**Intra-party democracy, political performance, and the survival of party leaders: Austria, 1945–2011**

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**Abstract:**

Political parties are central to modern democracy and the selection of its leader is one of the most crucial decisions for any political party to make. Yet, the analysis of party leadership survival is still in its infancy. The pioneering research has been confined to few countries and decades and has focused exclusively on performance-related explanations. While performance is an obvious determinant of party leader survival, generations of research on party organizations suggest that intra-party factors should matter, too. We argue that, while the political performance of a party leader (winning elections, securing government participation) is important, intra-party support and the rules of leadership selection add substantively to our understanding of why party leaders survive or fall. We test these expectations on a new data set covering all leaders of Austrian parties between 1945 and 2011. The results of our statistical analysis support our claim and show that intra-party factors have a considerable impact on party leader survival.
Intra-party democracy, political performance, and the survival of party leaders: Austria, 1945–2011
INTRODUCTION

In modern democracies party leaders – the ‘ones’ of their respective parties – are particularly important office holders. As their party’s single most important decision-maker the leader exercises major influence on the policy positions the party advances, the party’s behaviour vis-à-vis other parties, and typically the most important government position available to the party when in office is reserved for the party leader. Likewise, the party leader has a great say in advancing or hindering the careers of fellow partisans. At the same time the party leaders constitute an important reason why voters vote for (or against) a party (Aarts et al. 2011; Bittner 2011). A leader holding on to power tends to be a constant in the calculations of other actors and hence contributes to political stability. Any change in party leadership can be consequential in terms of public policy, inter-party cooperation, the recruitment to other elite positions, and electoral competition. For instance, the party change literature argues that leadership change ‘is a sufficient, though not necessary, condition for party change’ (Harmel et al. 1995: 5; see also Wilson 1980, 1994; Janda 1990; Harmel and Janda 1994). A change in party leadership thus sends important signals to the voters, to the other parties, to the economy, to the party activists, and may trigger reactions of considerable consequence. Continuity or change in the position of party leader hence is a relevant political phenomenon worth studying.

It is therefore all the more striking that research on party leader survival has not yet attracted a great deal of scholarly attention. While duration in public political office is a frequently studied subject, political parties have largely been spared from both descriptive and analytical attempts to come to grips with the phenomenon. In contrast to the numerous accounts of the survival of heads of states or governments (e.g. Blondel 1980; Bienen and van de Walle 1991, 1992; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003), analyses of government durations (Warwick 1994; Diermeier and Stevenson 1999, 2000; Strøm and Swindle 2002), or studies of ministerial tenure (Berlinski et al. 2007, 2010; Huber and Martinez-Gallardo 2008; Indridason and Kam 2008), research on party leader survival is very much in its infancy. The pioneering study of Andrews and Jackman (2008) showed that a party’s electoral fortunes and holding government office are the (substantively relevant) factors that drive leadership change. Indeed, being successful at the polls and winning or holding government office are core goals of political parties (Strøm 1990; Müller and Strøm 1999). It is only natural that party performance with regard to these goals should determine the fate of the one most responsible for that performance.
Yet, performance-related aspects may not be the only determinants of party leader survival. Drawing on the party organization literature we posit that intra-party factors should also be taken into account. More specifically, we claim that organisational and behavioural characteristics of the leadership selection and removal process impact on the odds of party leader change. While selection and deselection may be separate processes and follow their own rules (Cross and Blais 2012), we do not systematically distinguish them in the present paper. Such differentiation is irrelevant for our empirical case, where removing a party leader requires electing a successor. Refining our hypotheses for a larger sample may thus well lead to expectations that occasionally differ for the two processes.

There are at least two reasons why we expect that organisational and behavioural characteristics of the leadership selection process matter. First, the rules governing the leadership selection process place themselves on a continuum between open and closed. On the open end, they invite challengers to come forward while shielding incumbents from internal competitors (see De Winter 1993; Punnett 1993; Strøm 1993; Kenig 2008; see also Hazan and Rahat 2010). Second, the actual selection process reveals information about the intra-party standing of the leaders. Overwhelming support may make the leader appear as the one and only person for the job and being unassailable. On the opposite side of the scale of intra-party standing, a leader who cannot rally the party behind him- or herself may look weak and already doomed. Selection processes thus reveal information on the intra-party standing of the leader. By encouraging or discouraging potential competitors, such information by itself contributes to the dynamics in leadership selection.

