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Evaluating the electoral impact of Party Cohesion

AN APPROACH USING NEWSPAPERS

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Introduction

Public interest in politics varies, but one of the areas on which we have reason to believe that they are interested is cohesion within parties. This is the raw stuff of pure politics. Who backstabs who, who rises to top and who does not, who wins and who loses. This is politics as a spectator sport and as a gladiatorial contest. It can also matter for its own sake. Party leadership is important both for policy direction and managerial purposes, and certainly instability within a party can be a sign that leadership is under threat.

While politics fundamentally is important because of how it influences people's real lives that is not necessarily the part that the public finds most interesting. Certainly, and at least anecdotally the media spends considerably more time reporting on process than the policy which implies that there is interest here, as the media in order to continue making a profit need to be reporting on what fundamentally interests the public at large.

Political knowledge does not arise in a vacuum. The public needs to acquire its knowledge from the reporting of events that occur. Party infighting is one of the main areas that the media report on, so it might be expected that if the public care about it should manifest somewhere. If this matters to the public, we should be able to observe it.

Literature Review

One of the largest areas of the political science literature in general is certainly the question of why do people vote the way that they do. There seems at times to be as many theories as there are political scientists, however most theories of voting behavior typically suggest that voters base their decision on some overarching issues and ideas. These seem to fall into three broad categories. The first suggests that voters base their decision on big, identifiable cleavages in society, like class or the position of the church (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). The second theory holds that many voters feel somehow 'close to' or attached to a party, and however that attachment arose, will continue to vote for them because of the force of habit that attachment has provided (Bartels, 2000). The final grand theory for voting behaviour suggests that issues matter. Specifically that voters will vote for a party whose positions are closest to them, particularly on the economy personally (Downs, 1957; Hotelling, 1929).

While important these are certainly not the only ways by which voters make up their mind. Other issues may matter on the margins. One of the most frequently discussed in the literature are valence issues – issues on which the parties basically agree and the question becomes who is more competent in that area (see Ansolabehere & Snyder, 2000; Best, Ladewig, & Wong, 2013; Johns, Mitchell, Denver, & Pattie, 2009). One of the most basic areas of competence is internal unity. This is because of how basic it is to the functioning of a political party, which is, by definition a group of people who have decided to band together as one force in order to obtain political office. This requires them to act together. This makes cohesion a valence issue (Clark, 2013).

It is necessary to firstly define cohesion. Ozbudun defined party cohesion as the extent to which, in a given situation, 'group members can be observed to work together for the group's goal in one and the same way'. (Ozbudun 1970, p. 305). This means that cohesion is a condition of unity of action among party members (Hazan, 2003). Cohesion is made lower if there are suggestions that the party may not speak with one voice on any matter, whether policy-related or strategic. For it to matter to voters it must be observable. This conceptualisation allows us to capture both policy and the idea that parties may be united on policy but have important divisions on other matters.

Additionally a dissenter is defined as any individual member who breaks with the majority of their party on any matter. An act that lowers cohesion, in any form, will be referred to as a dissent. Cohesion and unity are used interchangeably in the rest of this paper.

We would expect that parties for whom any sign of an inability to implement 'good' governance should be adversely affected in polls. We can observe this in other areas of political life. In the literature on party leadership perceived competence of party leaders was one of the best predictors

of whether voters chose the Conservatives or the Labour Party in the 1987 British General election (Stewart & Clarke, 1992). This effect was still present even when the Conservatives were led by a less polarizing political figure (Clarke, Ho, & Stewart, 2000). More generally the literature on party competence suggests that this is a salient issue for voters (Bellucci, 2006). This is likely driven both by party messaging effectively 'selling' party achievements and party platform, and also the idea of issue ownership, where certain parties are just seen as better equipped to deal with certain issues. Certainly in the U.S. being as seen as simply intrinsically more capable on specific issues ('issue ownership')and policy areas is a help to parties when this is raised by media (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1994). This effect is mitigated in some circumstances. It is dependent on a number of factors for it to operate, such as the actual salience of the issue that the party owns (Bélanger & Meguid, 2008) and whether the party or candidate trying to highlight the issue as important are in agreement with the media in assessing an area as important (Hayes, 2008).

All of this is to say that competence, in all of its various manifestations, is valued by voters. It is valued by voters in their party leaders, and it is valued by voters if they are choosing who best to vote for when they want certain areas of policies highlighted and delivered upon. Low cohesion harms the ability of parties to deliver on any of this. It harms the ability of voters to evaluate parties on leadership grounds. It does this by making voters unsure who is actually likely to be the leader of a specific party, which makes it difficult for them to evaluate even well-regarded leaders as they are unsure whether they will actually get the leader presented to them for a meaningful length of time. It also harms the ability of voters to evaluate parties on policy grounds. This is both because it distracts the party – and important individuals within it - from focusing on areas of policy that voters actually care about and that in voters evaluations of the party there is more likely to be actual policy differences when discussing multiple contenders for high office. This should be particularly true outside of a context that voters expect such an event.

There is only a small literature on the electoral effects of cohesion directly, and this can be divided into literature on party effects and individual effects of the electoral effects of cohesion. Maravall found that a perception of being uncohesive, all other things being equal was a net negative for parties in Britain and Spain (Maravall, 2008). Greene and Haber examine Germany and find that low cohesion incurs heavy reputational costs on parties. Much like having a reputation for appearing incompetent, this makes voters less likely to vote for a party relative to its competitors even if they agree with its policies and left-right placement (Greene & Haber, 2015, p. 17). While generally being significant, the observed behaviour of parties suggests that cohesion becomes more desirable and

more achievable by parties the closer the general election is (Ceron, 2012). This ties cohesion into the literature on party competence, and voting on valence issues in particular.

Focusing at the level of individual candidates Vivyan and Wagner found that British Labour MPs who were known to be rebellious against Tony Blair performed somewhat better in the ballot box than those were totally loyal to him, although the effect was small and largely restricted to those voters who liked the Labour party, but also disliked the Labour leadership – which is clearly a fairly narrow subgroup of voters. The effect would also not be sufficient to actually save the seats of many Labour MPs in that election (Vivyan & Wagner, 2012).Olivella et al. examine the issue in Slovakia, which uses an open list electoral system, which should lead to more party control of MPs than in a plurality system like Britain where MPs have direct mandates from voters (Farrell, 2011). They found that MPs with a known tendency for rebellion actually, in spite of the difficulties that they cause the party leadership, are actually more likely to hold their seats in Parliament. This is because parties acknowledge that this independence of action seems to be popular with voters, and place these candidates in higher places on the list, and thus effectively rewarding them for their action. They do this in the hope that emphasizing a popular political figure for voters will win them popular support (Olivella, Malecki, & Sher, 2013).

Clearly there seems to be a disconnect between incentives for parties and incentives for individual members of a party with regard to cohesion. This means that candidates who benefit from cohesion are actually simply getting a greater share of votes from a share of votes that their own actions have made smaller, meaning that they may not have benefitted from this at all.

