

The Conservative Party Leadership Election of 2016: An Analysis of the Voting Motivations of Conservative Parliamentarians

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This article provides the first systematic examination of the voting motivations of Conservative MPs in the final parliamentary ballot of the Conservative Party leadership election of 2016. We identify the voting behaviour of each Conservative parliamentarian as part of a unique data set that we use to test, through the use of multivariate analysis, a series of hypotheses based around social background variables (i.e. gender and education); political variables (i.e. parliamentary experience, electoral marginality, the electoral threat posed by UKIP and ministerial status); and ideological variables (i.e. attitudes towards same-sex marriage and Brexit). Our findings demonstrate that ideology did matter in terms of voting. Attitudes towards Brexit were central to the appeals of both Theresa May (to Remainers) and Andrea Leadsom (to Leavers). We also demonstrate that in terms of support for Leadsom, Brexit was not the only significant driver, as opinion on same-sex marriage, year of entry and ministerial status also influenced voting behaviour.

Keywords: Conservative Party, Leadership Elections, Parliamentary Behaviour, Theresa May, Brexit

There is an extensive academic literature on leadership selection within the Conservative Party. This article contributes to that literature by assessing voting motivations of Conservative parliamentarians in the second parliamentary ballot of their July 2016 leadership election. With 165 votes (50.2 per cent), Theresa May won the first parliamentary ballot comfortably, with a clear lead over Andrea Leadsom (66 votes/20.1 per cent) and Michael Gove (48 votes/14.6 per cent), resulting in the automatic elimination of the lowest placed candidate, Liam Fox (16 votes/4.9 per cent) and the withdrawal of Stephen Crabb (34 votes/10.3 per cent). She then secured the backing of 199 of her parliamentary colleagues (60.3 per cent)

in the second ballot, which provided her with a parliamentary mandate that was stronger than all of her predecessors when acquiring the leadership since the democratisation of leadership selection in 1965—that is, Edward Heath (1965, 49.3 per cent); Margaret Thatcher (1975, 52.9 per cent); John Major (1990, 49.7 per cent); William Hague (1997, 56.1 per cent); Iain Duncan Smith (2001, 32.5 per cent); Michael Howard (2003; no ballot held as only one candidate); and David Cameron (2005, 45.4 per cent) (Heppell, 2008, p. 186).

The second parliamentary ballot eliminated the third-placed candidate, Gove (46 votes/14 per cent), and ensured that May would proceed with the second-placed candidate, Leadsom (84 votes/25.5 per cent) to a one member, one vote ballot of Conservative Party members. The gap between her and May was so large that it created a conundrum for Leadsom. As the Conservative membership was assumed to be predominantly pro-Brexit, Leadsom, as a pro-Brexit candidate, *might* be able to win a party membership ballot (Mason, 2016). However, proceeding with her candidature in this hope would require a two-month campaign, thereby prolonging the period of political instability that had been created by the vote to leave the European Union (EU). Even if Leadsom could win the party membership ballot she would be left leading the Conservative Party with the backing of only one-quarter of her parliamentary colleagues. The experience of the Labour Party, whose leader, Jeremy Corbyn, claimed a leadership mandate from the membership (59.5 per cent), but only had the support of 36 Labour MPs or 15.5 per cent of the parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) (see Dorey and Denham, 2016) was something many Conservatives wanted to avoid. Doubts about her capacity to lead effectively with such a low level of parliamentary support were then intensified by the following factors. First, allegations emerged about her pre-parliamentary career; secondly, queries about her tax returns; and thirdly, her judgement was questioned after she implied that she would be a better Prime Minister than May because, unlike May, she was a mother. The cumulative impact of the above led to her decision to withdraw her candidature rather than proceed to a membership ballot (Bulman, 2016).

That May secured such a high level of support from her parliamentary colleagues is the conundrum this article seeks to explain. There is a long tradition of attempting to explain the *how* and *why* of party leadership selection and rejection within the Conservative Party. Academic explanations of Conservative Party leadership elections fall broadly into two camps. The first approach can be described as the anecdotally driven narrative—that is, the profiling of the candidates and their strengths and weaknesses; the appraisal of the campaigning period and the positions adopted by the candidates (and mistakes made). This is followed by a descriptive account of the ballots, leading to a set of explanations of why the victor was selected and the vanquished were rejected (see, e.g. Alderman, 1996, 1998; Alderman and Carter, 2002; Denham and Dorey, 2006; Denham and

O'Hara, 2008; Heppell, 2008). Within such accounts scholars have consistently argued that candidates for the party leadership were being selected (or rejected) on the basis of the following: first, evaluations of their ability to unify the party; secondly, their comparative electability; and thirdly, their perceived competence (Stark, 1996).