In the following section, we outline our theoretical expectations about the determinants of party leader survival. We focus on explanatory variables pertaining to office- and vote-seeking objectives as well as behavioural and institutional features of intra-party politics. We then present our data and discuss the leadership selection mechanisms in place in the parties under study in more detail. Next, the analytical section reports the results from our statistical analysis and examines the effects of the most relevant variables in more detail. We conclude by discussing implications for future research.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES: EXPLAINING PARTY LEADERSHIP SURVIVAL

Party leaders constitute a special breed, even among politicians. Most of them have worked hard politically and fought their way up for many years. Being party leader and combining
this office with the most attractive public office available to their party is their life. If the
decision were left to them, many would probably go on in their political offices forever – and
probably longer than anyone else would consider reasonable. In short, when in office, many
of these leaders can hardly see any attractive alternative life course. Yet, since party leaders
are mortal not only physically but also politically, then what are the factors that determine
whether they will stay in the leadership position or be forced out of office? We distinguish
between a party leader’s political performance, that is, the achievement of party goals (policy,
office, and votes), and the institutional and behavioural environment that party leaders face
within their own party.

The political performance of party leaders

Parties make those individuals leaders whom they expect to make the most important
contributions to their political performance. While in some (hopefully rare) situations internal
reconciliation and consolidation may be what the party most urgently needs, most
performance expectations of competitive parties are outward-directed.

Theories of rational party behaviour suggest that policy, office, and votes are the prime goals
of political parties (Müller and Strøm 1999; Strøm 1990). Individual parties may give
different weights to these goals and these weights may differ according to the relevance
different intra-party actors have in making party decisions. For instance, party activists are
generally considered more policy-oriented and professional politicians more interested in
office per se. Different modes of making decisions (such as selecting leaders), which give
different weights to various groups, thus may shift weights also between party goals.
Likewise, party goals may change over time for many reasons. Still, it is highly unlikely that a
party fully dismisses any of these objectives, save for extreme cases such as anti-system
parties that reject participation in democratically elected governments on principle.

Also, the goals of policy, office, and votes are interlinked. While at times a skilful party
leader may be able to maximize all three (Poguntke 1999), often trade-offs exist and one goal
can only be realized at the price of abandoning or disregarding another. The interdependence
and potential conflicting party goals become visible when major decisions have to be made:
Entering government, for instance, may satisfy a party’s office demands and surely helps in
promoting its policy objectives. However, such a decision may be electorally harmful. As the
single most important decision-maker within a party, the leader bears the bulk of
responsibility for these choices and thus the success or failure in achieving the party’s goals, whatever the relative weights given specifically to the pursuit of policy, office, or votes.

We can thus expect that parties will hold on to the leaders who are successful in achieving their parties’ goals while replacing those that fail to do so. More specifically, the party selectorate will consider the performance a party takes under its leader when deciding about maintaining or replacing him or her.

If we assume that all parties are vote-seekers to some extent, we can expect that electoral performance is a major determinant of party leader survival. Party leaders who win elections should, *ceteris paribus*, be more likely to survive in office than those who lose at the polls. Although we are considering parliamentary elections (with many candidates of each of the parties) rather than elections to chief executive office (featuring only one candidate per party) the party leaders exercise great influence on the results. They do so by their direct appeal to the voters (Bittner 2011; King 2002) and more indirectly via their influence on the party list, policy programme, and campaign (Poguntke and Webb 2005). While it may not be strictly necessary for leaders to win elections, it is most likely harmful to lose them. This is so because electoral defeats are ‘sticky’ in terms of image and may require a new leader taking over to allow for a successful restart. Along these lines, previous studies have highlighted the significance of electoral defeat for the deselection of party leaders (e.g. Andrews and Jackman 2008; Bynander and ’t Hart 2007: 53–4). If we finally consider that winning votes also has an instrumental value for the achievement of the other party goals (Strøm 1990: 573) we must assume the link between electoral performance and party leader survival to be especially strong. We thus conjecture:

**H1** Party leaders are less likely to be removed the better their electoral performance.

Another important aspect of political performance pertains to the achievement of government office. While office-seeking behaviour may be instrumental, for instance in serving the purpose of implementing a party’s policy platform, theories of party competition and coalition formation have argued that politicians value office as an intrinsic goal (Downs 1957: 28; Riker 1962: 23). Yet, regardless of whether office is valued intrinsically or instrumentally, we can assume that participation in government is positively related to a party leader’s chances of survival. For one thing, getting into government or, conversely, losing government office is
by itself a strong signal of success or failure that may be powerful enough to outweigh electoral performance. Moreover, cabinet participation endows party leaders with a multitude of resources, ranging from cabinet portfolios and policy-making capacities to more mundane government goods that can be allocated strategically. It is reasonable to assume that these resources are used, *inter alia*, to build or maintain intra-party coalitions and thereby reinforce the leader’s position. Indeed, there is substantive evidence to suggest that, all else being equal, holding government office prolongs the tenure of party leaders (Andrews and Jackman 2008: 670).

