organisational framework, the puzzle of contemporary Social Democratic decline can be approach through the prism of the cartel party. Social Democratic parties cartelised in the last decades of the twentieth century, as they increased their reliance on the state for financing and policy delegation in order to overcome problems that stemmed from the increased costs of providing public goods and running large-scale broadcast campaigns (Blyth & Katz, 2005; Katz & Mair, 1995, 2009). Social Democratic parties were not the only type of party to make this organisational transition, and cartel party systems emerged when a group of parties co-ordinated to share the spoils of the state and lock out challengers (Katz & Mair, 1995, 2009). Practically

speaking, this party-level co-ordination required Social Democratic parties to moderate their ideologies, which occurred through the adoption of the Third Way. Internally, the construction of a cartel organisation was contingent on the dominance of electoral professional actors from the party on the ground as these party actors were closest to the state, which often occurred at the expense of the influence of trade union leaders and party activists (Katz & Mair, 2002; Panebianco, 1988).

Cartelisation helped Social Democratic parties overcome specific problems that they faced from the 1980s, however it has proved vastly ineffective in providing these parties with the resources that they need to face the interpretive and electoral problems that were accentuated by the financial crises of the late 2000s (Hopkin & Blyth, 2018). The anti-system politics that emerged from these crises and was articulated by various types of challenger parties should be interpreted as a demand that parties do something to alleviate the economic insecurity felt by an increasing proportion of national electorates (Hopkin, 2020; Hopkin & Blyth, 2018). This is an external environment that the party organisations literature predicts would pressure a party to change, as the combination of loss of vote share, increased party competition and a deep recession that tears a whole in the underpinning Third Way ideology would prompt a party to seek new ideological and material resources to engage its electorate (Harmel & Janda, 1994). However, Social Democratic support for austerity is tied to a cartel organisational structure that encourages policy delegation and de-politicisation, rather than an active party government that would develop new policies to shield voters from the worst effects of the crisis (Hopkin, 2015; Mair, 2009). Indeed, despite the rise of anti-system politics, Social Democratic parties have maintained cartel party organisations as they struggle to diversify their sources of financing (Biezen & Kopecký, 2017); their connections to civil society and social groups remain weak (Allern & Verge, 2017); and they remain oriented around the party in public office, and particularly the office of the leader (Bardi et al., 2017).

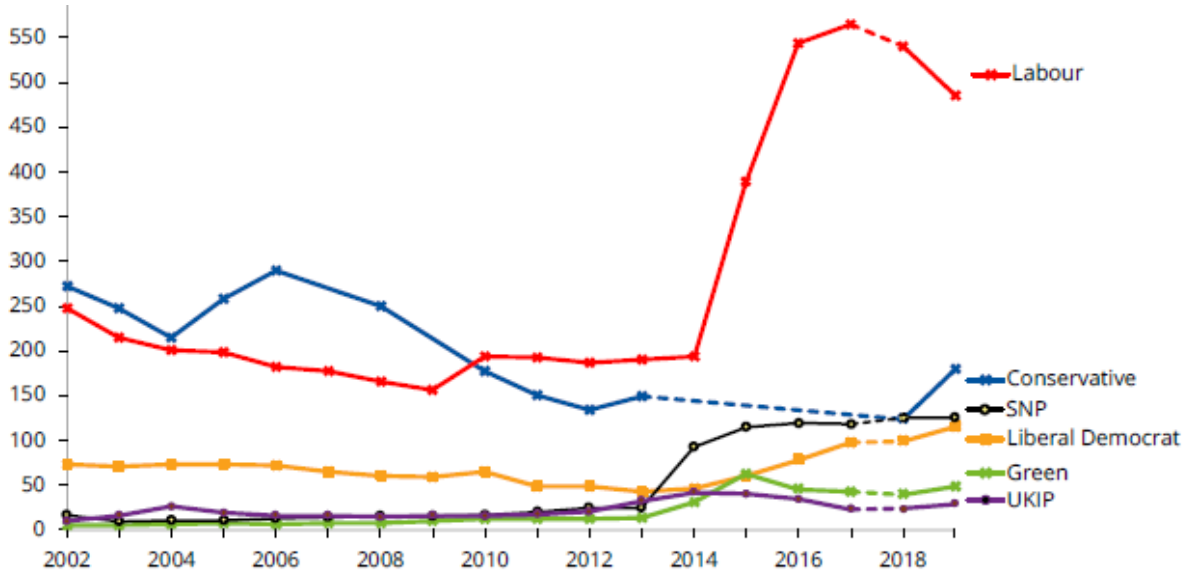
In this paper, I question why Social Democratic parties would maintain a cartel organisational structure in the face of re-alignment to anti-system politics and in doing so seek to demonstrate the utility of an organisational approach to the question of Social Democratic decline. I develop an *Organisational Power theory*, which draws on the previously discussed ideas that party change is contingent on elite replacement. However, this theory identifies in-built constraints in the cartel structure that prevent new types of actors from emerging and solidifying control across party institutions. It predicts that these constraints will produce an organisational stasis that prevents Social Democratic parties from transitioning away from the cartel organisational structure, which is a necessary condition for it to respond to the emerging anti-system politics. I test this theory against a more behaviouralist *Party Re-alignment theory*, which is premised on a rejection of the idea that the cartel organisational structure precludes Social Democratic parties from re-aligning to changes in voter preferences. This theory argues that anti-system politics is a temporary rupture, and that the cartel structure provides an effective decision-making and resource structure to respond to the personalisation that has personified the alignment towards anti-system politics.

I test these theories through case analysis of the one Social Democratic party that has made the most concerted attempt to move away from a cartel model of party organisation – the British Labour party under Jeremy Corbyn. While the impact of the financial crisis in the UK had not immediately led to the rise of anti-system forces, Corbyn himself, alongside the increase of UKIP and the SNP demonstrated the multifaceted way that the austerity response was forcing a re-alignment (Hopkin, 2017). This came to a head a year into Corbyn's tenure, when the Brexit referendum signified the full extent of the re-alignment of British politics (Fetzer, 2019; Jennings & Stoker, 2016). As such, there were clear exogenous pressures for the Labour party, which had become an archetypal cartel party in the New Labour period (Mair, 2000; Russell, 2005), to change. At the same time, Corbyn's election as party leader brought some of these exogenous pressures inside the party. As Figure 1 shows, his rise was accompanied by a dramatic increase in the size of

the membership, the vast majority of whom joined in support of Corbyn's radicalism. Upon his election, Corbyn promised an ideological re-orientation away from the Third Way, which would be underpinned by a new organisational structure in which party members would have significant influence: 'it's about being open to the people we seek to represent; giving them a voice through our organisation and policy-making and drawing members into political action. Why not give… our grassroots members and supporters a real say?' (Jeremy Corbyn quoted in Wintour, 2015). This organisational transition did not just require an ideological shift away from the Third Way, but a strategic shift in the way in which the party engaged with social groups in the electorate. Rather than seeking to gain support through de-politicised persuasion articulated through valence appeals, Corbyn's Labour party promised the partisan mobilisation of supporters through a democratised party structure. However, despite short-lived success around the 2017 General Election, Corbyn failed to substantially reform the party organisation as the party retained an institutional structure that did not significantly depart from the New Labour cartel party (Bassett, 2020; Gerbaudo, 2021). Thus, while Corbyn did shift the party's approach on economic questions, the party's approach to Brexit – the dominant issue of the day – was largely derived from a Third Way strategic initiative of triangulation. By analysing the failed organisational transition of the Labour party, I can test the relative plausibility of the two theories.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section I outline each of the theories. I then explain the methodological choices made with regards to data collection and case selection. In the fourth section, I provide an overview of the case, which includes the collation of specific pieces of evidence into key moments or junctures in Labour's development under Corbyn. This section is followed by an analysis of how specific pieces of evidence were weighted and evaluated in relation to each of the theory. Finally, I conclude.