One drawback of this narrative-based approach is that academics can be left making somewhat subjective assessments of the supposed unifying and electioneering abilities of candidates, and perceptions of their overall political competence (although as Quinn (2016) has demonstrated, credible evidence can be assembled from opinion polling to bolster such judgements). That limitation explains the value of the second approach, which has been used to explain the outcomes of Conservative Party leadership elections. Here the focus is on developing a more systematic way of identifying the variables that may have influenced voting behaviour within parliamentary ballots. The work of Cowley and Garry (1998) and Cowley and Bailey (2000) established this approach as they analysed voting behaviour in the ballots of 1975 and 1990, testing a range of social, political and ideological variables, so as to provide a more nuanced explanation of the elections of Thatcher and Major, respectively. Aspects of that approach were embraced in the work of Heppell and Hill (2008, 2010) as they set about establishing what motivated parliamentary support for, first, Hague in the 1997 leadership election; and second for Duncan Smith in the 2001 leadership election. Such studies revealed the influence of ideological positioning on candidate preference—the economic right for Thatcher in 1975 (Cowley and Garry, 1998), the Eurosceptics for Major in 1990 (Cowley and Bailey, 2000) and for Hague in 1997 (Heppell and Hill, 2008), but that ideological positioning was less significant in the selection of Cameron in 2005 (Heppell and Hill, 2010).

Our article embraces and extends the second systematic and quantitative approach, as we aim to identify the voting motivations of Conservative MPs in the second parliamentary ballot in 2016. It could be that ideological positioning might explain voting for May, Leadsom or Gove, but if so is that ideological support based on attitudes vis-à-vis Brexit, or attitudes towards social, sexual and moral matters? And what if ideology does not explain voting preference? Should that be the case we decided that we should build into our approach a range of social and political variables, replicating the modelling of Cowley and Garry (1998) and Cowley and Bailey (2000) but adding in variables which were not relevant for their case studies of the 1990 and 1975 Conservative Party leadership contests.

We have constructed a data set on the parliamentary Conservative Party (PCP) in relation to a range of social variables (gender and education); political variables (when they first entered Parliament, their parliamentary experience, electoral marginality; position in relation to the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), and their career status—i.e. backbencher or minister); and ideological variables (their attitudes towards same-sex marriage and Brexit). To achieve these aims, our

article is organised into the following sections. First, we identify and explain our hypotheses for the voting behaviour of Conservative parliamentarians in the second parliamentary ballot. In the second section, we address issues relating to how our data was collected and collated. Thirdly, we outline the methods used to test our hypotheses and present our results, and confirm whether our hypotheses have been substantiated. In our analysis and conclusions section, we summarise our key research findings, and compare and contrast our findings to prior studies on Conservative Party leadership elections.

1. What *may* have influenced voting behaviour? Selecting variables and determining hypotheses

Rather than rely on qualitative research that implies that May was victorious because the selectorate (i.e. the PCP) concluded that she was best equipped to unify the party, to appeal to the electorate, and demonstrate governing competence, our article attempts to provide quantitative evidence of why some Conservative parliamentarians did (or did not) endorse May. Our starting point is to determine which variables—social, political and ideological—warrant consideration and the assumptions we hold that form the basis of our hypotheses.

1.1 Social background variables: gender and education

Our interest in examining the relationship between voting behaviour and the social background reflects the fact that existing research on the social composition of the PCP has traditionally emphasised how they have recruited from a narrow social strata. Despite various initiatives to address this via reforms to candidate selection, and despite some progress on this front, the Conservatives have remained sensitive to the accusation that they appear to be sexist and elitist (Hill, 2013).

The social background variables that we consider are gender and educational background. Cowley and Bailey's (2000) study of voting behaviour in the parliamentary ballots of 1975—when Thatcher won the party leadership—included gender as a variable, but subsequent quantitative-driven accounts excluded it due to a lack of female candidates in the 1990, 1997 and 2001 contests (Cowley and Garry, 1998; Heppell and Hill, 2008, 2010). However, the presence of two female candidates in the final parliamentary ballot in 2016 meant that gender was a relevant variable for consideration. It was also the first leadership election to occur since the inception of the feminisation agenda which Cameron had launched in opposition—this led to the Conservatives making targeted policy pledges and interventions on issues such as parental leave and the gender pay gap, as part of an explicit attempt to target female voters (Childs and Webb, 2012, pp. 165–181).

The contribution of May to the feminisation agenda was considerable. When May entered Parliament in 1997, she was one of the only 13 female Conservative parliamentarians, the same number the party had after their landslide election victory in 1931. In the long years of opposition she developed a ‘substantial reputation’ (Childs and Webb, 2012, p. 59) on issues relating to women and equality. The development of the feminisation agenda in opposition—and the work on candidate selection and training, and the integration of gender politics into policy development, alongside the work of the Conservative Women’s Organisation (CWO) and Women2Win—was only achieved through May’s ‘successful leadership’ (Childs and Webb, 2012, p. 68). The credibility and reputation that May had as a mentor and a role model to female Conservatives entering the PCP in the 2010 and 2015 cohorts could not be matched by Leadsom. Therefore, on our first variable of gender, we will test the following hypothesis:

[H1] Female Conservative parliamentarians will show a stronger likelihood to vote for May as opposed to Leadsom or Gove.