However, the literature on coalition governments also tells us that government participation may not necessarily impact all parties uniformly (Falcó-Gimeno 2012). As Narud and Valen (2008: 383) show, the electoral penalty from holding office is considerably smaller for the prime ministers’ party than for the cabinet as a whole. Indeed, coalition rule often demands larger policy sacrifices from leaders of junior government parties while at the same time providing them with fewer resources to buy support from their co-partisans. Thus, entering a coalition places a disproportionate burden on those party leaders. We hence expect government participation to be beneficial only for leaders of senior government parties, whereas the impact on leaders of junior parties should be in the opposite direction.

H2a  Party leaders of senior government parties are less likely to be removed.

H2b  Party leaders of junior government parties are more likely to be removed.

The third aspect of political performance concerns the achievement of policy goals. Indeed, most parties will value policy gains for intrinsic reasons. At the same time, and under ideal circumstances, such policies may also serve the purpose of enhancing a party’s electoral prospects. While we assume that policy performance is a valid determinant of party leader survival, the measurement of policy success is a notoriously difficult undertaking. In contrast to electoral performance or government participation, there are no clear yardsticks to evaluate a leader’s performance. A reliable measure for the policy performance of parties and political leaders is yet to be developed. In any case, it is safe to assume that office and policy success are correlated to some degree. This fact is pushed to its extreme in the idea of ministerial government as formulated by Laver and Shepsle (1990, 1996) who equate holding ministerial office to policy dictatorship within the respective jurisdiction. Thus, to some extent,
government participation can be regarded as an indicator of the achievement of both office and policy objectives.

While all competitive political parties share the desire for electoral success, government office, and policy achievements, they are quite different in terms of history, organizational culture, and the rules that govern the selection process. We expect that such differences between political parties affect the way they treat their leaders.

**Intra-party determinants of party leader survival**

A huge body of literature argues that leadership selection mechanisms and devices to hold leaders accountable matter by making incumbents more or less vulnerable to replacement (e.g. Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2002, 2003; Konrad and Skaperdas 2007; Samuels and Shugart 2010). We cannot see why political parties should be fundamentally different in this respect from the government institutions they strive to control or, indeed, from any other type of formal organization. Based on this premise we put forward systematic expectations about the impact of intra-party support for party leaders and the institutional features of the leadership selection process.

To begin with, the office of party leader is unique, and typically the number of people who are ambitioned to take up that office exceeds 1. Given all the power that comes with this office, it is not hard to understand why. Also, it can be considered as the ticket to even more desirable offices. Hence, the demand will always be greater than can be satisfied. At times, this inevitably results in high levels of intra-party competition for the leadership position, even if such competition is not always visible from the outside. In the bid for the party leadership, however, incumbents possess a significant advantage. Still, Bynander and ’t Hart (2007: 54) report internal rivalry as a cause of leadership change in almost half of the cases in their sample. Also, plenty of case studies have scrutinized some of the most significant instances of intra-party conflict at times of leadership succession (e.g. Alderman and Carter 1991; Cowley and Bailey 2000; Bynander and ’t Hart 2008).

As a general rule, political leaders need to maintain sufficient levels of support from their subordinates in order to remain in power. The most elaborate version of this argument has been put forward by the proponents of selectorate theory (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2002, 2003). Political leaders are thus more likely to be replaced if their support coalition shrinks in size so that it can no longer prevent the removal of the leader. Indeed, if a party leader is re-
elected but has unusually low support (as indicated, for instance, by votes at party
conferences) this is a signal to potential rivals that the incumbent is no longer undisputed.
This, in turn, may set a process into motion in the course of which the authority of the leader
is further undermined. We therefore assume that the degree of approval that party leaders
receive from their selectorate – even in the absence of an opponent – is indicative of the
extent to which they are in danger of being dismissed in the near future.

H3 Party leaders are more likely to be removed the lower their intra-party support.