All of this suggests that there should be a relationship between party cohesion in whether voters are opting for a party. However there is reason to believe that this effect is not isolated to just the party which is having low cohesion. This is because we still expect voters to vote on grounds that we know and expect, like the economy or ideological self-placement. If these things are valued by voters, then we should also not expect cohesion to simply override them, particularly when cohesion is believed to matter precisely because it touches on issues competence and issue positioning among party elites. Accordingly we should expect that those factors will continue to influence voter choice. This means that if low cohesion is negatively affecting one party the beneficiaries should be those parties that are similar to it – whether that is ideologically similar or similar in some other aspect of the political system. This is because these are parties that are less easily separated by these easy distinguishing factors that divide parties, so voters may reach for other means – like cohesion – to distinguish them.

Case Justification

This paper is concerned with cohesion in the British Labour Party. There are a number of reasons why this is a good case, both for its own merits and more generally.

Labour is one of Britain's major political for much of the twentieth century. It has elected six prime ministers and is currently the official opposition. It has had a major influence on British political life and will doubtless continue to do so. Labour's issues, like that of any organisation of its size and stature, whether political or not, is of intrinsic interest and importance.

Labour's internal unity is certainly politically current at present. Jeremy Corbyn's insistence upon staying on in his party leadership position, in spite of only receiving the support 20% of his parliamentary party in a confidence vote (Chakelian, 2016) and 172 Labour MPs and MEPs directly nominating his opponent in the ensuing contest has certainly attracted attention. There certainly appears, at least, to be severe differences in opinion between Corbyn and much of his parliamentary party, much of which has spilled out into the public sphere. Following on from Jeremy Corbyn's election to the party leadership in 2015 the party has had repeated public disputes on both policy and non-policy issues. In the beginning of the year the party had shadow ministers threaten to resign over Corbyn's efforts to whip the party against renewing the Trident nuclear missile program, when official party policy was for the reverse position (Sculthorpe, 2016). The party was also quite publically divided over the issue of airstrikes against the Islamic State in Syria, with the Shadow Foreign Secretary Hilary Benn giving a widely praised speech against the position of the party leadership (Wilkinson, Henderson, & Millward, 2016). There were more periodic rumbles on more general topics in the interim. Several MPs who nominated him for the leadership expressed disquiet with his competence rather than his policy positions primarily (Cox & Coyle, 2016). However it was after the referendum on Britain's European Union membership that Labour's internal unity completely disintegrated. After the firing of Benn there was a mass resignation of shadow cabinet ministers. The chair of the 'Remain' campaign for Labour, Alan Johnson, strongly criticised Corbyn's lacklustre campaign on the issue, and publically called for his resignation (Casalicchio, 2016). Other strongly critical figures criticised his basic approach to party leadership, which they claimed was chaotic and directionless, with a tendency to undermine his colleagues with announcements without prior consultation with them (Debbonaire, 2016; Greenwood, 2016). One of the most notable interventions was that of former party leader Neil Kinnock, who called on moderates in the party to fight Corbyn for 'their party', drawing on his own experience (Sparrow & Jones, 2016).

Kinnock certainly would be familiar with internal party struggles. One of the recurring themes of this contest however is that this all seems familiar to those familiar with the history of the Labour Party.

Labour has regularly had severe splits and obvious internal tension throughout the modern era and an obvious way of understanding Labour's current struggles is to understand the background to, and consequences of, previous internal bickering within Labour. During the 1950s Aneurin Bevan maintained a consistent opposition to the party leadership from a left wing perspective, a position that was eventually inherited by Ian Mikardo when Bevan joined the front bench. This did not abate as time moved on. In the 1960s and 1970s the so-called Tribune group of left wing MPs regularly caused difficulties for the government (Finer, 1980, pp. 114–120). At this time the issues became less ideological and more personal, with even the intrinsic desirability of unity of purposes being implied to be a point of contention. Powell notes, for instance, that part of Michael Foot and Tony Benn's – both firebrands of the left within the party – issues with one another stemmed from Foot's belief that the unity of the party must be a key priority, and Benn's disagreement with even that (Powell, 2001, p. 66). The 1980s were marked by even tenser and more bitter internal struggles of the issue of 'Militant Tendency', a group which aimed to transform the party into a much more radical left wing force than it ever was previously. This was a time of strong personalities, as Tony Benn finally attempted to seize control of the party apparatus and party positions from his more moderate opponents. This only started to abate when Benn lost his own seat in 1983 and Labour started its very long process of slowly moderating (Seyd, 1987, p. 167). This resulted in the issue of internal unity becoming an overriding goal within the party by this stage. Kinnock viewed it as 'the only way to make Labour electable' (Jones, 1994, p. 13).

In some ways this history is less than surprising for Labour. It has long been thought of as a party of 'factions' which is habitually more divided than its Conservative rivals (Finer, 1980, p. 116). But this is not a story without consequences, and without outwards manifestations. It is worth pointing out that prominent Labour figures felt that organised rebellion was anathema to the party, and anything other than isolated conscience votes were to be strongly discouraged. Former cabinet minister Richard Crossman said that it conscience votes 'must be individual, not collective, not organised' (Crossman, 1975, p. 96). Certainly, MPs needed to agree with the party generally, and confine public displays of disloyalty to technical issues. However this was a policy pursued by both major parties and if this was how dissent actually operated than virtually all of it would be little known figures voting against governments on bills of little note, like the Tory MP Tom Stuttaford voting in support of an amendment to clause 3 of the 1973 water bill, an event likely only remembered because Phillip Norton uses it as his example of the dissent that party leaders can cope with (Norton, 1978, p. 35).

Nonetheless, the aforementioned Tribune Group and Militant were clearly factors in the party. Every single Tribune affiliated MP voted against Labour at least once between 1974 and 1979 (Seyd, 1987, p. 80). Militant was considered such an issue in the 1980s that Neil Kinnock used his Leaders speech

in 1985 not, primarily, to attack the Thatcher government but to condemn Labour's own Militant dominated council in Liverpool (Kinnock, 1985).

The existence of these factions can be traced to a growing disappointment among the membership with the behaviour of the parliamentary party in government, as well as a change in the fundamental character of the membership. There seem to be two trends with the membership of the party. Firstly, Labour membership began to fall, and fairly alarmingly so, after it reached its 1950s peak. Labour individual membership was as high as 1,014,524 in 1952, but by 1973 it had fallen to 665,379. If anything, this overstated the true figure, and the number of 'real' party members by this point was probably really only 150,000 to 200,000 individuals (McLean, 1978, p. 51). The members that were left were also different. Even amidst the falling membership Labour was attracting new recruits. These were disproportionally well-educated and ideological. They had not joined the party to be deferential to the existing elites. Those working class members who remained were likewise becoming less deferential. This left the party in a conundrum. The usual strategy for winning elections is to appeal to the moderate centre of politics, and this should be reflected in party policy. But this means that 'If it [Labour] wants to win elections, it must disappoint party militants; but if it disappoints them again and again, it can hardly expect them to keep on paying their party subscriptions….' (McLean, 1978, p. 53).