Our second social background variable was education, which was used by both Cowley and Garry (1998) and Cowley and Bailey (2000). We use the example of the 1990 profile to explain how we construct our hypotheses. In terms of schooling, Cowley and Garry assumed (and demonstrated) that the privately educated, which they called their ‘surrogate for class’, would tend towards either Michael Heseltine (Shrewsbury) or Douglas Hurd (Eton), and that the non-privately educated would tend towards state-educated Major (Rutlish Grammar). They also assumed (and demonstrated) that Oxbridge-educated parliamentarians would gravitate towards Heseltine (Oxford) or Hurd (Cambridge) whilst the graduates of less prestigious institutions (or those who did not attend university) would gravitate towards Major (Cowley and Garry, 1998, pp. 475–476; 485–486). However, replicating these assumptions was slightly more problematic when applied to the succession contest of 2016 than had been the case in 1990. In terms of schooling of the candidates, Gove was privately educated, Leadsom was not. Also, although May briefly attended private school, the majority of her education was non-fee paying. With regard to university, May and Gove went to Oxford, whilst Leadsom attended Warwick. The distinctions here are less clear-cut than in 1990 when one candidate (Major) had not attended university at all. On the basis of the above we constructed the following hypotheses for educational background:

[H2] Privately educated Conservative parliamentarians will show a reduced likelihood of voting for Leadsom.

[H3] Oxbridge educated Conservative parliamentarians will show a reduced likelihood of voting for Leadsom.

1.2 Political background variables: experience, marginality, UKIP vote share and ministerial status

Our interest in examining the relationship between voting behaviour and political variables—such as year of entry, marginality and ministerial status—also flows from their use in prior research on leadership selection. When considering the 1990 leadership selection, for example, Cowley and Garry implied that Major (first elected in 1979) would be more appealing to less experienced MPs than Hurd (first elected in 1974) and Heseltine (first elected in 1966). Conversely, they hypothesised that Heseltine and Hurd would attract more support from longer-serving parliamentarians (Cowley and Garry, 1998, pp. 477–478). Can we replicate these assumptions with regard to the three-way contest between May, Leadsom and Gove? May was the longest serving of the candidates after being first elected in 1997; Gove entered eight years later in 2005, whereas Leadsom was the least experienced after entering Parliament in 2010. On the basis of this our experience hypothesis is:

[H4] Longer serving Conservative parliamentarians will show an increased likelihood for voting for May.

Alongside determining whether there was evidence of a cohort effect with longer-serving parliamentarians favouring May as the longest-serving candidate, we also chose to consider two other political determinants: electoral marginality and ministerial status. These variables were used in all of the contests that have been subject to prior quantitative assessment (Cowley and Garry, 1998; Cowley and Bailey, 2000; Heppell and Hill, 2008, 2010). When considering this we assume that Conservative parliamentarians might or should be influenced by polling data about the respective voter appeal of the candidates. For example, in the 1990 Conservative leadership election, Cowley and Garry assumed that MPs with marginal seats would gravitate away from the least electorally attractive candidate (Hurd), although this was not subsequently proven (Cowley and Garry, 1998, pp. 477, 486). On a similar basis we might hypothesise that MPs in the most marginal constituencies would support the candidate viewed most positively by the electorate. Polling conducted shortly before the first ballot of MPs found that of the five confirmed candidates, May was the clear favourite amongst the public with 50.4 per cent, naming her as the most suitable contender to take over from Cameron. Her nearest rival was Stephen Crabb on 15.9 per cent. Amongst Conservative voters, May's lead was even greater with backing from 58.9 per cent whilst Gove was second on just 14.7 per cent (Survation, 2016). As such we offer the following hypothesis on electoral marginality:

[H5] Conservative parliamentarians holding marginal constituencies would be more inclined towards voting for May.

In addition to electoral marginality we also wanted to identify whether the vote share of UKIP within the constituency of each Conservative parliamentarian might be significant. UKIP enjoyed a surge in popular support in the years preceding the 2016 Brexit referendum. For example, they secured 27.5 per cent of the vote and 4.3 million votes in the 2014 elections to the European Parliament. Later that same year the defection of two Conservative parliamentarians to UKIP (Douglas Carswell and Mark Reckless) and their subsequent by-election victories put Cameron under growing pressure. Moreover, the danger of being outflanked on their right (Lynch and Whittaker, 2013) was evident from survey-based research prior to the General Election of 2015, which estimated that one-quarter of the Conservative Party *members* were contemplating voting for UKIP (Webb and Bale, 2014). This demonstrates the threat UKIP posed to the Conservatives and why their vote share in marginal Conservative constituencies is significant (on the rise of UKIP, see Goodwin and Milazzo, 2015). Therefore, based on the assumption that the Conservative Party had clear reasons to be fearful of UKIP, we decided to examine the vote shares for UKIP within each Conservative held constituency. We assumed that those most fearful of the UKIP threat would tend towards one of the leave candidates—Leadsom or Gove, and those less concerned with the UKIP threat would tend towards May as the remain candidate. As a consequence our hypothesis was as follows:

[H6] Conservative parliamentarians holding seats with the lowest UKIP vote shares would be more inclined towards voting for May, and those holding seats with the highest UKIP vote shares would be more inclined towards voting for Leadsom or Gove.