Figure 1: UK Party membership by party, 2002-2019 (in thousands)



Source: UK House of Commons Library

Theory

Why do mainstream parties retain cartel party structures despite external and internal pressures for change? In this section, I develop two theories that offer different explanations as to why contemporary Social Democratic parties would retain this organisational structure.

Party re-alignment

The first theory conceptualises party change as largely contingent on exogenous pressures. It argues that a party will only change its organisational structure if exogenous events lead party decision makers to conclude that the party must change in order to achieve its goals (Strøm, 1990). As Social Democratic parties have a long-history of electoral success, they are likely to be bureaucratic entities that are dominated by professionalised leaders (Michels, 2007), which means that they will pursue office-seeking goals (Schumacher et al., 2013). Thus, this theory holds that contemporary Social Democratic parties do not move away from the cartel structure because its leaders determine that this organisational model provides the optimal resources for the party to re-align to the demands of anti-system politics.

In part, the reason for this decision is driven by the perception that the increased voter disaffection and volatility synonymous with the rise of anti-system politics is a temporary feature (Dalton et al., 2011; Enyedi, 2014; Kitschelt & Rehm, 2015). The Party Re-alignment theory holds that anti-system politics is a reflection of a more complex structure of party competition than that in which previous party models, like the mass party, were effective. In these previous eras, party competition was structured by social cleavages aligned around a left-right issue dimension, whereas contemporary party competition is structured by multiple issue dimensions that intersect in ways that make it almost impossible for parties to organise the structure of competition (Kitschelt, 1994; Kitschelt & Rehm, 2015). As a result, voters are not necessarily motivated by single issues but instead form their preferences on the basis of instrumental reasoning, which means that parties rarely are elected with a specific policy mandate (Thomassen & van Ham, 2014). This is not to say that party competition is not influenced by highly divisive and contentious issues, but the way in which these issues are mediated by parties and inform voters' preferences is personalised (Rahat & Kenig, 2018). This occurs both in the way in which voters form personal narratives to instrumentalise their preferences, through the media's focus on the individual traits of leaders, and the promotion by parties of a polished and charismatic leader as the symbol of the party's values (Ferreira da Silva et al., 2021; Karvonen, 2010). As such, anti-system politics is no longer structured by distinct cleavages, but instead a technopopulism, where individual politicians make their pitches on the basis of both technocratic competence to improve voters' lives, and a populist pitch of charismatic representation (Bickerton & Accetti, 2021).

It is clear that the re-alignment away from cleavage competition has produced particularly acute difficulties for Social Democratic parties. Due to de-industrialisation, they can no longer rely on the industrial working class to provide significant electoral support (Gingrich & Häusermann, 2015; Kitschelt, 1994). At the same time, as the rise of challenger parties has had a re-aligning effect on party competition (De Vries & Hobolt, 2020), Social Democratic parties face competition from the populist right, the mainstream right, Green parties, and the populist left for different

elements of their potential support base (Gidron, 2022; Oesch & Rennwald, 2018). Indeed, it is possible that the anti-system period, which as mentioned is seen as a short term aberration, will see the effective number of parties in a party system change, as challenger parties increase in influence and gain experience in government (McDonnell & Newell, 2011).

Thus, as leaders of mainstream parties that have a pre-existing cartel structure, Social Democratic leaders determine that this remains the optimal organisational model to ensure that their party remains electorally relevant. As parties of the mainstream, their pathway to survival and office is to construct a coalition of voters that support the political establishment while adding support from, typically younger graduates who may lack the economic security to have their interests represented by the party but oppose the authoritarianism of the more prominent anti-system challengers. Social Democratic parties' well resourced, professionalised bureaucracy is equipped to collate and analyse vast amounts of data, through which it can identify and target the specific groups that fall into such an electoral coalition. This bureaucracy has significant policy making experience, which means that the party can perform credibility and competence in ways that speak to its increasingly middle-class voter base. This bureaucracy values the input of PR experts as much as policy exports, which provides the means to sell leaders on the personality. Finally, the centralised decision-making structure, in which power is concentrated in the hands of the leader, provides the requisite flexibility to coherently shift positions and to adopt new strategies in response to the emergent issues in a re-aligning politics.

The party re-alignment theory therefore provides an explanation that can be summarised: the exogenous pressures for party change associated with the rise of anti-system politics create new technopopulist demands for representation. The party leader, regardless of whether they are an incumbent or newly appointed, will be motivated by office-seeking goals and hold a dominant position in their party as it is already a cartel party. The leader will determine that this organisational structure provides an effective allocation of resources to re-align the party to the new structure of competition.

Organisational Power

Organisational Power is a synthesis of Panebianco's (1988) concept of the dominant coalition and Mudge's (2018) emphasises on the historically specific nature of actor interests. The theory holds that organisational change is contingent on a restructuring of the internal power dynamics, through an increase in influence of new types of actors inside the party whose distinct interests are reflected in a shift in function of party institutions. Thus, this theory acknowledges the relevance of exogenous pressures that are associated with anti-system politics, however it argues that these only have an impact when they influence the process of internal restructuring. Moreover, it holds that the initial process of cartelisation has produced path dependent constraints that limit the extent to which new types of actors can emerge and sustain influence.

Analytic attention primarily rests on the structure of the party's 'dominant coalition', which is an 'alliance of alliances' between the most powerful actors within a party and thereby serves as a 'coalition of internal party forces with which [the party's leader] must at least to a certain degree negotiate' (Panebianco, 1988, p. 38). An actor gains a position in the dominant coalition through control over 'zones of uncertainty', which are the internal institutions and resources through which a party performs essential activities (Panebianco, 1988, p. 33). What makes these zones uncertain is that the way in which they function depends on the interests of the actor that controls it. An actor forms their interests through their experiences and social relations inside and outside the party (Mudge, 2018). This means that an actor's interests are historically specific: the interests of an MP in 2022 is going to be different from that of an MP in 1975 and in turn from 1945; the internal power that a trade union leader may wield is likely to change across time based on the fluctuations in power that trade unions have outside of the party, which can in turn influence the appetite of other party actors to work with them. This means that the specific organisational structure that a party holds at a given point in time will reflect which type of actors hold power within the dominant coalition, as the institutions through which internal conflicts are negotiated will ultimately influence the ideology, program and strategy that the party holds.