In addition, the size of the voting body and the method of voting can make a difference in the
readiness of dissenters to withhold their support (Müller et al. 1992). While smaller voting
bodies and open voting will discourage deviant behaviour, secret voting in large bodies
provides an opportunity structure that is favourable to it. Such institutional features of the
leadership selection process have hitherto been researched with respect to the competitiveness
of leadership contests (Kenig 2008), their openness (Carty and Blake 1999; LeDuc 2001;
Kenig 2009; Cross and Blais 2012a, b), the degree of oligarchy within parties (Müller and
Meth-Cohn 1991; Müller et al. 1992), or their impact on the removal of prime ministers
(Weller 1994). In what way do the specifics of the leadership selection mechanism impact the
survival of party leaders? We assume that more closed methods of leadership selection pose
greater obstacles to potential challengers and thus lead to longer durations of leadership
tenures. Smaller selectorates and more elitist voting bodies provide the incumbent party leader
with potentially important means to influence the decision-making process in his or her
favour. A party leader acquainted with the art of intrigue may outmanoeuvre his or her rivals
by forming alliances and purchasing support in handing out office or policy rewards to
electors – a strategy that is much easier to implement if the recipients of such goods are small
in numbers. Viewing such trade-offs from the opposite side, Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2002:
562) stated ‘public goods become more attractive to provide relative to private goods as the
size of the winning coalition increases’. More elitist modes of leadership selection should thus
favour incumbent leaders who – particularly when in public office – are able to deliver, while
challengers are likely to be limited to making promises for the future and hence face a
credibility problem. In addition, the party leader may also be in a powerful position to shape
the composition of the upper echelons of a party. He or she can use these (mostly informal)
powers to staff the leadership selectorate with loyal followers. A small voting body merely provides opportunities and under most circumstances the party leader should be the one who is best placed to exploit them. If he or she is not willing or able to exploit them, this factor might easily help competitors and turn against the incumbent. It is also plausible that party leaders may be more immune to internal opposition when chosen by a truly wide selectorate. As Mair (1994: 16) argues, enfranchising ordinary party members can be a purposeful strategy by party elites to deprive mid-level activists of their influence. Leaders thus become accountable to a larger and more amorphous selectorate that is more difficult to mobilize and ostensibly more prone to be manipulated. This argument implies that the relationship between selectorate size and party leader survival is not necessarily linear. However, since our empirical case does not cover parties with full membership votes for the party leadership, we state our fourth hypothesis based on our initial intuition:

H4 Party leaders are less likely to be removed the smaller the size of the selectorate.

Along similar lines, we argue that the statutory length of the leadership term impacts a leader’s odds of being deselected. This assumption follows a very simple intuition: a leader who needs to seek confirmation in office every year is much more prone to being replaced than a leader with a four-year mandate. To be sure, most modern parties have mechanisms in place that allow for the early deselection of a party leader (Kenig 2009: 442). Yet, the formal requirements for such an undertaking present an additional hurdle to a potential leadership challenge and the negative externalities such intra-party processes are likely to cause work in favour of the incumbent leader. Also, a longer office term will invariably include temporary ups and downs of the party while short termed leaders may preside only over one of these alternatives until the next election comes up. The selectorate’s knowledge that down-periods have been followed by up-periods in the past may then stabilise long-termed leaders in the case of a down-period when the election is due. Lacking such knowledge in the case of short-termed leaders, electors may interpret temporary downs as indicating a permanent trend under the leader and act accordingly. Our fifth hypothesis therefore reads:

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1 To shed light on the selection mechanisms’ relevance for leadership survival, it is worth using a rare chance for a counterfactual thought experiment. Jörg Haider, without doubt the most successful FPÖ leader, came to office via a party congress election, beating the sitting party leader, Norbert Steger. Yet, from the taking sides of most of the party leadership in that contest we know that if the decision had been left to the executive body, the outcome would have been different with Steger being re-elected by a substantial margin.
H5  Party leaders are less likely to be removed the longer their statutory leadership term.

Clearly, the intra-party features discussed here do not exhaust party organizational characteristics and differences. Yet, they are the ones we can most directly relate to our dependent variable and they allow for clear intuitions about the specific mechanisms and direction of effects.

CASE SELECTION, DATA AND METHOD

The extant studies of party leadership selection and deselection cover the whole range of approaches, from the analysis of particular episodes within one party (e.g. Heppell and Hill 2008; Heppell et al. 2010), single-party studies (e.g. Denham 2009; Denham and O’Hara 2008), single-country studies (Müller and Meth-Cohn 1991; Punnett 1991; Marsh 1993; Courtney 1995), to a few genuinely comparative pieces (Andrews and Jackman 2008; Kenig 2008, 2009; Cross and Blais 2011, 2012b; Laing and ’t Hart 2011). Each of these approaches has its distinctive advantages and limitations. In the case of a single event, this is often a complex process upon which the analyst can generate high-quality information. Such an analysis can do justice to factors that are unique to the case or cannot be considered with regard to other cases lacking relevant information. These advantages are balanced by the fact that the results, interesting as they may be, face severe limitations in terms of generalization to a universe. At the other end of the scale, comparative studies have the potential to maximize the variation in both the dependent and the independent variables, thereby inviting generalization. This comes at the price that the complexity of the data generation process perhaps requires greater simplification than we would like to see and/or limiting the analysis to shorter time periods (Kenig 2008) or a few countries which share some features that allow overcoming these problems (Andrews and Jackman 2008; Cross and Blais 2012b). More geographically inclusive research is only beginning to emerge (Laing and ’t Hart 2011; Horiuchi et al. 2013).

In opting for a long-term single-country study we steer some middle way between the extremes of single-event and long-term multi-country studies. While we choose Austria mainly because country expertise allows us to produce high-quality data on intra-party factors
over the full post-war period, it also represents an interesting case. It combines a long-lasting democratic regime with some equally long-lasting political parties – we can observe some parties over a period of 66 years. At the same time, we also include parties with shorter fates in national politics. Our selection criterion is to include all parties in our analysis that won parliamentary representation after 1945. These parties experienced considerable ups and downs in terms of electoral support and holding government office. Yet, the Austrian case is perhaps most interesting in combining parties with a range of organizational patterns. Most importantly for the present purpose, the centralization of decision-making varies considerably, leading to different formal procedures of selecting (and deselecting) party leaders.