Our final political variable is the career status of Conservative parliamentarians. Here we utilise the distinction between insiders/ministers and outsiders/backbenchers which assumes that the level and extent of ministerial experience could be an influence on voting. For example, in 1975, Heath performed strongly amongst those who had been ministers in his 1970–1974 administration, whereas Thatcher was weaker amongst that group and far stronger amongst career backbenchers (Cowley and Bailey, 2000, pp. 610–611). How should we apply this to 2016? Both May and Gove were ministerial insiders, although as Home Secretary May held a more high profile and more prestigious position than Gove, who served under Cameron as Education Secretary (May 2010 to July 2014); Chief Whip (July 2014 to May 2015); and Justice Secretary (May 2015–). Leadsom was the least experienced candidate by a considerable margin. She had been on the frontbench for only two years as a junior Treasury minister (April 2014 to May 2015) and a Minister of State in the Department

of Energy (May 2015–16). Based on the above, our career status hypothesis vis-à-vis ministerial experience is:

[H7] Incumbent ministers and former ministers would be more inclined towards voting for May, and backbenchers would be more inclined towards voting for Leadsom.

1.3 Ideological variables: same-sex marriage and Brexit

There have been a number of studies that have examined the ideological composition of the PCP, and they have tended to view ideological conflict through three divides: economic policy and the wet/dry distinction; moral issues and the social liberal/conservative distinction; and the European policy divide between Europhiles and Eurosceptics (Garry, 1995; Heppell, 2002, 2013). These categorisations informed the hypotheses on voting behaviour used by Cowley and Garry (1998) and Heppell and Hill (2008, 2010) in their appraisals of the contests in 1990, 1997 and 2001, respectively.

However, a process of ideological realignment can be said to have occurred within modern British conservatism. The morality divide between liberals and conservatives not only remains relevant but also came to dominate the opposition era, as social liberalism emerged as central plank of Cameronite modernisation (Hayton, 2010). Once in government this ideological feud was then exposed during the passage of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act of 2013 (Clements, 2014). Running in parallel to the increasing importance of the morality divide, came the gradual disappearance of the conflict between wets and dries over economic policy. The economically moderate wet wing of the PCP tended to be located amongst older Conservatives who, over time, either retired or were defeated. Furthermore the incoming cohorts from 1992 onwards were overwhelmingly dry in their economic outlook. Dry economic liberalism became ‘firmly embedded’ within the PCP (Hayton, 2010, p. 493) as the level of wet representation decreased from 33 per cent of the 1992–1997 PCP to 13 per cent in the 2005–2010 PCP (with dry representation increasing from 56 to 80 per cent in the same period, Heppell, 2002, 2009). Wet representation within the PCP was so peripheral in the 2010–2015 PCP that it was not deemed worthy of ongoing consideration (see Heppell, 2013, p. 353).

That means for our ideological determinants we will not include the economic wet/dry divide, but we will retain the morality liberal/conservative divide. As Cameron set about reforming the Conservatives in opposition post 2005, the liberalism–conservatism cleavage around morality was central to identifying his modernising supporters and traditionalist critics (Hayton, 2010, pp. 492–493). Gaining acceptance for modernised social liberalism would be a slow and painful

process in the period between 1992 and 2015. Academic research identified that 30.5 per cent of the 1992–1997 PCP was identifiable with socially liberal thinking (Heppell, 2002, p. 312), which had increased to only 31.9 per cent of the 2010–2015 PCP (Heppell, 2013, p. 348). Cameron increasingly alienated himself from the traditionalist wing of his own party by his positive rhetoric vis-à-vis endorsing civil partnerships and adoption rights for same-sex couples. His championing of equal marriage rights for same-sex couples succeeded in pitting secular, modernising free market liberals against religious social conservatives (Ashcroft and Oakeshott, 2015, pp. 404–412). On this touchstone issue, Gove and May voted for and Leadsom abstained. On the basis of this our morality hypothesis is as follows:

[H8] Social liberals would be more inclined to vote for May or Gove, and social conservatives will be more inclined to vote for Leadsom.

We will of course retain the European divide. But by the time the Conservatives re-entered office (May 2010) it was no longer credible to define their European policy divisions around the labels of Europhilia and Euroscepticism (Cowley and Stuart, 2010, p. 141). Pro-Europeanism within the PCP shrank dramatically in the post-Thatcherite era, from 29.6 per cent of the 1992–1997 PCP (i.e. 98 from 336 members) to just 3.5 per cent in the 2005–2010 PCP (i.e. 7 from 198 members). Running parallel to this was a sharp increase Eurosceptic opinion from 58 per cent in the 1992–1997 PCP (i.e. 192 from 336 members) to 91.4 per cent in the 2005–2010 PCP (i.e. 181 from 198 members) (Heppell, 2002, 2009).