Following this logic, even if there are exogenous pressures for a party to change its organisational structure, it will only do so through changes to the composition and structure of the dominant coalition (Harmel & Janda, 1994; Panebianco, 1988). Because each actors' assessment of the need and extent for party change will be tied to their unique social relations, significant exogenous change should provoke substantial intra-party debates. However these debates will only occur if actors with alternative interests and interpretations can emerge in the dominant coalition by winning control of zones of uncertainty. Through their control of these zones, these actors would then shift the function of party institutions to reflect their ideas over how the party should engage with its external environment, which would be tantamount to organisational change. However, it is important to recognise that for a party to change the function of a party institution it is likely going to have to control multiple, related zones. For instance, if a party was to change the way in which candidate selection occurs it would have to control the institution that determines party rules. It is also possible that there could be no overall control of a specific zone, for instance if no actor can control a majority of delegates at the party conference or the party executive committee. As such, there are multiple pathways to a scenario in which exogenous change creates pressure for party change and new actors emerge to push the party in this direction, however they are unable to gain sufficient control over the requisite zones to implement these reforms. This would produce organisational stasis in which the dominant coalition cannot cohesively function, which prevents the party from responding to its external environment resulting in party decline.

Under the organisational power theory, the cartel organisational structure can be seen to have produced path-dependent constraints that result in such organisational stasis. These constraints are tied to the process through which electoral professional actors came to hold a hegemonic position within the dominant coalition through their almost unilateral control over key zones of uncertainty (Katz & Mair, 2002; Panebianco, 1988). Under catch-all and mass forms of organisation, trade unions and party members had held influence often through their supply of

party financing and influence at the party conference. However, in the cartel party state subventions typically flowed directly to parliamentary actors which negated an important source of extra-parliamentary actors' influence (Allern et al., 2021; Blyth & Katz, 2005; Nassmacher, 2009). In election campaigns, Social Democratic parties came to rely more fully on outside professionals' PR expertise than the mobilising activities of members or party bureaucrats (Esser et al., 2016; Mudge, 2018; Vliegenthart, 2011). Once members and union leaders lost influence, the party on the ground typically declined as a site of independent authority (Katz & Mair, 2002; Mair, 2013).

As the party on the ground declined in influence, internal accountability shifted away from zones of uncertainty like the party conference. Instead, the key line of accountability was increasingly the one between the party leader and the parliamentary party, with the cabinet a potential intermediary (Bardi et al., 2017; Katz & Mair, 2002; Panebianco, 1988, pp. 266–7). As such, in Social Democratic cartel parties, it is the interests of different parliamentary actors in the dominant coalition that are key, both in terms of the ideological interests that influence the formation of public policy and in terms of the resources that are available to the party in its campaigns and mobilising activities.

As such, when Social Democratic parties are confronted with exogenous constraints that pressure change, the initial party response will be contingent on the historically specific interests of parliamentary elites. Substantial ideological divisions within the parliamentary party could drive change, however because parliamentarians are likely to share the same elite occupational backgrounds it is likely that there will be a relative homogeneity between parliamentary actors' interests that are likely to be reflected in interests and ideas closely related to the Third Way, which was the paradigm in which they were socialised (O'Grady, 2018). Hence, only a small number of MPs would likely respond to exogenous pressures associated with anti-system politics through significantly different ideological interpretations from their colleagues.

As part of the shift in accountability structure amidst cartelisation, parties often democratised processes of candidate and leader selection while keeping significant institutional barriers to true outsiders from contesting (Hopkin, 2001; Katz, 2001; Pilet & Cross, 2014). Decades later, this could have an unforeseen consequence. This institutional reform had been made in a context in which the exodus of members from the party meant that the remnants were often perceived as more mainstream or normal. However, the effects of anti-system politics could have a radicalising effect on these remaining members, while also encouraging outside members to join or re-join the party. This could provide a route for dissident MPs that lack support inside the parliamentary party to seek to change the party organisation by capturing control of the party leadership or by increasing their profile through the media attention that these contests often garner.

However, even if such a process was to unfold, the party leader would still be largely accountable to the parliamentary party unless they transitioned the party away from a cartel structure. This is likely to require control of a greater range of zones of uncertainty than just the party leadership. Under the cartel structure, any new actors or new leaders that emerged with different interpretations and an intention to re-orient the party would face a problem as their ideas would conflict with the majority of MPs' interests.

To win control of a broader range of zones of uncertainty, the new leader must assemble a broad insurgent coalition by mobilising support amongst diffuse elements of the party on the ground including trade unions, affiliate organisations and the party membership. There are two potential constraints to this. The first is the question of where these new types of actors would come from. In the process of cartelisation many of these actors quit the party, which creates a problem over how they can, independently or through co-ordination, regain influence within the party structure. The second is the extent to which there is actually an alignment of interests across the potential insurgency. They each have unique social relations outside of the party and therefore

a different understanding of how the party should function. The more dispersed the insurgency the less likely it is to be sustained.

The organisational power theory is therefore relatively pessimistic, however it is important to re-emphasise that, for Social Democratic parties, there is potential for anti-system politics to refract inside the party and create new debates. This could occur through debates between different elements of the parliamentary party or through the mobilisation of the remnants of the party on the ground. As such, it is likely that there will be some degree of change in terms of the composition of the dominant coalition. The key question is whether these new actors can gain control of the requisite number of zones of uncertainty that would lead to a clear shift in the organisational structure. This would produce a dynamic where the increased influence of outside actors is insufficient to change the organisational structure but also where the prevailing parliamentary elites cannot fully implement their own interests. In this scenario, institutional stasis precludes organisational change but also negates the cartel party from functioning efficiently. This would only compound party decline.

Table 1: Summary of Party re-alignment and Organisational power theories

	Party re-alignment	**Organisational power**
Actor interests	Leader office-seeking; members policy-seeking	Historical specific; formed through unique social relations that extend outside party
Cartelisation effects	Leader dominant actor	Embedded / path dependent institutional constraints
Proposed source of party change	Exogenous: Leader determines that exogenous events require party to change to achieve goals	Endogenous: change in composition and structure of dominant coalition leads to change in function of party institutions/zones of uncertainty
Effect of party system change	Significant: Party must respond to decline of cleavage democracy; re-alignment to multi-	Medium: anti-system politics can politicise members / external social movements

	dimensional, personalised politics	become source for new actors to emerge inside party
Outcome	Leader determines cartel structure is optimal for party to adapt	Organisational stasis: Embedded constraints of cartelisation prevent new actors from institutionalising change in structure of dominant coalition

The two theories outlined in this section provide different explanations for why contemporary Social Democratic parties have retained a cartel structure. These differences are emphasised in Table 1. As Table 1 highlights, the major point of difference between the theories is whether party change is rooted in exogenous or endogenous pressures. While the party re-alignment theory acknowledges that the decision is ultimately in the hands of key party elites, these actors are seen to respond only to exogenous pressures to change. As Social Democratic parties are operating according to a pre-existing structure in which the parliamentary party is dominant, these actors will be guided by office-seeking instincts and thus determine that while their external environment is challenging, it does not require the party to change its organisational structure. By contrast, the organisational power theory identifies party change to be driven by endogenous factors, specifically a change in structure of the party's ruling dominant coalition. This theory identifies path dependent constraints that are tied to the process through which the cartel party was originally institutionalised, which make it significantly harder for new actors to gain control of the required zones of uncertainty to change the party organisation. However, exogenous pressures will create opportunities for new actors to gain some internal power, which will ultimately result in organisational stasis.