From the timeline displayed in Figure 1 it becomes clear that parties differ substantially in the frequency of leadership turnover. By the early 1990s, for instance, the ÖVP had had ten party leaders as opposed to the SPÖ’s five. The FPÖ, in turn, had the same number of leaders between its establishment in the mid 1950s and the late 1990s as it had in the five years that followed its entering the government coalition with the ÖVP (Schüssel I) in early 2000. Two smaller parties in our data set do not display any variation in leadership during their time of parliamentary representation. Whereas the persistence of Johann Koplenig as leader of the KPÖ may be attributed to the distinct nature of Communist leadership, Heide Schmidt’s considerable public appeal and personal identification with the Liberal Forum rendered her undisputed as this party’s leader. In contrast, the Greens, who were traditionally suspicious of the concept of leadership by a single person established a party leadership position only six years after entering parliament.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

While it is undoubtedly crucial to understand such idiosyncrasies of parties and their leaders, this study attempts to account for the systematic variation in the survival of party leaders. We therefore specify a Cox proportional hazards model with leadership tenure measured in days as the dependent variable. Starting from the assumption that party leaders want to hold on to

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2 The parties include the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), the People’s Party (ÖVP), the Communist Party (KPÖ), the League of Independents (VdU), its successor the Freedom Party (FPÖ), the Greens, the Liberal Forum (LIF), and the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ). These parties remain in our sample for the time of their representation in parliament. In case of parties losing parliamentary representation we follow the fate of the party leader under whom this significant event has occurred.

3 Koplenig did not step down until 1965 – a full six years after the KPÖ had lost its parliamentary status.
their position as long as possible, we apply a censoring regime that treats every departure from the party leadership not caused by death as a failure event (Schleinzer 1975 and Haider 2008, both killed in car accidents, as well as Reinghaller 1958), severe illness (Pröll in 2011), promotion to higher office (Schärf who was elected Federal President in 1957) or credible voluntary retirement (Vranitzky 1997). In addition, we treat all observations extending beyond the year 2011 as right-censored.

**FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE**

Figure 2 plots the distribution of the dependent variable. The median duration of leadership tenure is 1310 days; the mean is 1955, with a standard deviation of 1743 days. This makes Austria a typical case among post-war democracies (Laing and ’t Hart 2011: 113).

**THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES**

In order to test our hypotheses concerning the survival of party leaders, we specify a number of covariates.

First, we examine the impact of holding executive office by including two dichotomous variables, indicating whether the leader’s party is represented as the senior or junior government party during each observational period. As theorized above, we assume that government participation boosts leadership duration, but only for leaders of the senior government party (the Chancellors). The Austrian case is somewhat peculiar because of the predominance of grand coalition governments and low partisan turnover in cabinet. A good deal of the variance captured by the two government participation variables is therefore due to variation between parties rather than within parties over time.

Second, we operationalize electoral performance as the percentage change in a party’s popular vote share at the most recent parliamentary elections. While it would be an equally valid approach to use legislative seat shares, we choose vote shares in order to eliminate the subtle effects of the changes to the Austrian electoral system in 1971 and 1992.

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4 Stretching the idea of anticipation, a case could be made against the right-censoring of Vranitzky in 1997. The claim then would be that he resigned to avoid inevitable decline and suffered a less glorious departure. Yet, treating this observation as failed does not alter any of the substantive results of our analysis.
Likewise, we record intra-party support as the change in the vote share that a leader received at the party conference or in the party executive. Negative values thus indicate that support for a leader has decreased, whereas positive values record the opposite.

As to the institutional determinants of party leader survival, we take into account the variation across time and parties in the statutory length of the leadership term. This variable takes on values between one and four years. There is considerable variation across parties, but also over time. Most Austrian parties have increased the length of their executive terms over the past decades (Müller et al. 1992: 122), thus requiring the leader to seek the consent of the party on a less frequent basis. While, for instance, the SPÖ’s Adolf Schärf was consecutively re-elected eleven times between 1945 and 1957, Wolfgang Schüssel had to seek confirmation from the party congress only twice in his 12-year-period as leader of the ÖVP.

A second institutional variable concerns the mode of leadership selection. We distinguish between elite-centred and agency-centred modes of selection (Kenig 2009: 435), represented by the values 1 and 0, respectively. The former records all instances of (1) direct election by the executive or (2) nomination by the executive and subsequent confirmation by the party congress, whereas the latter is coded for all instances of direct election by the party congress. Our expectation here is that less open forms of leadership selection result in greater chances of party leader survival.