Therefore, we will update the categorisations to reflect the debate that characterised the referendum: between reformists and remain Conservatives (i.e. soft but pragmatic Euroscepticism) and the rejectionist and Brexit Conservatives (i.e. hard Eurosceptics). The soft variant encapsulated Cameron's position of seeking renegotiated terms for continued membership—that position had been supported by around half of the 2010–2015 PCP (i.e. 154 members out of 306), with around one-quarter subscribing to the rejectionist mindset that would countenance leaving the EU (Heppell, 2013, p. 347). However, there was scope for the rejectionist position to expand further within the PCP due to the dual impact of the Eurozone crisis and increasing voter concern about immigration (notably the influx of migrants from Bulgaria and Romania) as this created the space for the rise of UKIP (Gifford, 2014). In an attempt to nullify the threat from UKIP, and to placate the hard Eurosceptic sentiment on his own backbenches, in 2013 Cameron committed a future majority Conservative administration to a referendum on continued EU membership following the securing of renegotiated terms. In doing so, he had created the route to an unwanted referendum and Brexit (see Lynch, 2015).

The European divide creates the basis for our second ideologically centred hypothesis. Although the labels differ, we embrace the logic underpinning the use of the European divide in previous studies of its impact on voting behaviour in leadership elections. So, for example, Cowley and Garry assumed (and confirmed) in their study of the 1990 Conservative Party leadership election that a correlation existed between pro-Europeanism and voting for either Heseltine and Hurd, and Euroscepticism and voting for Major (Cowley and Garry, 1998, pp. 480, 492). The positions of the 2016 candidates—May for remain, and Leadsom and Gove for leave—inform our hypothesis on the European ideological variable:

[H9] Reformists and remain Conservatives would be more inclined towards voting for May, and rejectionist and Brexit Conservatives would be more inclined towards voting for either Leadsom or Gove.

2. Data collection and coding

In this second section of the article, we outline how our data was collected and our methods of assessment. We needed to establish who voted for each candidate in order to test our various social, political and ideological hypotheses. In terms of our data collection and collation, we sought guidance from the work of others who have tested such variables amongst members of the PCP (see, e.g. Cowley and Garry, 1998; Cowley and Bailey, 2000; Heppell and Crines, 2016; Heppell *et al.*, 2017). To ensure methodological rigour in terms of our ideological categorisation we extend the approaches of Norton (1990), Heppell (2002, 2013) and Heppell and Hill (2008, 2009, 2010)—that is, positioning via division lists, membership of party groups and public comments.

The viability of the research is dependent upon our ability to construct an accurate data set of the voting behaviour of Conservative parliamentarians in the second ballot. This is challenging as party leadership ballots are anonymous. We relied on public declarations of support for a candidate, typically made through personal websites, social media and articles/interviews in the mainstream media. In addition, we cross-checked these against the various lists of declared supporters compiled by media organisations as the contest unfolded, principally the BBC and broadsheet newspapers such as *The Times* and *The Guardian*.

This approach carries with it concerns about accuracy. First, it is quite possible for an MP to publicly declare for one candidate, and then vote for another in the privacy of the polling booth. However, the numbers of declared supporters we identified for each candidate—May 194 out of 199; Leadsom 71 out of 84 and Gove 29 out of 46—are lower than the actual number of votes cast for each. This suggests that any false declarations have not been a major factor in the contest. Secondly, it was also possible for an MP to declare after the ballot that they voted

for a different candidate than they actually did. For example, on seeing the size of her lead, ambitious Conservatives could have chosen to claim they voted for May to ingratiate themselves with the likely victor. However, the number of individuals declaring afterwards was very small, and we discounted such declarations (similarly on Brexit, only positions declared before the referendum result was known have been recorded). Overall, our approach is methodologically robust and we have an accurate data set covering the bulk of the electorate, with only a small number of Conservative parliamentarians classified as undeclared—that is, we identified 294 out of 329 votes cast, so we had 35 missing plus one abstention (Cameron). We have identified the voting behaviour of 89.3 per cent of the 2016 PCP—this is broadly comparable with Cowley and Garry's (1998, p. 483) data on the 1990 leadership election (90.8 per cent).

Of the nine variables that we wanted to test, distinguishing Conservative parliamentarians by gender requires no explanation. With regard to education (both school and university), experience (year of entry), constituency marginality and UKIP vote share as well as ministerial career (or not), we collected this information from, first, the UK Parliament website which contains profiles for each parliamentarian (see <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/>), and, secondly, from the Dods Parliamentary Companion 2016.