Most of the areas on which large sections membership disagreed with the leadership were in a similar clump of policy issues. The prominence of individual issues waxed and waned as time passed but nearly always included the issue of nationalisation of industry, capital punishment, nuclear disarmament and Europe all achieving particular prominence (Turner, 1978, p. 232). The issue of nationalisation was long an important one for hierarchy, and led to frequent conference defeats for Wilson in particular when he was Prime Minister (Howell, 1976, p. 245).

However the most important issue at this time was whether Britain should join the European Community (which would become the European Union). This was important as a source of division for a number of reasons. Firstly it was both an area in which the ideologically left members had strong feeling on, but also one of the only areas where significant numbers of other people in the party were also critical (Turner, 1978, p. 232). Furthermore, Europe predominantly grew as a concern in the party because of what the party leadership was using EU membership as in the 1960s – as a means of compensating for Britain's poor economic performance for a number of years (Howell, 1976, p. 272). It was also something that the US was pushing for, owing to Britain's growing international weakness (Peele, 2016, p. 282). This was particularly galling for this portion of the membership as the economic policies that Wilson's government was enacting were certainly

breaches of party principles and promises, in addition to being very unsuccessful at improving the British economy (Howell, 1976, p. 253).

The top ranks of the party were also torn up over it. While initially broadly favourable to EU membership and campaigned in 1970 on that basis, opinion began to shift in the party when they moved into opposition. While several senior figures in the party expressed a growing disquiet with joining the EU, party deputy leader Roy Jenkins was very determined to express his full support for membership. All efforts to hold the party together at the time of the vote ultimately came to nothing, with even efforts to limit the parliamentary rebellion being rejected as a compromise (Campbell, 2014, pp. 371–379). Certainly, the referendum in 1976 seems to have been an effort by Wilson to avoid a split within his deeply divided party. It seems to have been a purely political move to try to ease internal tension (Peele, 2016, p. 285). However, after some short term relief If anything, things got worse within the party as time progressed, in spite of the issue's lack of salience to much of the British public (McLean, 1978, p. 48). This was one of the primary issues on which the Social Democratic Party (SDP) split from the Labour party in 1981 (Crewe & King, 1995). It is worth noting that, if anything, the bitterness of the divide is understated, as individuals within the party did attempt to tone down their rhetoric in the interest of party unity (George & Rosamond, 1992, p. 183). It is also worth noting that Europe alone did not determine the 1976 leadership contest to succeed Wilson – although it was undoubtedly a factor. The divisions between MPs were much too complex to be boiled down to any single divide, no matter how pertinent (Heppell, Crines, & Nicholls, 2010, p. 68).

This sort of behaviour however strongly suggests that Labour politicians at the time viewed public displays of disunity as being something that the electorate would punish. This is probably due to the difficulty in persuading the public as to the merits of particular policy positions when the party itself is not entirely convinced of them, and is sufficiently unhappy with to express this view publicly (Norris, 1994, p. 174). This was probably borne out by the party's very public internal disintegration at the beginning of the 1980s and its subsequent collapse of twenty percentage points in the polls (Whiteley, 1983, p. 4). The party's own external image on unity was so bad by 1983 that Miller argues that we should not expect to manifest as an independent predictor of vote choice. This is because, while almost no non-Labour voters rate Labour's 'team' as effective, almost none of the public that were still voting for Labour rated them as in any way competent either (Miller, 1992, p. 339). The party certainly came across as significantly more united in subsequent elections (Curtice & Semetko, 1994, p. 52).

All of this suggests that party unity in the British Labour is an important issue in the party's history and development, and certainly that the party's very public contemporary woes have strong echoes in the party's history over decades. It also suggests that the issues that preoccupy the party at present have been present throughout the party's history – such as Europe and nuclear weapons – and have been almost as divisive at each point in time. It however also suggests that this is an issue that wax and wanes, and is not of equal importance, which suggests variation. There is also the suggestion that this matters on multiple dimensions. Labour seems to divide on both policy related and on non-policy related grounds. Both need to be analysed.

Dataset and Methodology

In order to evaluate the electoral impact of party cohesion on the British Labour party data had to be gathered. Much of the data comes from Davidson's paper, a methodology paper concerned with fractional cointegration primarily, but in order to demonstrate what he was examining he used a database of fifty years of monthly Gallup polls, combined with extensive economic data (Davidson, 2005). It is hoped to use his foundational data combined with my own gathered data from newspapers to test the hypothesis.

While Davidson gathered data from 1950 to 2000 only the data from February 1963 until December 1989 has been used here. This is due to time constraints with data gathering. It is nonetheless hoped to extend the research to include all years from 1950 until the Millenium. These temporary date bounds have been chosen for reasons however which are outlined below.

The newspaper data gathered in this instance was fairly broad. The data gathered were editorials from 'The Times' during the time period. The Times was chosen for several reasons. It is a major newspaper of record in Britain, which is regarded as a major broadsheet publication which provides extensive current affairs coverage. Additionally unlike some of its major broadsheet rivals like 'The Telegraph' and 'The Guardian' the Times is relatively more impartial, although it is still considered a right wing paper on the whole (Curtice & Semetko, 1994). It has endorsed both major parties in general elections since World War Two, which means that it might be expected to somewhat more impartial than other more ideological newspapers, or, at the least, that it is not so wedded to one party as to not be able to see its flaws.

Editorials were chosen for two reasons. Firstly they were chosen for practical ease of use. Using editorials rather than every article ever written by the Times cuts down the amount of articles that need to be read considerably. There is little reason to believe that this will very meaningfully cut the quality of the data received. Editorials by their nature provide comment on the major events on the day and provides a chance for the newspaper to express its editorial stance explicitly to its readership. It would be very unusual for a newspaper of The Times' standing and interest in political events not to provide comment on the political events of the day. The use of editorials therefore also provides an implicit filter on whether an event is 'important' or just political noise, and not worthy of general notice or comment. You know that something is important if the Editorial broad decides it worthy of particular comment. If, however, the Times was actually being biased or trying to 'sabotage' a party which it did not approve of we would expect that to manifest, not only in the results, but also in the basic distribution of their editorials. It seems unlikely that a broadsheet newspaper would, even in the worst interpretation of the hostile press, do anything quite that overt.

However not all editorials were used as, naturally, there were many issues in Britain that warranted discussion, not just internal battles in British Labour. However when it is relevant we should expect the newspaper to comment. In this comment they will certainly outline the names of the major personalities involved, either to discuss how they are causing the rupture or what they are doing in order to avert it. As the brief history outlines in the justification for the use of this case, specific personalities were often integral parts of this conflict. This includes the four party leaders during this time – Harold Wilson, James Callaghan, Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock but also other senior figures in the party which never quite emerged to the leadership. This includes foot and Kinnock's long-term nemesis from the ideological left Tony Benn but also moderate and SDP founder Roy Jenkins, who also hoped to transform British politics to his own liking. The time period of 1963-1989 means that this analysis will cover the entirety of Wilson's leadership of the party, as well as that of Calllaghan and Foot, and all bar the last two years of Kinnock's tenure. It also covers long periods of Labour being in both opposition and in government, and great changes in British society and economy oover this time period. The bound at 1989 also helps us to disregard the ending of the Cold War, which arguably changed politics on the left to such a degree as to make it difficult to compare ideological disputes before and after this point.