As control variables we include the age of the party leader and the year of each observation. While we do not put forward explicit theoretical arguments about these two covariates, our intuition is that older leaders will be more vulnerable and that there is an overall tendency towards higher levels of leadership turnover across time.

Table 1 presents the summary statistics for all variables in the data set and their hypothesized effect on the removal of a leader.

### TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

#### STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

We test our assumptions about the determinants of party leader survival on an original data set covering the 45 leaders of the eight parties represented in the Austrian parliament between 1945 and 2011. Given that we have no a priori expectations about the functional form of the
dependent variable, we opt for the semi-parametric Cox proportional hazards model (Cox 1972). The maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) that this model employs produces asymptotically unbiased and efficient estimates in large samples. Yet, it is possible that the parameters are biased and/or inefficient as the sample size becomes smaller. A biased estimate would lead to wrong inferences about the effect size associated with a specific covariate. Inefficient estimates would lead to false conclusions concerning the significance of the findings. What, then, are the implications of the small sample size of 45?

First, it needs to be recognized that, while there are only 45 leaders in the sample, the presence of time-varying covariates results in a total of 229 observations. For instance, a leader who competes in five general elections is reported in the data set as five observations with changing values for the electoral performance variable. Likewise, new observations are generated with each change in the government vs. opposition status of a party, and each time a leader is re-elected by his or her selectorate (thus recording variation in the leader’s intra-party support). Although the 229 observations in the data set are thus clustered on party leaders, the sample contains much more information than if there were only one observation per variable for each of the 45 leaders. Since MLE is a procedure that finds the parameters most likely to have produced the data, it can be argued that the uncertainty attached to these parameters is considerably reduced by the additional information contained in the time-varying covariates.

Second, one can try to assess the likely size of the bias. According to a simulation study conducted by Langner et al. (2003), the extent of the bias in parameters for dichotomous predictors is rather limited (less than 10 %) if the risk of failure for the ‘exposed’ cases (i.e. cases taking on a value of 1 for the respective covariate) is not too small (≥ 0.15). For the two dummy variables in the data, the ‘exposed’ cases exhibit much greater risks of failure: 18 out of 23 leaders (0.78) for all leaders in government and 5 of out 9 leaders (0.56) that were selected by the party executive. As an important caveat, however, it should be noted that the amount of bias in the parameter estimates of the continuous covariates is less clear.

Third, there are good reasons to assume that inefficiency in MLE estimates does not necessarily lead to completely wrong inferences. As Hart and Clark (1999) demonstrate, small sample sizes do not increase the probability of rejecting a true null hypothesis. While the risk of making type I errors is thus rather limited, type II errors are more likely to occur with small samples (Hart and Clark 1999: 8–10). This suggests that we should be careful in reverting to
the null hypothesis even in the absence of statistical significance, since a small sample may
simply not contain enough information to detect a true relationship.

With these caveats in mind, we present a number of Cox proportional hazard regressions in
Table 2. In addition to the full model (Model 7), we report six bivariate models, one for each
covariate, in order to show that the effects are robust across different specifications. All
models are calculated with standard errors clustered on party leaders.

The interpretation of the reported hazard ratios is straightforward: a value above 1 indicates a
greater likelihood of removal as the value of the independent variable increases, whereas
values below 1 mean that leaders are less likely to be replaced.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Taken together, the covariates in the analysis have reasonably good explanatory power. The
full model yields a McFadden’s R-square of almost 0.2, thus suggesting that a substantial
portion of the variation in leadership duration can be accounted for by the independent
variables. Also, an inspection of the baseline hazard (not reported) shows that party leaders’
 odds of being removed increase monotonically over the course of their tenure. This suggests
that irrespective of the effects of the independent variables, the passage of time works against
party leaders retaining their position.

Looking at the individual predictors more closely, Models 1 and 7 very much yield the
expected result for the electoral performance variable. Winning elections raises the chances
for party leaders to stay in office, while electoral defeat is likely to doom their odds of
survival. This effect is quite strong: a hazard ratio of 0.793 indicates that a gain in the vote
share of one percent decreases a party leader’s chance of being deselected by over 20 percent.
Also, the impact of electoral success (or failure) is almost unchanged when including the
other covariates (see Model 7). This result fully confirms our expectations about the
importance of winning votes for the survival of party leaders and is in line with the findings
reported by Andrews and Jackman (2008: 670). In addition, the pseudo R-squares strongly
suggest that electoral success (or failure) have the greatest explanatory power of all covariates
in the analysis. More than half of the explained variance in the full model is accounted for by
the electoral performance predictor.
By contrast, the two indicators for government participation (one for senior and one for junior coalition parties) fail to reach statistical significance in the full model. The strong divergence in the direction of the effects and the weakly significant hazard ratio in Model 3 suggest that the intuition behind H2a and H2b is not necessarily false. Yet, the hypothesized effects are probably too small to materialize in our limited sample. The statistical models thus yield no conclusive evidence as to the validity of the hypotheses pertaining to government participation. We have also tested for the difference between the leaders of senior and junior government parties by switching reference categories (results not reported). As above, no statistically significant effect emerges.

