LEADER CHANGE

Volume III: United Kingdom

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Volume I: Denmark
Volume II: Germany
Volume III: United Kingdom
Volume IV: United States

Table of Contents

for

Volume III: United Kingdom

Leader Change

Introduction

by Robert Harmel

When have parties changed their leaders, why, and under what circumstances? As part of the more comprehensive Party Change Project of Robert Harmel and Kenneth Janda, researchers from Texas A&M University undertook to provide data with which to answer such questions for the most significant parties of Denmark, Germany, the U.K., and the U.S. for the period 1950-1990. The driving motivation was to collect data on a number of "independent variables" involving party leader change, with which to help explain other types of party change (encompassing deliberate changes of issue position and party organization).[1]

In order to standardize the information collected for each case of party leader change, Harmel developed an initial coding sheet (the "long form") covering the date of leader change, the names and characteristics of the individuals involved, the leadership position involved, reasons for the change, and certain attributes of the change. For Germany, the U.K., and the U.S., the primary coders were graduate students at Texas A&M. These coders relied upon available English language literature (both secondary literature and, in some cases, party documents), recording the relevant information and making a few coding judgments as necessary. For Denmark, Lars Bille of the University of Copenhagen was the primary source of information concerning leaders and leader changes, and Bille and Harmel together completed the initial coding sheets for those parties.

Once the relevant information had been recorded textually on the "long forms," numeric codes were assigned for each variable and these were recorded on "short forms" (i.e. the Numeric Coding Sheets). Both the initital, long forms and the ultimate, short forms are included in this package, with the short forms (which were coded *from* the long forms) presented first. The long forms are provided so that users who doubt any of our short-form codes may find the information which supported the coding judgment.

The result is a complete set of numeric data on party leadership changes for the significant parties of the four countries, covering the entire period of the Party Change Project. Many of the data are "judgmental" in nature (i.e., relying heavily upon judgments of coders), and should be used with the appropriate cautions in mind. Certain specific assumptions and operational rules underlie the production of the data, and some of those are discussed below.

Position of Leadership Involved

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[1]For explanation and an example of our use of leader change variables as independent variables, see Harmel, Heo, Tan, and Janda (1995), especially page 19, endnote #9.

In any given party at a given time, there may be more than one person who would be thought of as a party leader. The most obvious such situation would involve a case where the leader of the extraparliamentary party leader was not the same person as the leader of the party's parliamentary group. Our objective was to code changes in just the "primary" position of leadership within the party at any particular time. To aid us in identifying the appropriate venue of party leadership (which did indeed vary across parties, and which changed over time within some of the parties), we relied upon decisions made for the "Primary Leader of the Party" variable in another part of the Party Change Project, as recorded in the data book for Parl/Xtraparl Power (May 1996).

In a few instances, the change of primary leader also involved a change of venue (as when the "former" primary leader was extraparliamentary chair, but his/her replacement was parliamentary group leader). In such cases, we always coded the position of the successor as the venue of leadership.

Former Occupation

Among the personal characteristics coded for each leader is the "former occupation." Though any given individual is likely to have held more than one occupation prior to assuming national leadership of a political party, our primary objective with this variable was to code that occupational category with which most voters would have identified a person at the time of his/her selection as party leader. For example, someone who was trained as a lawyer but who held unelected governmental positions for the thirty years prior to assuming party leadership would be assigned a code of "7" (for Government Bureaucrat) on the short form.

Reason(s) for Change of Leader

In coding the reason for changing leaders at a particular time, we identified some departures as being due to "natural causes" (e.g., death or illness), some as clearly voluntary (e.g., resignations to pursue another occupation or to spend more time with family), and some as involving lack of re-selection or pressure to resign. Because "electoral performance" has such an important place in party change theory, special consideration was given to whether pressured / involuntary departures involved electoral considerations. Once again, our purpose here was to identify and code the "primary" reason for the particular change of leader, though there may have been one or more secondary reasons as well.

Character of the Change

Two possible attributes of the change itself - whether it was involved in a change of dominant faction and whether it involved what was seen as clear generational shift - were also coded as dichotomous (yes/no) variables. In determining association with a change of dominant faction we relied heavily upon information recorded in another data book produced for the Party

Change Project, titled Dominant Faction (September 1996). It should be noted that a change of leaders between members of different factions does not necessarily involve a change of dominant faction. In determining whether a particular change of leader involved a clear generational shift, we explicitly and very intentionally relied upon more than just the difference in ages between successive leaders. If we could find no evidence that others in the party saw the change as involving a shift from one generation of leaders to another, we coded the variable as "no." Any user who wishes to develop another variable to capture age differential, *per se*, may do so on the basis of the birth dates supplied for all leaders.

Caution to Users Concerning Quotations: **In reviewing the supporting material on the long forms, we discovered some instances of inaccurate usage of quotation marks. In some cases where quotation marks were used, the affected material was actually a paraphrase. In other cases, exact quotations were not indicated by quotation marks. When such errors were identified, they were, of course, corrected. However, we regretfully can not guarantee that all quotations are correctly identified. Nor should it be assumed that all material on the long forms is necessarily "original." Hence, users should consult original sources before quoting from material contained on the long forms. The original purpose for the long forms was to provide a record to support numerical coding on the short forms; the long forms are provided here only as background for understanding (and checking) the codes that were given.**