Data and methods

The hypotheses outlined in the previous section give different explanations for why a given party fails to change in response to environmental pressures. The theories diverge on explanations for

the source of specific actors' interests and the expectations around the exogenous and endogenous prompts for their behaviour at critical points for party decision making. The analysis of decision making at critical junctures requires the researcher to 'reconstruct, in a systematic and rigorous fashion, each stage of the decision-making process' (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 354). The research design required to test these hypotheses must enable the identification of different actors' interests, as well as an assessment of the different influences on decision making inside the party at different stages.

To analyse and identify how actor motivations and structural constraints influence organisational change, I apply process tracing to analyse a great range of primary and secondary source materials from the British Labour party in the period between 2015 and 2020 (Bennett and Checkel 2014; Fairfield and Charman 2017). I have conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with party elites (see appendix for a list). These individuals were purposively selected according to their position within the party hierarchy and their relationship with the party leadership in the period of study. On top of this, I have read a range of party reports and memos that shed insight into the behaviour and reasoning of different actors throughout the period. I also collected data through analysis of newspaper sources. In my original search, I limited my study to articles from LabourList, The Guardian, and The New Statesman. I selected these newspapers as, historically, they have provided the most in-depth reporting and coverage of the Labour party and its intra-party politics. I have supplemented the data collected from these accounts, with secondary sources that range from academic election studies to journalistic accounts of the Corbyn period. These sources are particularly useful as they often included interviews with party elites, which can therefore help to elucidate the influences on party actors.

I employ logical Bayesianism to weigh and assess the significant body of evidence collected through my data collection. Accepting that information we possess is inevitably limited, Bayesian reasoning can help us weigh the probability of a hypothesis relative to an unlimited number of mutually exclusive rivals. By mentally inhabiting the world of each hypothesis, we ask whether a

given piece of evidence supports a particular proposition more than it corroborates rivals(Fairfield & Charman, 2022). This cumulative process allows us to evaluate the overall weight of evidence for each hypothesis, and therefore determine which explanation is most plausible. In the next section I draw on the evidence collected to provide an overview of the case. In the discussion section I then analyse how the body of evidence speaks to each hypothesis

Case overview

On the 8th of May 2015, after Labour's disastrous election defeat, Ed Miliband resigned as party leader. This triggered a new leadership contest. According to the central party office director that designed the rules for leadership selection, the nomination threshold of 15% of MPs was deemed a 'safe barrier to any outsider – especially from the hard left' (McHugh 2015). However, the radical left backbencher, Jeremy Corbyn, was able to overcome this hurdle thanks to over a dozen MPs who "lent" him their signatures on the basis that they did not expect or want him to win, but believed that he would broaden the debate (Kogan 2019, 226; interview with Jon Cruddas MP, London, April 2020). Once he had secured entry to the contest, Corbyn's eventual victory was contingent on his capacity to unite disparate elements of the party on the ground. Firstly, Corbyn secured the endorsement of nine trade unions. On top of their endorsements Unite, the CWU and the TSSA, provide the financing, staff, and office space for Corbyn's campaign to actually function. Staff from Corbyn's campaigns have suggested that this material support was crucial to Corbyn's mobilisation of members inside and outside the party (Nunns 2018; Kogan 2019; Jones 2020). Between May and September 2015 over 250,000 people joined the Labour party. Surveys of these members suggest that Corbyn's anti-system discourse and anti-capitalist policy agenda were motivating factors for new and returning members to join the party during the leadership election (Whiteley et al. 2019). In addition to disenchanted members and former members, Corbyn's campaign had drawn together different social movements including Stop the War coalition, participants in the 2010 student-led protests against education fees, parts of Occupy, and older

veterans of Trotskyist, Communist and Anarchist groups (Jones, 2020, chaps. 1–2; Nunns, 2018, chap. 7).

In the aftermath of Corbyn's victory, Jon Lansman, the long-time party activist who managed Corbyn's campaign, founded Momentum in order to institutionalise the support amongst the mass membership. It was envisaged that Momentum would organise and mobilise the membership base to stave off the envisaged backlash from parliamentary elites; and, as Corbyn's party democratisation agenda unfolded, Momentum would help to shift the dynamics of the party in public office by influencing candidate selection processes (Jones 2020, 56; interview with Jon Lansman, April 2019). In reality, the construction of Momentum faced significant teething problems. There was a significant division between Lansman, whose extensive background in the Labour party stretched back to the 1980s when the left was last relevant inside the party, and younger activists who had only recently been politicised through their participation in the proliferation of anti-austerity social movements. The substance of this division rested on whether Momentum should function primarily as a faction, pushing to influence internal party processes; or whether it should function primarily outside the party, focusing on bringing more and more people into the party by running campaigns in connected environments (; interview with Jon Lansman, April 2019) Kogan, 2019, pp. 254–9).

While this debate went unresolved, the envisaged hostility came from multiple sources inside the party. The party central office, which was still largely dominated by Directors that had been appointed to permanent contracts under the leadership of Tony Blair (Russell 2005; Minkin 2014), did not support Corbyn's proposed shifts and made efforts to delay his capacity to appoint staff to his own office and blocked access to resources (Nunns 2018; Kogan 2019; The Labour Party 2020, 41–50; interview with Julie Lawrence, Director of the Office of General Secretary, January 2020; Interview with James Meadway, Advisor to John McDonnell MP, January 2020; Interview with Matt Zarb-Cousin, Advisor to Jeremy Corbyn, April 2020). Because the General Secretary, and not the Leader, appointed Directors at the central party office, Corbyn could not

directly alter this dynamic. The General Secretary is accountable to the National Executive Committee (NEC), and for the first two years of his leadership, Corbyn lacked a majority on the NEC and could only rely on support from grassroots and a limited number of union delegates. At the same time, due to a lack of support amongst MPs, Corbyn could only appoint four allies to his Shadow Cabinet (McCaffrey 2015; Kogan 2019). As a result, Corbyn was forced to accede to the preferences of electorally inclined Shadow Cabinet members on policy issues such as welfare reform, the junior doctors strike and the UK's participation in air strikes on Syria (Wintour 2015b; Carlin 2016; Cowley and Kavanagh 2018a, 76; Kogan 2019, 262–63; Jones 2020, 76–77).