This result is somewhat surprising in the light of previous findings (Andrews and Jackman 2008: 670), yet it may well be explained by the high stability in the composition of Austrian post-war governments. While both traditional parties of government, the SPÖ and ÖVP, have been in power during at least 50 of the past 66 years (see Figure 1), the other parties mostly had to limit themselves to the opposition role. Thus, there is relatively little inner-party variance in the office-related predictors to account for the survival of party leaders.

We test for the theorized party organizational factors individually in Models 4 to 6. Changes in intra-party support clearly emerge as a significant predictor of party leader survival. This corroborates our assumption that declining approval of a leader within the party ranks is a valid indicator of a leader’s shrinking odds of survival. The hazard ratio reported in the full model suggests that a one-percent change in intra-party support alters the risk of removal by over four percent. Given that leadership elections are typically uncontested and therefore often yield voting results similar to those in autocratic regimes, it is quite remarkable that even small changes in the support levels are indicative of a leader’s chances of staying in office.

Furthermore, we find a significant effect of the selection mechanism. Leaders that were directly elected by a party congress as opposed to an elite-centred process are in much greater danger of being replaced. A hazard ratio of 0.236 in the full model indicates that this effect is quite substantial. All else being equal, selection by the executive thus brings down the chances of being deselected by more than 76 percent. More exclusive processes of selection

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5 For instance, the only party leader who was replaced despite seeking reelection, Norbert Steger, already experienced drop in support at the preceding party congress. His remaining two years in office were characterized by his rival’s – Jörg Haider – efforts to stir up the party against the leader and to mobilize support for himself.
thus correlate with party leaders being less exposed to the risk of removal. Party leadership office periods are defined by the party rules in all Austrian parties. This implies that the process of removing an incumbent leader is identical to that of selecting a new one. Thus our result fully corroborates the findings by Cross and Blais (2012: 125) who report a substantial (if only barely significant) effect of the regulations guiding the removal of party leaders: ‘the easier it is to remove the leader, the shorter the stay at the helm of the party’. In fact, since the process of removing a leader is identical to the selection of a successor, it could be argued that it is the selectorate’s removal authority that actually matters. Yet, since selectorates and desselectorates are empirically equivalent, the analysis cannot distinguish between these two effects.

Finally, we find no significant effect for the leadership term covariate. Party leaders’ risk of replacement therefore seems to be independent of the statutory lengths of their term. In other words, the mere fact that some party leaders need to seek approval from the party on a more frequent basis than others does not explain variation in the total duration of party leaders’ tenure.

The effects of the control variables are in the expected direction, yet only the time variable is significant at the ten percent level. Party leader turnover thus increases over the six decades that we observe. A myriad of factors could help to explain this trend, from a greater intensity of political competition to higher degrees of electoral volatility and heightened media scrutiny.

Overall, the performance of the covariates relating to the parties’ internal life support two of our initial expectations: accounting for the intra-party standing of leaders and the institutional rules of leadership selection considerably enhances our understanding of the determinants of party leader survival. More oligarchic mechanisms of selection (and thus removal) help leaders retain their position, while more open selection (and removal) mechanisms increase the risk of being deselected. Also, there is good support for the notion that intra-party support levels are indicative of a party leader’s chances of survival.

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

Figures 3 and 4 provide a more intuitive account of the impact of two variables of theoretical interest that are novel to the study of party leadership survival. They depict survival functions
contingent on either of the two variables with all other variables held constant at their mean. These estimations are based on the full model (Model 6).

FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

As becomes clear from Figure 3, the impact of intraparty support is small but consistent. All else being equal, a loss in support of ten percent takes the survival function below the 0.5 threshold several hundred days before the zero-percent reference line reaches that point. Party leaders striving for a long tenure should therefore rightly worry about their backing at party conferences (or in other voting bodies).

Figure 4 displays the impact of the selection mechanism on the survival of party leaders. Again, it becomes clear that a more exclusive mode of leadership selection results in higher chances of survival. The degree of oligarchy that becomes manifest in such institutional characteristics is clearly a relevant factor in explaining party leaders' fate.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

In order to sum up the findings of the above analysis, Table 3 reports the hypothesized effects for all independent variables and evaluates them against the results from the statistical models. A good part of our initial expectations are borne out by the data. Yet, while there is substantial evidence for the general importance of electoral performance, there seems to be no uniform impact across parties of the government participation variable. As to the intra-party variables, we find that variation in the level of intra-party support and the nature of the leadership selection mechanism make a difference, whereas the statutory term length does not impact on party leader survival.