This is reflected in the search criteria for editorials. Using the Times digital archive editorials that included the names of at least two of the prominent figures of the period were included. These were bounded for when they were significant factors in the British Labour Party politics. On the whole, this meant that nine pairs of relationships were searched for over the time period

1963-1976	Wilson-Callaghan
	Wilson-Jenkins
	Jenkins-Callaghan
1976-1980	Callaghan-Jenkins
1980-1983	Foot-Benn
	Foot-Healy
	Healy-Benn
1983-1989	Kinnock-Benn
	Kinnock-Smith

 Table – Dyads of politicians searched for, and the years within which they were searched for

These were chosen because these were the main British Labour political figures of their time. While there are clearly other figures that were relevant to the political scene during this period, none of them had the same level of clout within the party over an extended time period, or achieved quite the same level of high office either within the party or in terms of ministerial office. These figures are more than local party stalwarts – they have a reasonable claim to be the main public faces of the party, who more than anyone else set the tone for future of the party. If there is an effect on the public perception of the party in any area, it is likely to originate from such figures as these.

All editorials were read that met this criteria and coded under a number of objective and subjective criteria. They were coded for issues such as the length of the piece, how many paragraphs the piece contained, what dates it occurred on, the page number and the primary personalities involved. It was also coded under a number of more subjective criteria. These included whether the article was positive or negative in tone, whether the article concerned policy and if so what policies it was primarily concerned with, whether it concerned the party leadership, whether it occurred during a party conference, whether it occurred during a general election campaign, whether it occurred during an internal party leadership campaign and whether the mention of the Labour's own disunity was merely a passing reference, or the main focus of the editorial. This meant that of 9,460 editorials that were published in the Times between February 1963 and December 1989 there were 257 applicable editorials. This means that 2.72% of all possible days in this time period had some discussion, however tangential, about Labour cohesion. While this proportion may seem low it is worth pointing out that Labour is one major party of two, and that numerous major events of global importance happened over this twenty-six year stretch.

The key dependent variable for analysis is the net change in Labour support in that month versus the previous month. For example if Labour had 30% support in one month, and then fell to 28% in the next month, the observation would record this at -2 in this instance. This has a range of X to Y. There are a number of advantages to using these Gallup polls exclusively throughout this period. Gallup polls regularly and relatively frequently throughout the period. This means that it can actually be used as a data source for the entire time period. It also polls with extreme regularity. Gallup has exactly one poll per month throughout this period. This means that the data is unlikely to be affected by sudden bursts in polling distorting the values of the independent variable. With the polling occurring at regularly intervals, the gap between polls effectively varies between twenty-eight and thirty-one days. This means that each new polling observation in the dataset has roughly the same chance to accumulate editorials that discuss cohesion in the same time frame.

However this also means that the number of observations is small. There are only 325 months during this twenty-six year interval. This is a fairly small sample size on which to base any sort of statistical analysis. This means that the number of independent variables must, by necessity, be kept small so as not to overburden any statistical model used.

The sample size however must be cut still further for much of the analysis. This is because, naturally, most months include no discussion whatsoever of cohesion in their editorial page. It simply was a non-issue and not worthy of discussion during that time. When it did come up however there might be a periodic mention of 'tensions' or 'disagreements', or there might be a sudden flurry of

discussion and comment from the editorial board. As already discussed, there are many factors that influence how and why people make the voting decisions that they do. It is certainly not expected that party cohesion is a predominant factor. It is only expected that it matters and may sway some individuals at the margins. However any effect that is there is likely to only be discernable, owing to the sample size issue, when it is at the forefront of voter's minds. It is therefore proposed to examine two versions of the dataset – the first including all possible months, and the second only months where cohesion warranted at least some discussion in the editorial page. If this was swinging some voters, even if just an instinctual reaction that does not survive long term, we are most likely to observe it in this form.

The main independent variable is number of negative editorials that discuss divisions, in some form or another, within the British Labour Party in that month. This is simply a count of the number of negative editorials that appeared in the Times that month.

There are a number of control variables. Opinion polls do not occur in a vacuum, and have statistical error bounds and reflect broader trends in politics at that moment. This makes them vulnerable to a self-correcting long term average. If the poll is conducted well then, in most instances, the poll will be corrected, within an error bound. However this means that if there is a strong change in one poll, we should expect there should be some sort of bounce back in the next poll, simply because of how extreme the last poll result was. This is significant if the causal mechanism actually works in the opposite way as hypothesis. If falling poll rating causes individuals members in the party to lash out and attack the leader for causing this problem, then it is possible that that this could manifest in the results as a rise in support for Labour as the reversion to the mean has already started to take place. This would be in spite of the party settling into polling at some kind of new and lower level. Additionally there are more substantive issues at play here. There is laboratory evidence for knowledge of previous opinion polls influencing how one might vote in the US at least (See Mehrabian, 1998 for a full description of his experiment on the matter). It is not expected or believed that opinion polls happen in a vacuum. We do expect voters to be at least somewhat of them. As this can influence their thinking it must be independently accounted for. Accordingly a lag of the dependent variable must be included to correct for such issues in the trend.

For similar reasons a lag of the key independent variable, the number of negative editorials discussing party cohesion, must also be included, to account for the possibility that any effect is not instantaneous. Also included were the most statistically relevant variable from Davidson's analysis – the treasury bond rates. This is because they are a relatively good indicator proxy for the overall health of the economy. His dependent variable – the polling lead that the government had over the

opposition, was also included, as it might be expected that this would affect what party figures are willing to say or consider saying as it affects their level of risk.

This data violates a number of standard statistical assumptions, which means that an ordinary least squares linear regression cannot be performed. In order to cope with the problems caused by this a bootstrap regression was used in each case with a pseudo-random number generator, in order to allow replicability. While this somewhat hampers the interpretation of exact coefficients, it does mean that the analysis can actually place, and in addition to this has the advantage of somewhat alleviating for the relatively small sample size.

Based on the response of elites the reaction we should expect is a negative one from the electorate. This leads to:

H1: The more negative editorials that appear in any given month, the more percentage points Labour will lose in the polls in that month compared to the previous month.