With respect to our coding for education we differentiated via four types of school—home educated, state, grammar and private—and for university we differentiated according to the following six types—did not attend university; attended a post-1992 university; attended a pre-1992 university (excluding Russell Group); attended a Russell Group university; attended Oxbridge; attended a private university. The insider/outside distinction was coded as follows: first, being a minister at the time of the leadership election; second, ex-minister or what could be defined as the dispossessed; and finally, the never-possessed grouping of career backbenchers, which may not only include long-standing figures, but also all of the new entrants in 2015. Both electoral marginality and percentage vote share achieved by UKIP within each Conservative constituency were continuous variables.

For our ideologically based hypotheses we coded as follows. With regard to the socially liberal/conservative distinction we used the legislation on same-sex marriage as our determinant. Those who voted for the legislation (and thus endorsed Cameronite modernisation) were defined as socially liberal, those who abstained were defined as agnostic and those who voted against were defined as socially conservative. The division lists utilised were from the votes on the second and third readings of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill on 5 February and 21 May 2013. This approach enabled us to position those who had been members of the 2010–2015 PCP. For those who entered Parliament after that vote, public declarations on constituency websites, parliamentary statements in Hansard and

social media activity have been used to determine their attitude towards the same determinate variable *vis-à-vis* same-sex marriage. For our European policy divide we identified those who voted remain or leave in the EU referendum via the same methods as we used for determining who voted for who in the leadership election: that is, public declarations made through social media (Twitter, Facebook, constituency webpages). These were cross-referenced with media articles and interviews, alongside declared lists of remain or leave supporters provided by the print media, and statements made in Parliament on their intentions. On the basis of these methods we were able to identify the voting behaviour and thereby the ideological position of the vast majority of the PCP. Those that we could not identify were recorded as undeclared.

3. Research findings

Table 1 reports at the basic level of descriptive statistics, the pattern of voting with regard to all of candidates and all categorical variables that we were considering. Table 2 shows the output for three logistic regression models, showing the relationship between the odds of supporting each candidate and the independent variables outlined above when holding all other variables constant. Both tables relate to the 294 Conservative parliamentarians whose voting position we were able to determine, and exclude the small number of undeclared or abstaining.

3.1 Analysis of results

Of our social background variables, our hypotheses on gender and education are disproven. There is no statistically significant relationship between being a female Conservative MP and voting for any of the candidates, nor is there a statistically significant relationship between going to a private school or Oxbridge and support (or lack thereof) for any candidate.

Our political variables related to parliamentary experience, electoral marginality and backbencher or minister: Our assumption that longer-serving Conservative parliamentarians would show an increased likelihood for voting for May is not proven, although a relationship that is statistically significant is identified in terms of the 2015 cohort, with new entrants less likely to endorse Leadsom. This, however, is the only statistically significant relationship with regard to parliamentary cohorts. Our assumption that Conservative parliamentarians holding marginal constituencies would be more inclined towards voting for May is not proven—that is, there is no statistically significant relationship between the size of majority and support for May. It is particularly illuminating to discover that our assumption regarding the vote share of UKIP is not proven—there is no statistically significant relationship between the threat posed by UKIP and voting

Table 1 Voting in the second parliamentary ballot of the leadership election of 2016: categorical social, political and ideological determinants

Variable	May, n (%)	Leadsom, n (%)	Gove, n (%)	Total, n (100 %)
Vote share	194 (66.0)	71 (24.2)	29 (9.9)	294
Social				
Gender				
Male	152 (64.7)	57 (24.3)	26 (11.0)	235
Female	42 (71.2)	14 (23.7)	3 (5.1)	59
School				
Private	81 (65.3)	30 (24.2)	13 (10.5)	124
Grammar	56 (62.9)	24 (27.0)	9 (10.1)	89
State	56 (70.0)	17 (21.3)	7 (8.8)	80
Home	1 (100)	0	0	1
University				
Oxbridge	61 (70.9)	15 (17.4)	10 (11.6)	86
Pre-1992	42 (67.7)	14 (22.6)	6 (9.7)	62
Post-1992	8 (50.0)	6 (37.5)	2 (12.5)	16
Private	5 (100)	0	0	5
Russell Group	63 (67.7)	23 (24.7)	7 (7.5)	93
None	15 (46.9)	13 (40.6)	4 (12.5)	32
Political				
Year of entry ^a				
Before 1997	21 (63.6)	9 (27.8)	3 (9.1)	33
1997–2010	46 (59.7)	19 (24.7)	12 (15.6)	77
2010–2015	84 (68.3)	31 (25.2)	8 (6.5)	123
2015	43 (70.5)	12 (19.7)	6 (9.8)	61
Minister				
Current	69 (81.2)	8 (9.4)	8 (9.4)	85
Never	102 (58.6)	57 (32.8)	15 (8.6)	174
Former	23 (65.7)	6 (17.1)	6 (17.1)	35
Ideological				
Social position (gay marriage)				
For	100 (74.6)	20 (14.9)	14 (10.5)	133
Against	57 (54.3)	41 (39.1)	7 (6.7)	105
Abstain	37 (67.3)	10 (18.2)	8 (14.6)	55
EU referendum				
Leave	44 (34.7)	62 (48.8)	21 (16.5)	127
Remain	142 (91.0)	6 (3.9)	8 (5.1)	156
Undeclared	8 (72.7)	3 (27.3)	0	11

^aFor Conservative parliamentarians first elected via by-elections, we aligned them to the parliament that they had entered—for example, if elected in a by-election in 1999 they were aligned to the 1997 parliamentary cohort. For Conservative parliamentarians who have been elected, defeated and re-elected we calculate them from their first entry into Parliament.