These early internal skirmishes came to a head in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum in the summer of 2016. Labour's ambivalent campaign served as a trigger for mass resignations from the Shadow Cabinet, while MPs overwhelmingly voted to trigger a new leadership contest. Statements from MPs at the time indicate that they believed Corbyn would resign under the weight of pressure (Boffey et al. 2016; Cowley and Kavanagh 2018a, 83–85; Kogan 2019, 267; Jones 2020, 78–79). However, bolstered by public and private support from the unions (Len McCluskey et al. 2016; Cowley and Kavanagh 2018a, 84), Corbyn refused to resign. Instead, Corbyn appointed a new Shadow Cabinet, albeit one that had to be reduced in size from 31 to 25 and was filled by primarily inexperienced MPs from the party's left. The site of the conflict moved to the NEC which, as the arbiter of party rules, would decide whether Corbyn would automatically appear in the leadership contest as it was clear that Corbyn would not be able to overcome the nomination threshold as he had a year earlier. With the support of all union delegates, Corbyn won the NEC vote 18-14. The leadership contest itself was effectively a foregone conclusion as Corbyn secured 61.8% of the vote. As such, the supposed "coup" attempt backfired badly for the parliamentary elites. They had lost their control over the Shadow Cabinet, and as a result were resigned to allowing Corbyn to 'fail on his own terms' (Cowley and Kavanagh 2018a; Kogan 2019, 293; interview with Jon Cruddas MP, January 2020). At the same time, over the course of the campaign, Momentum's membership increased to 20,000 (interview with Jon Lansman, April 2019). As such,

this event allowed Corbyn to galvanise his support base amongst both unions and the membership (interview with Matt Zarb-Cousin, April 2020).

At the snap 2017 General Election, Labour won 40% of the vote, which was an increase of 9.6% from 2015, and translated into an increase of 30 seats. Data from the British Election Study finds that Labour's capacity to unify the Remain vote and Corbyn's personal popularity were equally important to their improved electoral popularity (Mellon et al. 2018). Internal documents and memos indicate that Corbyn sought to construct an electoral coalition comprised of different groups that had been negatively impacted by austerity such as students, young people and the post-industrial working class (Ross and McTague 2017; Shipman 2017; Cowley and Kavanagh 2018a, 91–92; interview with Steve Howell, deputy director of communications, August 2019). Corbyn sought to articulate this coalition through anti-system policy agenda and discourse, tied together through mass campaign techniques. These included mass rallies of thousands of Labour supporters that were more reminiscent of American Presidential campaigns than traditional UK electoral campaigns. Equally, thousands of Labour supporters were mobilised by digital apps created by Momentum to canvass in marginal constituencies around the country. Corbyn's advisors, alongside staff at Momentum, developed innovative digital technologies including campaigning apps and a viral social media strategy (Peggs 2017; Howell 2019; interview with Jon Lansman, April 2019).

However, they faced significant opposition from the party central office. Under New Labour, the central office was tasked with managing Labour's electoral campaigns, although this was typically done in close collaboration with advisors in the leader's office (Russell 2005). During the election campaign there were substantial internal disagreements over whether Labour should take an offensive or defensive orientation, which extended into whether Labour should target moderate swing voters or non-voters (Ross and McTague 2017; Shipman 2017; Cowley and Kavanagh 2018b, 151; Howell 2019; Heneghan 2020; Jones 2020). Indeed, the Head of Strategy, Patrick Heneghan, ensured that campaign budgets were not shared with Corbyn's advisors; and he assembled a 'secret key seats team' that was based in a separate building, which funnelled £225,842

into the local campaigns of "Corbynsceptic" MPs (Heneghan 2020; Pogrund and Maguire 2020, 36–37; The Labour Party 2020, 92–93). These divisions were only resolved when Andrew Murray was seconded to the central office from Unite. Actors from all sides agree that this was a critical development because Unite was the primary financier of the campaign, Murray had an authority behind his decision-making that others did not (Cowley and Kavanagh 2018b, 187; Howell 2019).

Labour's relatively positive election result ensured that Corbyn would remain as leader. In the aftermath of the election, Corbyn began to extend his control over the organisation by assisting his allies into dominant positions within critical institutions. At the party conference in September 2017, delegates from the grassroots, Shadow Cabinet and left-aligned trade unions voted to expand the number of grassroots representatives on the NEC. In the ensuing ballot, these positions were won by the Momentum slate, which gave Corbyn a majority to remove Iain McNicol as General Secretary. This led the longstanding Directors at the central office to resign (Heneghan 2020). With a majority on the NEC, Corbyn was able to ensure that McNicol's successor would be his direct ally, and that the key staff at Southside would be supportive of Corbyn's agenda. However, this decision created divisions within Corbyn's internal coalition. The frontrunner to replace McNicol was Jennie Formby, who had been the Political Director at Unite. Lansman announced that he would challenge Formby, out of concern that this was becoming a 'traditional Labour stitch up' (interview with Jon Lansman, April 2019). Lansman eventually bowed to pressure from Corbyn to stand down, and Formby was appointed to the position by the NEC.

Divisions between the union and grassroots elements of Corbyn's support base emerged again over other organisational reforms. Corbyn still faced considerable hostility from MPs and lacked any mechanism to instil disciple or stop them from briefing against him (Jones 2020; Pogrund and Maguire 2020). Under pre-existing party rules, once a candidate was selected a first time, it was very difficult for constituency parties to 'de-select' them. But as long-time Campaign for Labour Party Democracy activists, both Corbyn and Lansman supported 'mandatory reselection' where all MPs would have to gain selection by their local party prior to each General

Election. Many MPs feared that, because they did not hold close relationships with their constituency parties, such a reform would lead to their deselection. As such, it is possible that this could have provided a basis for Corbyn to 'whip' MPs. However, the unions, including Unite, did not support mandatory reselection as they would lose their capacity to influence selection processes. Prior to the 2018 Party Conference, a 'compromise' was negotiated between the big-five unions and Corbyn's office, which blindsided Momentum (interview with Laura Parker, Momentum national director, September 2019). However this reform did little to fundamentally change the dynamics of the selection process (Bassett 2020).

Between the 2017 and 2019 General Elections, Labour struggled to respond to the issues that came to dominate its electoral environment. The most fundamental issue was Brexit. After the 2017 General Election, the majority of constituencies held by Labour were "Remain" seats, while the majority of constituencies that the party needed to win were "Leave" seats. Memos and statements from Corbyn's advisors suggest that in early 2018, Corbyn sought to position Labour around a "soft-Brexit" policy, in order to pave the way for a negotiation with Theresa May to pass the necessary legislation and reduce the salience of the issue (Mason 2018; Jones 2020, 186; Pogrund and Maguire 2020, 194–95). However, this was opposed by a number of parliamentary elites, most importantly the Shadow Brexit Secretary, Keir Starmer, who threatened to resign in protest in February 2018 (Pogrund and Maguire 2020, 71–72).

At the same time, the mass membership, including many of Corbyn's supporters, strongly supported a second referendum. Prior to the 2018 party conference, grassroots activists organised for constituency parties to submit over 151 motions that called for the party to support a second referendum. While the large quantity of motions, which were supported by a majority of Labour MPs, ensured that Labour would have to support some form of a second referendum, Corbyn, largely on electoralist grounds, sought to ensure that Remain would not be an option in this referendum (Kogan 2019). At the conference, the compositing meeting was the critical event. The compositing meeting determines how key points from multiple motions on the same topic are

summarised into a single motion that is debated on the conference floor. The meeting's rules are relatively arcane, which helps to ensure that the leadership will not be embarrassed by motions that pass in opposition to their own priorities. For instance, it requires unanimity to be reached and for all delegates to be in attendance for the entire meeting to speak. The meeting to determine the Brexit composite for the 2018 conference went for 7 hours. During the meeting, delegates from Unite pressured other unions to back down, and eventually a 'compromise' was brokered in which Labour would prioritise the push for a General Election and failing that 'keep all options on the table, including campaigning for a public vote' (Kogan 2019, 392–93; Pogrund and Maguire 2020, 138–41). This policy, dubbed "strategic ambiguity" remained the core of Labour's Brexit policy until the 2019 General Election.