However we also expect the reaction, if any, to be sharper in those months where cohesion is of particular relevance and is current for the electorate. This, in turn, leads to:

H2: The more negative editorials that appear in any month where there is at least one editorial discussing cohesion, the more percentage points Labour will lose in the polls in that month compared to the previous month compared with the comparison with any one month.
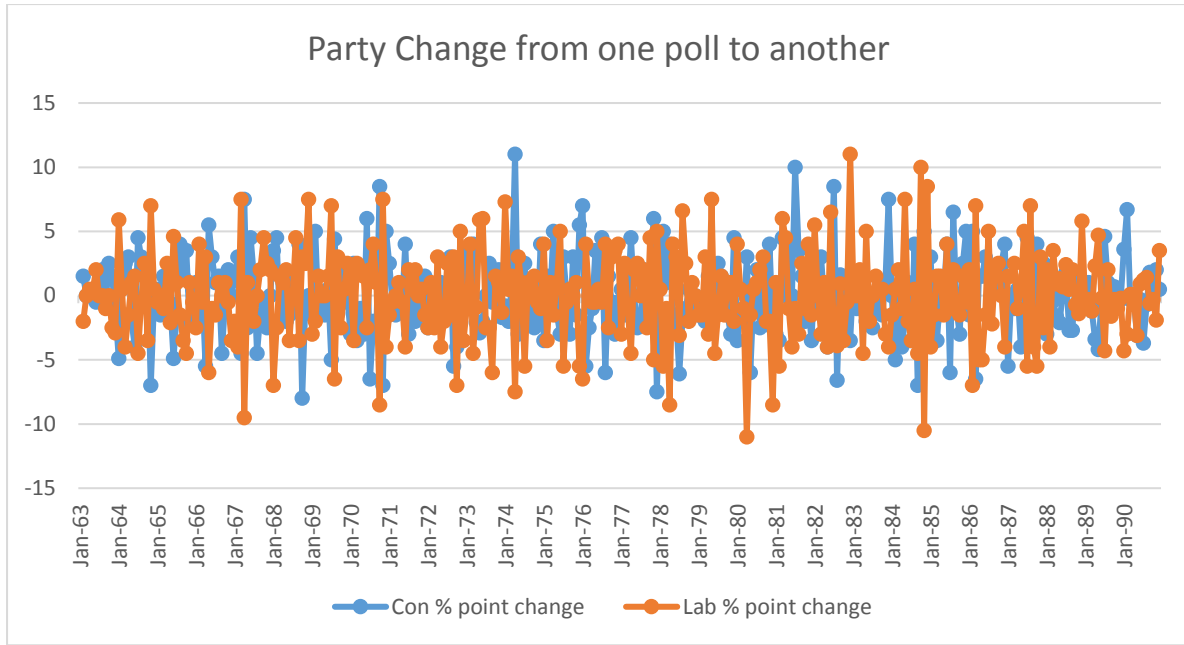
Results

There is certainly variation in the both the dependent and major independent variable. Both of which also behave very like what one would expect from them.

Opinion Polls 1963-1990
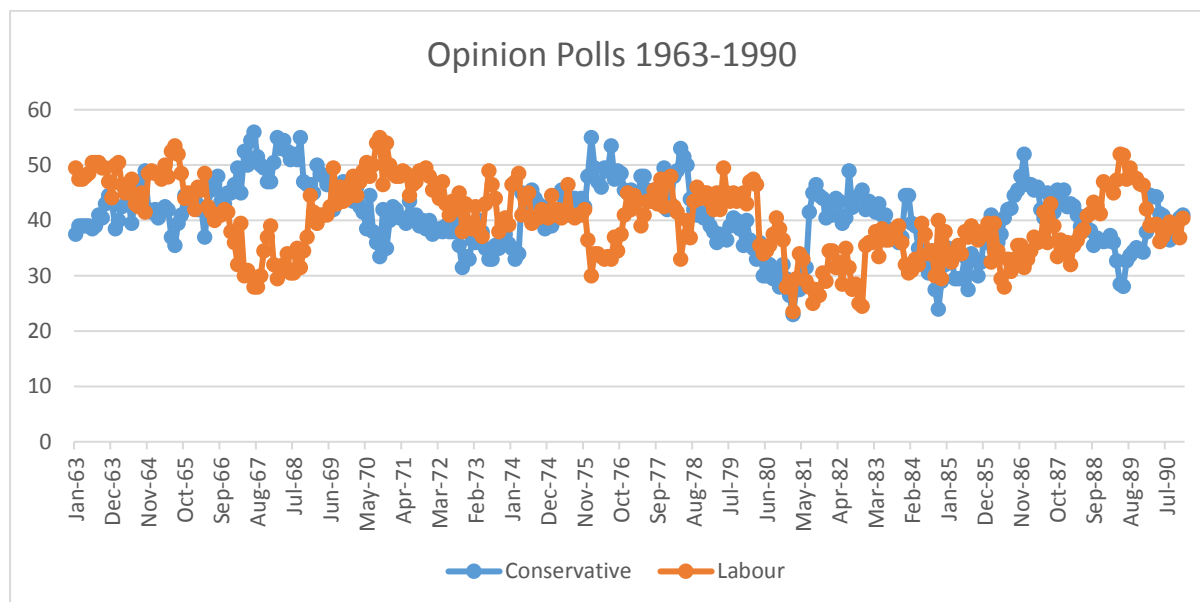
Gallup opinion polls behave, naturally, very similarly in this time period as to the popular conception of how well the various parties were doing at that point in time. Labour are narrowly ahead when they win the 1965 election by a very narrow margin. Labour margin in the polls grows and they win the 1966 election – called precisely to give the winning party a large workable majority in the House of Commons. This situation of Labour popularity does not last and the party starts to fall quite alarmingly as Britain's economy starts to disintegrate under Labour stewardship, with the Conservatives achieving an extended lead of approximately twenty percentage points, a position that they maintained almost until the election in 1970, when Labour suddenly pulled back ahead, before unexpectedly losing by only three percentage points. Following on this we can observe the relative unpopularity of the Heath government, which similarly had economic difficulty and, like Wilson's Labour government, ultimately pulled back most of their lost ground and actually won slightly more votes than Labour in February 1974. Labour win the November 1974 election more easily – which is also present in the chart. The party after re-entering office struggles on in 1975 before collapsing quite sharply in the late 1970s due to the oil crash and the 'winter of discontent'. They go on to lose the 1979 election. This is the most problematic portion of the poll series. Gallup seems to start systematically overstating Labour at this point in time. Gallup predicts that Labour will win the 1979 election. It then correctly records Labour's *annus horribilis* in 1981 (Whiteley, 1983) but then records Labour consistently above 30% throughout the rest of that parliamentary term, only falling towards the end, and well above the 27.6% that the party actually won in that contest.

Labour's fortunes after that fare better, both in reality and in the poll series, accurately reflecting their clear defeat in 19087 before their clear lead prior to the ousting of Margaret Thatcher in 1990. Gallup seems to be accurately recording polls relative to what was actually happening, and so there is little reason to distrust their individual poll outside this collective, or that changes from one individual poll to another do not reflect something meaningful, at least in the aggregate.

This pattern of predictable statistical regularity is borne out in the month-by-month change in the opinion poll results of both major parties. Neither of them seems to exhibit much evidence of bias. Both cluster around zero for the entire period of analysis. Significant swings, either positive or negative, occur only rarely. The Conservative polling pattern seems superficially more regular than Labour's as Labour exhibits sharp swings in both directions in the 1980s, but even then it clusters around zero on the whole, and this might be expected during the most tempestuous period of modern Labour's history.