Table 2 Multivariate logistic regression outputs for leadership support

	May	Leadsom	Gove
N	288	288	277
$p > \chi^2$	0.00	0.00	0.02
Pseudo r^2	0.32	0.35	0.17
Female (relative to male)	1.01	1.80	0.43
School (relative to those who attended a private school)			
Grammar	0.83	1.27	1.02
State	1.64	0.63	0.84
Home	1.00	(empty)	(empty)
University (relative to those who attended Oxbridge)			
Pre-1992	1.91	0.65	0.72
Post-1992	1.31	0.97	0.80
Private	1.00	(empty)	(empty)
Russell Group	1.26	1.19	0.65
None	0.76	1.34	1.23
Cohort (relative to those who became an MP before 1997)			
1997–2010	0.47	0.97	2.76
2010–2015	0.91	0.91	1.13
2015	1.71	0.22*	2.77
Majority size (%)	1.01	0.97	1.03
Minister (relative to those who were ministers)			
No	0.46	3.07*	0.75
Former Minister	0.67	1.15	1.74
Gay marriage (relative to those who voted for)			
Abstained	0.64	1.30	1.57
Against	0.74	2.71*	0.31*
EU referendum (relative to those who declared for Leave)			
Remain	18.48***	0.05***	0.17***
Undeclared	5.55*	0.33	(empty)
UKIP vote share	0.98	1.02	1.00
Constant	1.10	0.28	0.27

*** $p = 0.000$;** $0.001 \leq p \leq 0.01$;* $0.01 < p \leq 0.05$.

choice between the remain candidate (May) or the Brexit candidates (Leadsom or Gove). This might suggest that Conservative MPs quickly concluded that the referendum result would diminish the electoral threat posed by UKIP, or could simply indicate that other factors overrode this in their decision-making process about who to back for the leadership. In terms of ministerial status [H7], we did identify a statistically significant relationship between being a backbencher and increased likelihood for voting for Leadsom, suggesting that her position as the relative outsider amongst the candidates available had some impact with this group.

Our ideological variables related to attitudes towards moral issues (specifically same-sex marriage), and Europe. Our assumption that social liberals would be more inclined to vote for May or Gove, and social conservatives will be more inclined to vote for Leadsom [H8] is partially supported. Although for May there is no statistically significant relationship between support for gay marriage and declared support in the leadership election, the hypothesis is correct for the other two candidates. Relative to those who supported gay marriage, the odds of supporting Leadsom were 2.71 times higher amongst those who voted against gay marriage, whilst for Gove the odds were 0.31 times higher.

Our assumption with regard to Europe [H9] is supported. Those who backed remain in the EU referendum were more likely to vote for May and less likely to vote for Leadsom or Gove. The descriptive statistics paint a striking picture, with 91 per cent of the MPs identified as remain supporters backing Theresa May for the premiership. May also won the backing of 16.5 per cent of MPs who had voted to leave the EU, lending some credibility to her claim that she could unite the party, and perhaps also vindicating her decision to have a prominent Brexiteer, Chris Grayling, manage her campaign. In terms of support for May, relative to those MPs who voted to leave the EU, those who voted to remain had 18.48 times the odds of supporting May, whilst those who were undeclared had 5.55 times the odds of supporting May. Contrastingly, relative to those who voted to leave, those who voted to remain had 0.05 times the odds of supporting Leadsom, and 0.17 times the odds of supporting Gove.

Overall, the logistic regression models presented in Table 2 show that for support for May, the only variable of statistical significance is how a Conservative parliamentarian voted in the EU referendum. In terms of support for Leadsom, four variables are significant. First, relative to those who became Conservative parliamentarians before 1997, those who became an MP after 2015 had 0.22 times the odds of supporting Leadsom. This suggests the newer cohort of Conservative parliamentarians was less receptive to Leadsom's right-wing, socially conservative message than those who had been in the Commons since the Thatcher or Major years. Relative to those who were current ministers, backbenchers who had never held ministerial positions had 3.1 times greater odds of supporting Leadsom, again suggesting that those who shared her ideological positioning were not favoured under the Cameron government. This is reinforced by the measure of how one voted in the same-sex marriage debate. Relative to those who voted in favour, those who voted against have 2.7 times greater odds of supporting Leadsom. Finally for Leadsom, as with May, how Conservative parliamentarians voted in the EU referendum is very important in determining her support. Relative to those who voted leave, those who voted to remain had 0.05 times the odds of supporting Leadsom. Hence, we can see that Leadsom's support was higher amongst socially conservative Brexiteers, who tended to have been in

Parliament for longer, and who had been passed over for ministerial positions. Finally, for support for Gove's candidacy, we can see that his support is drawn from socially liberal Brexiteers. Relative to those who voted for same-sex marriage, those who voted against had 0.3 times the odds of backing the former Education Secretary, and relative to those who declared their intention to vote to leave, those who declared in favour of remaining had 0.2 times the odds of backing Gove.