The second issue that Labour had to deal with were allegations that Labour, as an organisation, was anti-Semitic; and that Corbyn was personally anti-Semitic. With regards to the former allegation, it appears that the hostility between Corbyn's office and the central party office in the early period of his leadership prevented the party from appropriately responding to the increased number of disputes raised against party members. The leaked report into the Labour Party's Governance and Legal Unit found that between 1 November 2016 and 19 February 2018, over 300 complaints of anti-Semitism were registered but only 34 investigations were initiated. These investigations culminated in just 10 suspensions (The Labour Party 2020). Whereas after Formby became General Secretary and instituted new procedures, in 2019, 45 members were expelled for anti-Semitism, while 104 members quit whilst being investigated. In the same year 296 members were suspended.

However, Corbyn struggled to respond to the personal allegations that were made against him. These were compounded by his opposition to the party accepting the full IHRA definition and examples of anti-Semitism, on the grounds that two of the examples were met with widespread concern by Palestinian groups. In July 2017, the NEC rubber stamped a code of conduct that endorsed the IHRA working definition but excluded four of the examples. This code of conduct

received significant criticism from the Jewish Board of Deputies and the Jewish Labour Movement. By September 2018, there was a majority on the NEC to pass the definition and examples in full. At this meeting, Corbyn sought to include a statement that emphasised it 'should it be regarded as antisemitic to describe Israel, its policies or the circumstances around its foundation as racist because of their discriminatory impact, or to support another settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict' (Jones 2020). However, a majority, including two Jewish NEC members who were otherwise core supporters of Corbyn – Jon Lansman and Rhea Wolfson – voted down Corbyn's addendum.

Corbyn's advisors have said that they struggled to get Corbyn to take their advice with regards to anti-Semitism. Instead, it appears that Corbyn preferred to listen to activists from his constituency and from the group Jewish Voice for Labour (Pogrund and Maguire 2020, 108). These activists reportedly held the view that groups like the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Labour Movement were too right-wing, and broadly unrepresentative, to speak in the Jewish Community's name. Corbyn's efforts can be contrasted with those of Momentum, which put out several videos, one of which received over 1.3 million views, that were aimed at political education around the language that activists use, and how this can be anti-Semitic. Momentum's efforts, and his own Jewish identity, meant that Lansman became a prominent defender of Corbyn in the media. However, Lansman and Momentum felt that their efforts were not supported by other elements of Corbyn's internal coalition. As Lansman says, 'I now feel I have been used as a Jew to defend the party, but I'm not supported afterwards. They're quite happy for me to go on fucking radio or TV to defend Jeremy, but I'm not supported afterwards' (Lansman quoted in Jones 2020). The 2019 General Election was a disaster for Labour, as the party suffered a negative 7.9% swing in vote share and lost 60 constituencies. Secondary accounts indicate that Labour's campaign was dysfunctional, and was characterised by animosity between Corbyn and his long-time ally, John McDonnell; as well as increasingly pronounced divisions between several of Corbyn's key staff members (Jones 2020; Pogrund and Maguire 2020). Corbyn's Head of Policy, Andrew Fisher,

resigned prior to the election campaign because 'of the lack of professionalism, competence and human decency which I am no longer willing to put up with daily' (Fisher quoted in Helm and Tapper 2019). The party's policy agenda during the election lacked a coherent framework. Fisher described Labour's strategy as based on incontinence 'because there was literally nothing else. No strategy, no planning, no themes, no narrative' (Fisher quoted in Jones 2020). While Unite General Secretary, Len McCluskey says that 'it was a mish mash of policies which, in my opinion, was determined by people who don't live in the working-class world' (McCluskey quoted in Jones 2020).

Discussion and analysis

In this section, I use logical Bayesianism to weigh and assess the plausibility of the evidence occurring under the world envisaged by each of my competing theories. Each theory makes a distinct statement about why a mainstream, cartelised party, such as the UK Labour party, would retain its organisational structure in response to internal and environmental pressures for change. Following Bayesian reasoning, we mentally inhabit the world of each theory to assess the relative likelihood of different pieces of evidence occurring under the proposed conditions.

We can start with a discussion of the evidence that speaks for and against our first theory, Party Re-alignment. This hypothesis assumes that key decision-makers in the party, regardless of their previous preferences and interests, will seek to ensure that the party responds to the broader process of electoral re-alignment. To this end, where questions of organisational reform arise, we would expect to observe the party leader and their elite supporters resist any changes on the basis that the centralised cartel structure provides them with the effective allocation of party resources to re-align. This theory is less concerned with internal dynamics, it assumes that as the party already has a cartel structure it will be leader dominated, and that the leader, regardless of their prior experiences, will be motivated by office-seeking interests. The source of party change is primarily exogenous – a need for re-alignment. As such, if party members or another actor were observed

to act to constrain the leader's efforts at re-alignment we would expect to see the leader and their elite supporters impose their authority as per the pre-existing power structure of the cartel party.

The evidence that speaks most loudly for the party re-alignment theory is Labour's election campaign in 2017. This is somewhat curious, as the programmatic shift that Labour undertook during the election campaign was clearly to more radical positions that would conventionally be seen as unelectable. Nevertheless, electoral re-alignment theory need not be conventional, and there is clear secondary evidence that by 2017 significant parts of the UK had been ravaged by austerity (Fetzer, 2019; Hopkin, 2017; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018), and the clear anti-austerity program that Corbyn's Labour party adopted can thus be interpreted as part of a strategic shift to re-align the party to the material and economic realities of the UK. To this end, Labour's surprising electoral improvement at this election and the denial of a parliamentary majority for the Conservatives clearly improved its chances of attaining office and therefore can be seen as strong evidence that speaks to the party re-alignment theory. A potential problem that confronts this theory's explanatory power is the evidence that suggests Labour employed strategies that are atypical of a cartel organisational structure, including the mass mobilisation of members and supporters, the use of mass rallies and an expansion of the party's digital footprint. During the 2017 campaign, the pre-existing directors in the party bureaucracy rejected the digital campaign and the targeting of non-voters that Corbyn and his staff envisaged as central to their strategy, as Steve Howell (interview, August 2019), the Deputy Communications Director at LOTO explained to me, '[the party bureaucracy] were used to campaigns only moving 2 or 3 percent. This whole theory of this kind of Blairie election campaign is that you have to be way ahead in the polls and then the campaign is about staying ahead… we felt that was out of date.'