Number of Editorials per month
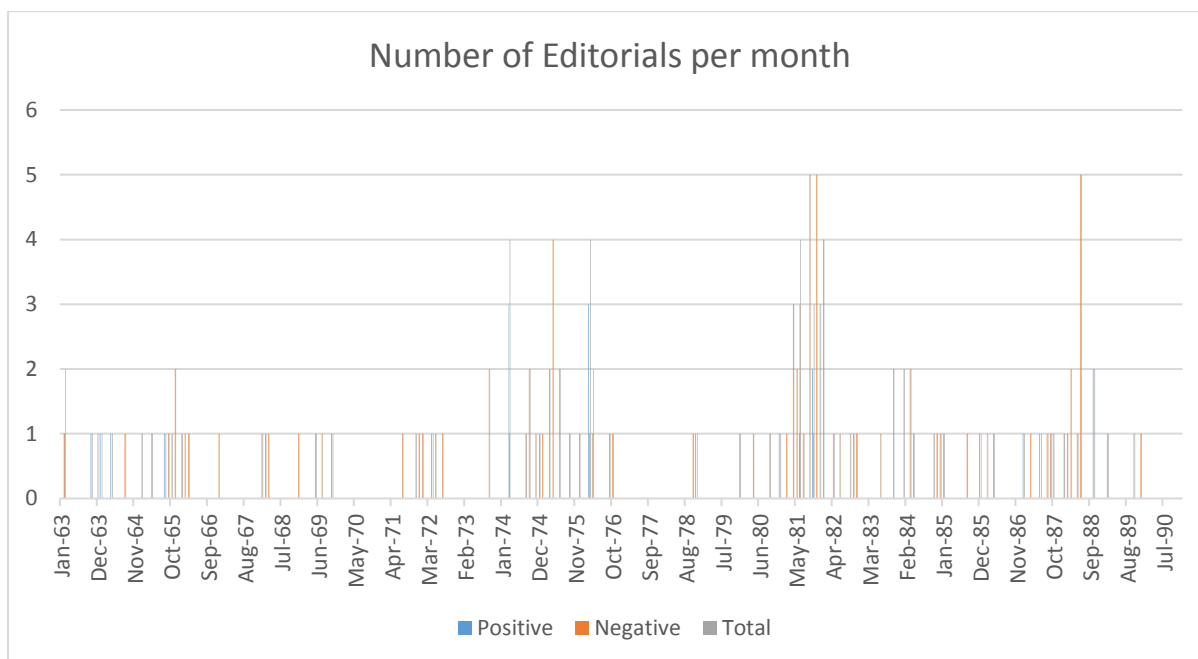
An examination of the editorials also suggests that they are behaving as expected. While no month has more than five editorials that relate to Labour party cohesion this is unsurprising when one considers that there are fewer editorials that discuss this than there are months in the sample. There is a somewhat constant and regular appearance of editorials with a number of surges. These correspond with the real points that the literature discusses as being the big points where the party had noticeable and observable differences. These occur at three points. The middle of the 1970s are clearly a difficult point for Labour. This is the point that the party's internal divisions over Britain's European Union membership became most apparent and manifest. Reflecting the long time period that this rumbled on for, these crop up over a two year period. The second surge is the most well-known one – the party's internal disintegration in the early 1980s. This coincided with the time that the party was torn up over the role of the left in the party and over Tony Benn's efforts to dramatically reshape the party to his own image. This spike also coincides with when this division was at its worst. When Labour resettles before their eventual, bad, defeat to the Conservatives in 1983 the overall number of editorials remains low. The final spike in the data occurs in 1988, when Tony Benn finally challenges Neil Kinnock for the leadership of the party. This naturally attracts considerable media interest before his defeat. In general, the spikes occur at the points in time when we would mostly expect them to, and at roughly the same intervals. This, in turn, suggests that the Times is not biased – at least in its rates of coverage of events and that it is thus more than reasonable to use them.

Table 1: Basic Models with DV Labour's poll change

	(1) Complete dataset	(2) Cohesion relevant subset
Total editorials	0.0909	0.505
	(0.209)	(0.302)
constant	-0.0654	-0.961
	(0.202)	(0.687)
N	335	95
R^2	0.001	0.017

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Probing the data statistically at a basic, preliminary level does not yield great insights. Using a bootstrap regression with a pseudo-random sample from the data without controls does not yield significant results in either the large sample size consisting of the entirety of the data in the dataset, nor the smaller subsample consisting of only those months where cohesion was a particular issue at that time. The cohesion relevant subset was much closer to statistical significance at conventional levels than the broader sample, with a p-value of 0.095. Predictably also the r-squared values were low, not even reaching 2% of all variation in the dependent variable accounted for in the model using only relevant data, which was the better model in this case. Unexpectedly the sign of the independent variable in both cases was positive. Even if the data was statistically significant this is more meaningful than the coefficients owing to the bootstrap technique taking random samples with replacement of the data. While neither model was statistically significant in this instance this nonetheless goes against both hypotheses.

Table 2: Complete Models, with DV Labour's poll change

	(1) Complete Dataset	(2) Cohesion relevant subset
Total editorials	0.166	0.777*
	(0.218)	(0.347)
% change in Lab poll previous month	-0.325***	-0.436***
	(0.0593)	(0.123)
No. editorials previous month	-0.207	-0.268
	(0.204)	(0.267)
Treasury bond rate when in office	0.0154	0.0360
	(0.0444)	(0.0696)
% govt lead when in office	-0.0408	-0.0645
	(0.0297)	(0.0748)
constant	-0.101	-1.451*
	(0.250)	(0.708)
N	322	94
R^2	0.114	0.178

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The addition of controls however does change the picture. In the subset of the sample where the cohesion was of most immediate relevance – where it actually warranted being discussed at least once in the month, the number of editorials is indeed statistically significant. What this means in substantive terms is difficult to evaluate fully, owing to the difficulty of interpreting bootstrapped coefficients. However, for every extra editorial above the first one that is written about the Labour party's internal struggles the party, in this random selection, gained 0.78% of the vote in this poll relative to the previous poll. This is not significant in the broader dataset, although it is still a positive effect. The number of editorials published in the previous month that discussed cohesion however was negative, albeit insignificant. In fact, the only other statistically significant variable in either model was how much Labour's poll rating at changed in the previous month. This was highly

statistically significant and negative in both models. In this bootstrapped sample for the whole dataset for every 1% Labour had gained in the polls during the month prior, it lost 0.33% the next month. It's even more severe in the cohesion related smaller sample, where Labour lost 0.44% in the subsequent month. This pattern is unsurprising with this variable. This is because we expect, and can observe, that Labour's overall poll rating tends to stay static. While there is a lot of statistical noise it, on the whole, is relatively stable. This means we should expect to see some sort of regression to the mean whenever Labour do well or badly. This means that if Labour goes up in a poll, they are more likely to go down rather than up in the following poll.

These findings, like in the basic model, are also counterintuitive. It seems odd that Labour would gain in opinion polls when its internal arguments are being discussed in the press. It seems especially odd that this continues to happen, and indeed the effect gets stronger when Labour's polling recent trend is accounted for. It is worth seeing what factors are driving this. It is therefore worth checking whether this is an artefact of the data or some kind of uniform poll swing.

If this unusual effect was simply a product of polls, and not specific to Labour, we would expect the main alternative to Labour, the Conservative Party, to gain whenever Labour loses. This seems to be generally true when looking at the overall polling trends above. However this interpretation does not seem to be valid here. In no model did the Conservatives gain appreciably when the internal cohesion of Labour was more under discussion. In no case was there statistical significance. Once again, the only particularly relevant variable was how much of a swing the Conservatives had achieved towards them in the previous poll, which behaved as expected and similarly to the equivalent variable when examining Labour.