CONCLUSION

The selection of its leader is one of the most significant decisions for a party to make. Such decisions often have profound consequences for a party’s electoral prospects, the policies it
promotes, and its performance in public office. A better understanding of the determinants of the selection and deselection of party leaders is therefore crucial for party researchers and students of democratic politics more generally. We add to this understanding by providing, to the best of our knowledge, the first systematic account of the impact of institutional and behavioural characteristics of intra-party life on party leader survival. Our analysis shows that electoral success and institutional intra-party factors are the most significant determinants of party leader survival. Also, we are able to illustrate that government participation does not impact uniformly on parties but has a differential effect on ‘traditional’ parties of government and opposition – a finding that may be specific to the Austrian case.

This caveat can be stated more generally. Although the parties included in our analysis show considerable variation with respect to most variables, they are all nested in one country. As always with single-country studies, it remains to be seen to what extent our specific results generalize beyond the case. Yet, we firmly believe that our initial intuition will hold up: organizational factors do have a major impact on the precise definition of party goals, the relative weight given to each of them, on how the performance of the one who leads is assessed and whether he or she will survive or be replaced in the party leadership position.

REFERENCES


http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/partypolitics


http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/partypolitics


Note: Boxes indicate duration of parliamentary representation, grey areas indicate government participation; * = VdU.
Figure 2: Histogram of leadership durations
Figure 3: Impact of intra-party support on party leader survival

Note: Calculations based on Model 7; all other variables held at their respective means (continuous variables) or modes (categorical variables).
Figure 4: Impact of selection mechanism on party leader survival

![Graph showing survival rates for different selection mechanisms.]

Note: Calculations based on Model 7; all other variables held at their respective means (continuous variables) or modes (categorical variables).
Table 1: Summary statistics (n=229 observations from 45 party leaders)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N (spells)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electoral performance</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>0.283</td>
<td>3.807</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-16.91</td>
<td>15.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior government party</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>0.271</td>
<td>0.445</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior government party</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td>0.422</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intra-party support (change)</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>0.820</td>
<td>7.600</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-37.75</td>
<td>36.30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selection by executive</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>0.345</td>
<td>0.476</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statutory term length</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>2.227</td>
<td>0.817</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>53.50</td>
<td>9.008</td>
<td>53.88</td>
<td>36.82</td>
<td>72.76</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Missing data are due to incomplete information on intra-party support.
Table 2: Determinants of party leader survival

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
<th>Model 6</th>
<th>Model 7</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Electoral performance</td>
<td>0.785***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.793***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-4.52)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(-3.76)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior government party</td>
<td>0.614</td>
<td>0.945</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-1.21)</td>
<td>(-0.08)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior government party</td>
<td>2.180+</td>
<td>1.425</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1.87)</td>
<td>(0.65)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intra-party support</td>
<td>0.927***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.955*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-3.96)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(-2.23)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Selection by executive</td>
<td>0.357*</td>
<td>0.236**</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-2.49)</td>
<td>(-2.70)</td>
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<td>Term length</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.95)</td>
<td>(-1.02)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(-0.56)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>1.025+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-1.94)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N (leaders) | 45 | 45 | 45 | 45 | 45 | 45 | 45 |
N (spells)   | 229| 229| 229| 228| 229| 229| 228|
Log likelihood| -83.69 | -93.43 | -92.02 | -89.99 | -91.37 | -93.63 | -75.32 |
AIC          | 169.4 | 188.9 | 186   | 182   | 184.7 | 189.3 | 166.6 |
McFadden’s $R^2$ | 0.110 | 0.007 | 0.022 | 0.041 | 0.029 | 0.004 | 0.197 |

Note: Figures are hazard ratios from Cox proportional hazards regression with standard errors clustered on leaders; t-statistics in parentheses; + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

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1 Cox regression requires the proportional hazards assumption to hold. A global test of the full model, conducted with Stata’s *estat phtest* function, yields chi-square values of 2.70 (p-value=0.95). The detailed test reveals that none of the variables violates the proportional hazards assumption (all p-values > 0.22, mean p-value = 0.60). As an additional robustness check we performed the same regressions using parametric models with Weibull and exponential functions. The results of these estimations are virtually identical with those reported in Table 2.
Table 3: Overview of results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Assumed effect on likelihood of removal</th>
<th>Effect found</th>
<th>Conclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>Electoral performance</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td>hypothesis confirmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2a</td>
<td>Senior government party</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>inconclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2b</td>
<td>Junior government party</td>
<td>positive</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>inconclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>Intra-party support</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td>hypothesis confirmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
<td>Selection by executive</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td>hypothesis confirmed</td>
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<tr>
<td>H5</td>
<td>Length of term</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>inconclusive</td>
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</tbody>
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