However, the organisational power theory also struggles to explain this piece of evidence as well. This theory suggests that, albeit temporarily, Corbyn had managed to shift the party's organisational structure away from a cartel organisation. Most significantly, it would appear that he did this without winning clear control of the dominant coalition, which is a problem for the

underpinning of the organisational power theory. While it is conceivable that this organisational shift was only possible due to the success of Corbyn's insurgent allies, and there is evidence that demonstrates that the intervention of Unite political strategist Andrew Murray was crucial, the restructuring of the party is too successful for the world envisaged by the theory. As such, the party re-alignment theory better explains the evidence presented around the 2017 General Election.

The party re-alignment theory does provide a plausible explanation for the evidence surrounding Labour's positioning in response to Brexit, however there is some complexity. Brexit was an event that clearly presented a strategic dilemma for Labour. Despite most Labour MPs campaigning in favour of Remain and over 70% of Labour supporters voting to Remain, the majority of Labour constituencies voted to Leave. Brexit is an event that clearly fits with the re-alignment of Britain around a new political axis, for instance on an urban cosmopolitan versus post-industrial backwater divide, in which the former was characterised by preference demands for economic investment and a global outlook; and the latter was characterised by redistributive demands, negative views of immigration and a nostalgic pride in English identity (Jennings & Stoker, 2016, 2017; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). Under this structural shift, Labour's electoral base resided in the more cosmopolitan areas and it struggled to form a coalition that sat across this divide. The first-past-the-post electoral system penalises higher concentration of votes in urban areas, which therefore means that there is less space for Labour to win elections within this new structural divide. As such, the strategic ambiguity position that Labour adopted is broadly conceivable under the party re-alignment hypothesis as it is a strategic fudge in which the party seeks to appeal to both sides of the issue. Moreover, in achieving this position, there is strong evidence that Corbyn used institutional levers of a centralised party leader to ensure that the pro-second referendum interests of party activists were suppressed, which aligns with the party re-alignment theory's expectations.

However, there is good evidence that Corbyn actually wanted Labour to adopt a soft-Brexit position. Party re-alignment theory expects that the leader will be relatively unconstrained by the party organisation, whereas one of Corbyn's advisors, Andrew Murray, explains that Corbyn's incapacity to impose his preferred Brexit strategy on the parliamentary party, 'created the space for a mass Remain movement' amongst the membership (Murray quoted in Jones 2020, 186). Moreover, there is evidence that suggests that Corbyn and his advisers' support for a soft-Brexit policy created frustration amongst elements of his grassroots support base. This is plausible under both theories, however under Party Re-alignment we would expect that Corbyn's interests would prevail. Instead, Labour's strategic ambiguity is best interpreted as a compromise that emerged from internal conflicts between the leader, parliamentary elites, members, and trade union elites. That the eventual policy satisfied no one, reflects how highly power was dispersed within the party organisation as no actor possessed the authority to impose their interests, which means that the evidence around Labour's Brexit policy is actually more plausibly explained by Organisational Power theory than Party Re-alignment.

Indeed, much of the evidence collected is more plausible under the Organisational Power explanation than the Party Re-alignment theory. This is not so much because the Party Re-alignment is not compelling, but because the evidence suggests that the key decisions made in the party were shaped by internal dynamics, rather than directly in response to exogenous events. This is clear from the outset of Corbyn's leadership in the way that the party responded to key emergent issues including welfare reform, the junior doctor's strike and military intervention in Syria. While it is clear that Labour adopted positions on these issues that might be seen as conventionally electable, in that they did not stray too far from the orthodoxy that was promoted by the Conservative party, the evidence appears to suggest that this is because key actors in the parliamentary Labour Party were in a position to compel Corbyn to do so. This is what we would expect under the Organisational Power explanation, whereas the Party Re-Alignment explanation suggests that the party would adopt these positions because Corbyn himself sought to do so.

The key mechanism under the Organisational Power hypothesis is the rise and fall of the insurgent coalition. By gaining some control over zones of uncertainty, the insurgent coalition is supposed to disrupt the pre-existing power dynamics of the dominant coalition. However, if it does not gain sufficient control to impose its own interests across party institutions, the theory suggests that organisational stasis will explain the lack of structural change. Under this explanation, we expect that external events do impact the party by politicising actors that lack power, both within the dominant parliamentary party and in the party on the ground. But ultimately, because these actors are starting from such a weak position and have such diverse experiences outside the party, this insurgency cannot be sustained. There is strong evidence that supports the presence and effect of this mechanism in explaining the Labour party's persistent cartelisation.

Firstly, the nature of Corbyn's leadership election and the institutionalisation of Momentum in the immediate aftermath is strong evidence that speaks loudly in favour of the political action of dissident MPs, and a more active and politicised role for trade union leaders and party activists. It is clear that Corbyn acted as a lightning rod to crystallize these different actors into an insurgent coalition that sought to shift internal power dynamics.

Secondly, the institutional pushback in terms of the incumbent elites' attempts to impose their interests in key policy issues that emerged early in Corbyn's leadership and then in the more overt attempt to remove him. This latter event is worth more specific analysis. There is evidence that in the months leading up to this challenge that Corbyn's insurgency had begun to drift. Labour's polling was dire, the enthusiasm amongst the grassroots had waned, and Momentum was suffering significant teething issues. However, the extreme nature of the MPs' actions acted as a rallying point to re-politicise the grassroots and re-engage them in the party on the ground. Key actors within Momentum say that it was at this point that they decided to formalise their position as an actor firmly embedded inside the party organisation (Kogan, 2019, pp. 295–9). Moreover, this was an event that publicly demonstrated the limitations of the MPs' power in an organisation where there was a clear disconnect between the parliamentary party and the parliamentary leader.

The sequencing of this event with exogenous junctures, most importantly the 2017 General Election, can also help to alleviate potential concerns over a clear limitation of the Organisational Power explanation. That is, the aforementioned difficulty that we are presented with in the organisational structure through which Labour contested the 2017 General Election. There is evidence that at this election Labour moved away from a cartel structure. However, in the aftermath, by choosing to retain the pre-existing means of selecting the party General Secretary and largely retaining the method of candidate selection, the party moved back to a centralised cartel structure. Can the organisational power theory provide an explanation for this?

When the sequencing of the evidence is taken on the whole, the theory does provide a plausible explanation. There is evidence that the failure of the Chicken Coup created a sense of resignation amongst Corbyn's parliamentary opponents. On top of this, having resigned their positions in the Shadow Cabinet, these opponents were replaced with MPs that, while lacking experience, were more amenable to Corbyn's agenda. As such, this was a critical event that increased Corbyn's control over critical zones of uncertainty, while decreasing his opponents' willingness to act, less than a year before a surprise election was held. In these conditions, it is conceivable that Corbyn could contest this election with a reformed organisational structure without having actually institutionalised this new dynamic. The MPs willingness to act to constrain Corbyn would resurface within a year of the election, largely prompted by his disastrous response to the Skripal poisonings, his potential support for a soft Brexit and the allegations around anti-Semitism.