Another possibility is to examine the tone of articles. If the result is being driven entirely by positive articles praising Labour, while happening to discuss cohesion, this result is significantly more explicable.

Table 3: All models, with DV the Conservative's poll change

	(1) Complete Dataset	(2) Cohesion relevant subset	(3) Complete Dataset	(4) Cohesion relevant subset
Total editorials	0.150	-0.105	0.0489	-0.284
	(0.152)	(0.229)	(0.183)	(0.348)
% change in Con poll previous month			-0.246***	-0.129
			(0.0599)	(0.105)
No. editorials previous month			0.334	0.216
			(0.281)	(0.439)
Treasury bond rate when in office			-0.00216	0.0614
			(0.0315)	(0.0573)
% govt lead when in office			-0.0131	-0.0215
			(0.0201)	(0.0388)
constant	-0.0525	0.498	-0.182	0.209
	(0.187)	(0.485)	(0.259)	(0.530)
N	335	95	322	94
R^2	0.002	0.001	0.068	0.044

Standard errors in parentheses
$^*\ p < 0.05$, $^{**}\ p < 0.01$, $^{***}\ p < 0.001$

Table 4: Revised model, with DV Labour's poll change and key IV total positive editorials

	(1) Complete Dataset	(2) Complete Dataset	(3) Cohesion relevant subset	(4) Cohesion relevant subset
Total positive editorials	-0.281	-0.181	-0.184	-0.0398
	(0.456)	(0.524)	(0.522)	(0.587)
% change in Lab poll previous month		-0.328***		-0.422**
		(0.0596)		(0.130)
No. positive editorials previous month		-0.577		0.209
		(0.508)		(1.101)
Treasury bond rate when in office		0.0182		0.0372
		(0.0445)		(0.0727)
% govt lead when in office		-0.0384		-0.0578
		(0.0291)		(0.0757)
constant	-0.00453	-0.0619	-0.159	-0.475
	(0.193)	(0.240)	(0.456)	(0.524)
N	335	322	95	94
R^2	0.001	0.115	0.001	0.144

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

As can be seen in Table 4, editorials that are positive in tone appear to have essentially no impact on polls. While the sign of the coefficients remains negative for all models, they are insignificant, and quite strikingly so, in every model. The only relevant variable is, once again, the change in the party's poll rating in the previous month. While there are not that many positive editorials in the dataset (there are only twenty-seven in total) it seems clear that they are not having a disproportionate impact on results. It is not that the British public has been temporarily swayed by new and positive coverage of the party.

Table 5: Revised model, with DV Labour's poll change and key IV total positive editorials

	(1) Complete Dataset	(2) Complete Dataset	(3) Cohesion relevant subset	(4) Cohesion relevant subset
Total negative editorials	0.171	0.213	0.553	0.742[*]
	(0.247)	(0.250)	(0.297)	(0.365)
% change in Lab poll previous month		-0.325[***]		-0.427[***]
		(0.0598)		(0.124)
No. negative editorials previous month		-0.136		-0.295
		(0.213)		(0.357)
Treasury bond rate when in office		0.0154		0.0406
		(0.0445)		(0.0714)
% govt lead when in office		-0.0421		-0.0604
		(0.0299)		(0.0746)
constant	-0.0855	-0.148	-0.875	-1.215
	(0.198)	(0.246)	(0.581)	(0.683)
N	335	322	95	94
R^2	0.001	0.114	0.021	0.178

Standard errors in parentheses
[*] $p < 0.05$, [**] $p < 0.01$, [***] $p < 0.001$

When one examines the editorials solely considered negative it reveals a similar pattern to what occurs when one merely looks at all editorials. There exists a clear and positive correlation between having a greater number of editorials that discuss Labour cohesion and Labour's performance in the polls that month. Every other variable behaves as expected and as they have in other models. This effect only merges in the model with the reduced cohesion related sample. Also, while the number of negative editorials is relatively close to being significant in the conventional sense (it has a p-value of 0.063) it is not. This means that the number of negative editorials is somehow, independently of the level of the previous month's coverage and independently of the trend in Labour's polls, related to good fortunes for Labour in the short term. It is important not to overstate this. The r-squared on

all of these models is relatively modest, and never reaches higher than 17.8% of all variation in the dependent variable accounted for. Clearly, there are other factors accounting for a great deal of variation in opinion polls in a given month. Equally clearly, this sort of coverage and events does not matter in a general sense, but it does in those months when it is of the most relevance to people. Something appears to be causing Labour's short term polling to improve when there is more negative coverage of events within the party.

Analysis

There are a number of possible, potentially inter-connecting, explanations for this counter-intuitive result, which contradicts previous results of analysis of cohesion as well as the author's own results with election studies, as well as being contrary to the central hypotheses. These can be summarised as relating to the nature of the lack of cohesion, the nature of news coverage and the nature of the voters themselves. The differing time horizon, that is much more short-term, that exists here that is not present in election studies may also play a role. These shall be discussed in turn.

The time horizon is undoubtedly important, and places this in a very different context from analysis that only looks at election. What this result does not tell us is that an increased lack of cohesion which is covered in a negative way helps a party in elections. Rather it is that this increased lack of cohesion helps the party in the next opinion poll. The superficial, observable correlation that Labour did very badly in 1983 – the election in which it was most divided remains. It also remains true to say, as election studies have found, that if an individual voter perceives a party as less united they are less likely to vote for that party, all other things being equal. Opinion polls are very good predictors of election results, but they are not the same as them. There have been numerous 'misses' in opinion polls in Britain. The 1992 example is well known (see Crewe, 1992; Curtice & Semetko, 1994). There are however others, including very recent examples. While polls were generally close in the final days of the vote most pollsters did indeed predict that Britain would vote to stay in the EU in 2016 (BBC, 2016). This has happened before, with the 2015 election being called wrongly due to insufficient randomness in polling samples (Sturgis et al., 2016), distorting other prediction models that had worked well in previous elections (for example Fisher, Ford, Jennings, Pickup, & Wlezien, 2011).

This reflects a few issues that we already knew about polling. Firstly, that a random sample of the population, however well done, is just that – random, and may not however much the risk is mitigated against be an exact replica of the intentions of the population (Worcester, 1996). This is particularly true if there is some sort of 'spiral of silence' effect, where people are reluctant to express what they feel are unpopular views (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). 'Landslide' elections, where the stakes are believed to be low owing to the certainty of victory, may produce a similar effect (See Magalhães, 2005 for a discussion of this in Portugal). What all of this means is that there are reasons why polling may not get exactly where the electorate stands at any given moment. The second issue is that, however much pollsters say it, being asked in a poll how you would vote if there was a general election tomorrow is not the same as actually voting. Firstly, they become less accurate the further away from an election that they are (Callegaro & Gasperoni, 2006, p. 163). The second issue

is sampling. While we can make good guesses, we actually just don't know who will show up on election day. Pollsters are attempting to make a sample out of an unknown population (Hillygus, 2011, p. 966). This means that even when the polls get it right, that may be due to luck, or belie questionable underlying assumptions and practices (Panagopoulos, 2014, p. 905). It is quite possible that what exercises a voter in a poll far from a general election or any prospect of one is not an issue on which they would actually vote. It is also possible that the population being sampled for this poll is not necessarily reflective of the subsequent population of that votes even if it is a perfect reflection of the issues that concern this particular sample.