Therefore, we can see two major cleavages in this leadership election: positioning in the EU referendum and social liberalism/conservatism. May's support was drawn from those who backed remain in the referendum, whilst Leadsom and Gove both drew support from Brexiteers; the former from socially conservative members of the PCP, and the latter from the socially liberal wing.

4. Conclusion

This article set out to explain how May was able to secure such a convincing victory in the second and telling ballot of Conservative MPs by analysing the demographic and attitudinal bases of her support. In so doing it draws upon a unique and detailed dataset that facilitates a rigorous statistical analysis, allowing us to test assumptions that might underpin media accounts or more narrative-based academic inquiries. Our work consequently contributes to and develops the systematic approach to analysing leadership elections, as discussed above, by extending the investigation of social, political and ideological variables within the PCP.

The result was extraordinary not just for the level of support May secured, which proved sufficient to prompt the withdrawal of her remaining rival and the abandonment of the final ballot of the full party membership, but because of the widespread expectation that Cameron's successor would come from the Brexit wing of the party. Indeed, all the pro-Brexit runners and riders in the contest tried to argue that only a Brexiteer could be trusted to deliver on the referendum victory for the leave campaign. May therefore sought to neutralise this threat to her chances by proclaiming firmly (and repeatedly) that 'Brexit means Brexit'.

May was undoubtedly assisted by the self-destruction of the leading pro-Brexit ticket in the race, namely the pairing of Boris Johnson and Gove, who had fronted the Leave campaign in the EU referendum. Johnson had for a number of years been widely expected to be a contender to succeed Cameron, and duly announced his candidature when the contest was triggered. He initially secured the backing of Gove who was tipped for a top job in a future Johnson cabinet, probably overseeing the Brexit negotiations as Foreign Secretary. However, with only hours to go until the close of nominations, Gove turned on his ally in a highly personalised attack and threw his own hat into the ring. This not only prompted Johnson to announce his withdrawal from the race but also hugely damaged Gove's own

credibility, with his personal rating amongst Conservative Party members falling from +41 before the move to -20 immediately afterwards (YouGov, 2016). The drama of the unfolding race perhaps inevitably lends itself towards candidate-focused explanations of the result. Indeed, following Gove's move against Johnson, May was regarded by Conservative Party members as by far and away the strongest of the remaining five candidates in relation to each of the three Stark criteria: 51 per cent saw her as best able to win an election (with Gove second on 13 per cent); 61 per cent saw her as best able to unify the party (with Leadsom second on 17 per cent) and 63 per cent said she would be the strongest leader (with Leadsom second on 14 per cent) (YouGov, 2016). This view of May as a competent, electable and unifying figure no doubt assisted May in the election and contributed to her victory, although without survey data of the electorate (i.e. Conservative MPs) measuring their views on each candidate we cannot weight the relative importance of these factors.

What our article nonetheless demonstrates is that even in the face of the dramatic twists and turns of the campaign, attitudes towards Brexit and same-sex marriage were the key statistically significant factors determining voting. We set out to explain the high level of support for May, and it is striking that she won the backing of more than nine out of ten of her fellow colleagues in the Remain camp, while the Leave camp was split on the socially liberal-conservative cleavage. It is also notable that although larger than many had expected before the referendum campaign began, the pro-Brexit faction in the PCP was smaller than the Remain faction, giving May a bigger base to work from in the second ballot (following the withdrawal of the only other Remain candidate, Stephen Crabb, after the first round). May also secured the backing of seven out of ten female Conservative MPs, but interestingly this was not a statistically significant factor in her victory.

Given the context of the leadership battle, in the aftermath of the EU referendum, the fact that the European divide was significant is unsurprising. The contest consequently sits alongside 1990, 1997 and 2001 as one in which the European issue loomed large as a key factor. If and when Brexit is delivered this might be the last Conservative leadership contest about which that can be said, marking the end of the defining ideological battleground in the party since the Thatcher era. That is not, however, to anticipate the end of ideologically driven voting in Conservative leadership battles of the future. The way in which support for the two Brexit candidates split along socially liberal-conservative axis is revealing of the depth of division that remains over that issue, and it is possible that an ideological divide on economic issues could re-emerge in the future, as the country seeks to define the shape of its political economy outside of the EU. As such our article has demonstrated that an appreciation of the ideological divisions in the PCP is vital for explaining the election of May. The scale of her

victory helped create the impression of party unity, and it was fortunate for her, and arguably for the Conservatives as a whole, that a full-blooded battle with a strong pro-Brexit candidate was avoided. In that sense, the party perhaps owes a debt of gratitude to Gove.

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