Moreover, the evidence collected supports the Organisational Power theory's explanation that the insurgency would fall apart due to different interests amongst key actors. Post-2017, with Corbyn in the ascendancy, there key organisational reforms that could have been made, most notably in terms of the means through which the new General Secretary would be elected and whether to change processes of candidate selection. These would have profound implications for the way that power worked within the party, and on both decisions it appears that Corbyn acted

in line with the interests of trade union leaders. With regards to candidate selection, Corbyn has subsequently acknowledged that the reason he could not implement mandatory reselection was because the proposal 'did not find enough support, particularly amongst unions… so we have the system we now have' (Corbyn quoted in Burtenshaw, 2020). This is strong evidence in favour of the idea that divergences within the insurgent coalition were instrumental in the limited nature of Corbyn's organisational reforms

As such, the dual effects of an inability to instil authority within the parliamentary party, and his inability to sustain his own support base, can reasonably explain Corbyn's struggles. Essentially, as is described under Organisational Power explanation, power within the Labour party remained highly dispersed. As a result, Corbyn could not reform or adapt the party organisation so, somewhat ironically, a highly centralised power structure remained, albeit one in which the leader was increasingly isolated from the rest of the party. As one of Corbyn's advisors says, the constant internal battles left Corbyn's centralised office simultaneously 'authoritative and isolated' (interview, James Meadway, January 2020). Effectively the Labour party became an organisation in which power was highly dispersed between two different types of parliamentary elites, and as such Corbyn was unable to implement his intended reforms. At the same time, until Corbyn's second defeat at the 2019 General Election, the parliamentary party was unable to act to further its own interests because they did not control the leadership, which proved such a vital zone of uncertainty.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have demonstrated that the Labour party's retention of a cartel organisational structure, despite internal and external pressures for change, is best explained by the organisational power hypothesis. While Corbyn gradually increased his power by winning control of critical institutions within the organisation, at no point did he have sufficient authority within the party in public office. This was, in a sense, the most critical party zone of uncertainty, because under the cartel structure the parliamentary party had effectively become the party. Without gaining authority

within this institution, Corbyn could not enact significant organisational changes. At the same time, Corbyn increasingly had to make decisions that disrupted the unity of his own support base. As a result, organisational stasis became entrenched as no actor held sufficient authority to fundamentally change the organisation.

This finding is important for our understanding of the specific dynamics of Corbyn's Labour party, as the membership surge combined with Jeremy Corbyn's election as party leader was supposed to lead the creation of some form of neo-mass party. This was a tumultuous time in both Labour and UK politics. Yet there has been little attempt from political science to take Corbyn's leadership seriously (Maiguashca & Dean, 2020). To this end, in this paper I have contributed to our understanding of Corbynism, and have demonstrated the validity of an organisational approach to explaining the variations in success during Corbyn's leadership.

More generally, the findings from this paper demonstrate the significance of an organisational approach to the puzzle of Social Democratic decline. While behavioural and ideational approaches have typically dominated our understanding of this outcome, they have left questions over party responsiveness open. The party re-alignment theory that I compared against the organisational power theory is rooted in a behavioural understanding of party change. My analysis does not deny the relevance or significance of exogenous shifts in social structure or the importance of critical events like the financial crisis. Rather it suggests that the way that these impact party decision making is not necessarily as rational as behavioural theories would suggest. Instead, my analysis suggests that exogenous developments impact the party through the way they influence different actors' interests and, most importantly, by providing opportunities for actors to alter the power dynamics inside parties. At the same time, my analysis demonstrates that there is a path dependent relationship between previous models of organisation and the ability for the party to adapt to new developments. This is precisely because power dynamics become institutionalised, and specific types of actors retain internal power despite their interests and worldviews failing to provide relevant interpretations of developments outside of the party.

On the whole, this analysis suggests that we do need to pay more attention to developments inside political parties to understand their responsiveness. It is clear that the structure of post-industrial economies and the nature of party competition is more difficult for Social Democratic parties. However there is a level of responsibility that these parties hold in their inability to change strategy and program that is tied to the resources provided by their organisational structure. My analysis suggests that the resources that a party provides are tied to its organisational structure, and in the case of the Labour party, stagnation ultimately meant that it did not have sufficient ideational nor material resources to successfully campaign in its broader context.

These findings demonstrate that political parties are incredibly difficult to change. Because the formal structures of a party reflect the internal distribution of power, the complexity of interests across different actors means that the party will often be inward looking and will find it difficult to organically evolve in relation to the structural developments in its external environment. This is particularly true of the cartel party. While the institutional structure developed by mainstream parties in the late 20th century may have helped to ensure their survival, the gradual weakening of party institutions outside of the party in public office have made it much more difficult to renew the organisation.

Of course, it is helpful to question the extent to which these findings are generalisable beyond the Labour party case. At a minimum, it is logical they should resonate with other mainstream parties in majoritarian party systems. As these systems tend to have high barriers to the entry of challenger parties, structural change is more typically channelled through pre-existing parties. In this way, the prevailing cartel structure clearly has implications for the capacity of these party systems to retain representative functions. If mainstream parties cannot adapt their organisations to meet environmental needs, and new parties cannot emerge to challenge their position, then it is possible that the decline in function of the party would continue at pace. This is clearly an important area for continued study.

At the same time, it is worth considering whether my findings could resonate in non-majoritarian systems. If the structure of these party systems is more amenable to challenger parties, then the inability of mainstream parties to change would lead to their general replacement in party systems. On the one hand, this makes the inability to change even more existential. However, on the other hand, it is also likely to make the effects of cartelisation more pronounced. As the party on the ground has been weakened, it is likely that party members and affiliated organisations are more likely to switch their allegiance to other parties. This considerably weakens the potential for challengers to emerge that could shift the composition of the dominant coalition within mainstream parties. Moving forward, it would be helpful to test my organisational power hypothesis in mainstream parties in such systems. An important line of enquiry would be whether these parties are characterised by institutional stasis, and whether this leads to increased rates of decline.

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Appendix: List of interviewees

Interviewees were selected through an initial purposive selection of key party elites, MPs and advisors around the Miliband and Corbyn leaderships. In these interviews I asked for suggestions of other relevant people and actors and attempted to reach interviewees at regional structures. Based on this combination of purposive and snow-balling interview techniques, I interviewed the following individuals between March 2019 and March 2020:

Jon Lansman	Chair of Momentum 2015- ; NEC member 2017-
Rachel Godfrey-Wood	Momentum National Organiser
Darren Rodwell	Leader of Barking and Dagenham Council
Navendu Mishra	Momentum National Organiser; MP for Stockport 2019-
Stephen Houghton	Leader of Barnsley Council
Lloyd Russell-Moyle	MP for Brighton Kempton 2017-
Caroline Flint	MP for Don Valley 1997-2019
Steve Howell	Deputy Director, Strategy and Communications, Jeremy Corbyn Office
India Thorogood	Organiser, Labour Community Organising Unit
Bambos Charalambous	MP for Enfield Southgate 2017-
Luke Cooper	Organiser, Another Europe is Possible
Michael Walker	Journalist, Novara Media
James Meadway	Adviser to John McDonnell 2015-2019
Julie Lawrence	Director of Labour General Secretary's Office 1998-2018
Jon Cruddas	MP for Dagenham, 2001-

Andrew Adonis	Labour Member House of Lords 2005-
Ann Black	NEC Member 2000-2018
Laura Parker	National Director, Momentum 2017-2019
Matt Zarb-Cousin	Advisor to Jeremy Corbyn, 2016-17