In short, there are reasons to believe that the reactions that polls produce and the samples they draw on have to are different from elections. It is easier to express approval or disapproval in a poll when you ultimately know that it does not matter than it is to do the same at a general election, when you may have to live with your choice for years.

It may also be that, while every effort was made to accommodate it, that the impact of the polls on cohesion is too far back to be captured by a lagged variable. It may be that bad polls do not trigger actions, they trigger plans for future actions so it does not manifest until well after the previous month it occurred, when the party might have begun to claw back lost ground in any case. These interpretations, based on the drawbacks of this sort of data and analysis, cannot be completely dismissed. It must be noted however that only negative editorials had an impact, which suggests something more specific than data deficiencies.

The events covered in these editorials are diverse, but there are a number of consistent themes that continuously crop up. The most important of which is leadership within the party. This can either be the literal titled position as head of the party, or as a figure of great influence within the party that has great influence on policy. This can be seen, for instance, in much of the career of Roy Jenkins, a senior Labour politicians whose career in the party, both at cabinet and elsewhere, spanned most of the time period under study. In battling uncompromisingly for Britain's entry to Europe, at the expense of his career in the party, he clearly shows that much of the struggle for political leadership does not have to be for actual positions within the party (although he did contest the leadership) (Campbell, 2014). If anything Tony Benn's crusade to transform the Labour Party into a far-left political outfit was even more extreme in this area, and at least somewhat intersected with that of Jenkins (Powell, 2001). This sort of struggle may actually be useful to the party, in that it allows them to see that there are alternative perspectives at play in the party. It allows voters to rationalise and gives means for them to dismiss the views and perspectives of politicians who they may not approve of. A left wing voter may not like Roy Jenkins in 1970s Labour, but they can be reassured that this

same party has Tony Benn and Michael Foot as among its most senior members as well, who have a reasonable likelihood of overruling Jenkins. This means that large numbers of voters may not actually be seeing division and strife primarily, but the expression of views by senior figures in the party that they themselves hold. This naturally makes them more inclined to support the party.

Furthermore, formal leadership contests within a party are a somewhat unique event. They are occasions where it is not only tolerated but expected that individuals within a party may argue with one another, sometimes ferociously. Voters may simply see this and positively to the vibrancy of the news coverage and media attention.

These interpretations, while plausible, do not necessarily help us to truly understand this phenomenon however. They do not help us to explain why it is the *negative* accounts of cohesion which are driving the statistical analysis – positive accounts have no specific impact. It is necessarily to look elsewhere for why voters might react positively to negative coverage.

The second potential explanation for this result is what news coverage means in and of itself. If an event is covered in an editorial that generally means it is significant and newsworthy. That also means that the party is more likely to be in the news in a broader sense. A 'all publicity is good publicity' effect may come into play here. It may be that it is not so much that voters see the negative coverage and commentary of events and react negatively to it, but rather that voters are reminded as to the existence of the party. This results in a small increase in support which does not last. It may be that this provides a short boost but long term harm, as eventually voters come to perceive the party in a certain, largely negative way. Arguably this would be similar to a 'priming' effect (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 11; Zaller, 1992, p. 80). Priming refers to giving respondents prompts to think about a certain issue, which then causes that issue to be a more important factor for decision making when another, related issue is brought up. The respondent is 'primed' to think a certain issue is important. This works in a very similar way here. A lack of cohesion causes renewed attention on the Labour Party, and thus greater news coverage of it. Then when Gallup poll the respondent and ask them who they would vote for if there was a general election tomorrow, they have had prior reason to think about Labour before the question is asked, and thus are more likely to pick them. This works differently than the simple idea that voters like vibrant parties. In this case they have actually not given the party any specific thought whatsoever. They are merely reacting to it cropping up more often. This makes it somewhat more plausible as it does not require voters to view negative coverage positively.

This would explain the negative perception that voters have on the one hand. They do seem to be less likely to vote for parties that they perceive to be divided. It would also explain however why the

results of this study would suggest that infighting is of benefit to Labour. They do indeed benefit – from the notice it provides. They cease to benefit and it starts to cause active harm if it is significant enough to change their overall perception of the party from united to divided.

A final, although related, possibility is a kind of reflexive defensiveness among certain kinds of voters. It might be that voters do not necessarily care about these events at all. Internal party bickering after all may not impact policy or even necessarily the management of parties. However there are numerous Labour identifying voters and there are certainly are lots of voters who think much of the media is biased against the Labour party, an idea that has at least some supporting basis historically (Wilks-Heeg, Blick, & Crone, 2013). Naturally, if you think the media is biased against the Labour Party – which is a party that you may be inclined to support anyway – you may be more sceptical of criticism directed at them from these biased sources. A good way of showing that you disapprove of such an action is to profess support for the party in its time of need and under such unfair criticism.

This may act as a kind of temporary 'underdog' effect, whereby people like to support someone they perceive as losing. However voters may, when casting their ballots in the actual election, recognise that 'Underdogs may capture our hearts, but at the same time, we may recognize that underdogs are usually inferior to top dogs and thus may deserve their subordinate status. As a result, we do not typically predict that our beloved underdogs will actually prevail, and we may not actually support them over more successful social entities.' (Kim et al., 2008, p. 2553). In other words, just because the voters may feel pangs of sympathy for a struggling Labour Party and may want them, at some level, to succeed, that does not mean that will actually vote for them on the day. This would also account for why the positive reaction is limited to the cases where the lack of cohesion was most severe. It may simply require something of that magnitude in order to trigger the underdog effect in voters.

This is the most complete and plausible explanation for the failure of either hypothesis to materialise. It accounts for negative accounts being more influential than positive ones, and also why this may not be apparent in analyses of how people actually vote, as the effect was temporary and reverted to their actual preferences – for strong united parties – by the time of the actual general election.

Conclusion

There does seem to be an effect of cohesion on the poll fortunes of the British Labour Party. However it is not a negative one, as hypothesised. Rather the party seems to do better in polls after incidences that show low levels of cohesion. While there are several possible explanations for this effect the most plausible is an underdog effect. Voters who like the Labour Party already feel sorry or solidarity for them and show their support in an opinion poll, but this does not carry over to support in the much more important general election.

The most obvious point to improve the study is to add data points – there are an additional twenty-two years-worth of data on British Labour to add to the sample, which considerably improves the sample size.

While this result can of course be over-analysed, and may be simply a product of the time this this occurred this is still very relevant. Labour's own current struggles with leadership and the direction of the party means that any result is likely to be of interest. This result is likely to be of little comfort to them. It does not suggest that Labour will do better than its current, dismal, poll ratings. By contrasts it suggests that these may flatter the party, and that once the ballot box becomes more pertinent in voters mind that they will continue to abandon the party.

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