Political Institutions, Spring 2016

**Class 5: Election outcomes and party system polarization**

This week’s class is about one of the causes of polarization in party systems. The article that you will read develops an argument about how parties that lose elections will behave. In your study groups, you will assess the article’s argument and empirics – most importantly by conducting your own research into the 2015 selection of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the British Labour Party.

Questions:

1. Why will parties tend to become more extreme after an electoral defeat?
2. What causes losing parties to eventually converge on the position of the winner?
3. Summarize the main results from the case studies and quantitative analysis, respectively. Which do you find more convincing? What are the main strengths and weaknesses of both? *(Study groups should answer question 3 in writing, uploading your one page response on the class blackboard site by Wednesday 23:59.)*
4. In the 2015 UK election, the Labour Party lost a second consecutive election. Following the loss, Jeremy Corbyn was elected new leader of the Party. Based on your own research\*, discuss to what extent the case fits with the theory and conclusions from Bækgaard and Jensen (2012). Think about the following questions in doing so:
   1. How is the Labour Party leader elected? What was Corbyn's support like from the party membership versus his support from the "Parliamentary Labour Party"?
   2. How does the distinction between the party membership and the "Parliamentary Labour Party" fit with the article's theory about the mechanism leading parties to become more extreme? According to Bækgaard and Jensen (2012), who are the actors driving the effect?

*(Study groups provide the answer for question 4 on 2-3 slides* *and upload them on blackboard by Wednesday 23:59.)*

\* Some potential sources include:

* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Party_(UK)_leadership_election,_2015>

("Procedure", "Candidates", and "Result" sections)

* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeremy_Corbyn_Labour_Party_leadership_campaign,_2015> (Introduction section)
* <http://www.economist.com/news/britain/21661653-jeremy-corbyn-will-probably-winbut-then-run-trouble-seeing-red>
* <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/sep/12/jeremy-corbyn-wins-labour-party-leadership-election>
* <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/2015-the-year-british-politics-lost-its-opposition/>

*Readings*:

Martin Bækgaard and Carsten Jensen (2012), “The dynamics of competitor party behavior”, *Political Studies* 60 (1), pages 131-146 (16 pages).