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Hard acts to follow: Predecessor effects on party leader survival

Yusaku Horiuchi
Dartmouth College, Hanover, USA

Matthew Laing
Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

Paul 't Hart
Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands

Abstract
In this article, using our original data on party leadership succession in 23 parliamentary democracies, we investigate the determinants of a party leader's survival rate: how long he/she remains in office. Unlike previous studies, which focus on *institutional* settings of leadership selection or on *situational* (political, economic and international) conditions at the time of succession, we propose a *perceptual* theory of leadership survival, focusing on the expectations of party constituents (or indirectly, the voting public) who have the power to remove a leader. Specifically, we argue that they 'benchmark' their expectation of a current party leader's performance by comparing it against their memory of that leader's immediate predecessor. Empirically, we show that party leaders who succeeded a (very) long-serving party leader and/or a leader who had also been the head of government experience lower longevity than others, making these types of predecessor 'hard acts to follow'.

Keywords
Parliamentary democracies, party leaders, leadership succession, prime ministers, survival analysis

1. Introduction

The leadership position in a political party is a 'hot seat' that confers significant power and authority to its occupant. Leaders are key shapers of their party's electoral platforms and, if they are also the heads of government, of public policies. They wield influence in appointments to party, cabinet, public service, judicial, regulatory and advisory positions. Furthermore, in recent years, the so-called 'personalization of politics' has placed a greater premium on the personality, style and skills of leaders in determining the electoral fate of parties and governments (Aarts et al., 2010; Blondel and Thibault, 2009). Party leaders who are also the head of government, in particular, are claimed to have gained power vis-à-vis their party organizations, cabinet colleagues and line agencies. At the national level of politics and government in parliamentary democracies, this trend has recently been referred to, albeit misleadingly, as the 'presidentialization' of prime ministers (Heffernan, 2003; Poguntke and Webb, 2005; Samuels, 2002).

Yet, the leadership of a political party, and possibly in its wake the head of government, is also a high-risk position. Political leaders operate constantly in the public eye, with all the responsibilities their position entails, and there are always plenty of people ready to criticize their performance. Naturally, there is no shortage of potential competitors, brooding on how and when to try and take over the top job.

Given the high stakes, fundamentally competitive and conditional nature of party leadership, political scientists

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Corresponding author:
Matthew Laing, Australian National University, Haydon-Allen Bldg, Australian National University, Canberra, 0200, Australia.
Email: matthew.laing@anu.edu.au

wonder why some party leaders manage to survive in the job for considerable periods of time, whereas others face relatively quick and often involuntary terminations. This question is relevant also because a variation in the length of leaders' survival in office may have important implications. On the one hand, it may be taken to be a key indicator of the level of authority and the level of support that leaders (whether in government or not) enjoy among their principal party constituents – those who have the power to remove them. On the other hand, very long-serving leaders may stifle innovation within parties and governments and generate internal conflicts and stalemates without any particular faction having quite enough power to replace them. It is not hard to imagine that in these two extreme cases, their eventual successors face quite different political biotope to secure their own survival.

There is now a considerable corpus of research on political leadership succession. The great majority of studies that deal with the succession of party leaders in democratic systems examine the effects of institutional rules of leadership selection and removal on leadership survival. Many such studies also assess the pros and cons on different leader selection and removal mechanisms from a number of different perspectives, and examine the impacts of recent institutional changes that have taken place within many parties (Colomé and Lopez Nieto, 1993; Courtney, 1995; Davis, 1998; Kenig, 2009; LeDuc, 2001; Marsh, 1993; Quinn, 2004, 2005; Stark, 1996; Strøm, 1993; Weller, 1983, 1994). Other empirical studies concentrate on explaining the dynamics of particular types of successions, such as voluntary or 'managed' handovers from an incumbent to an heir apparent (Bynander and 't Hart, 2006, 2007, 2008).

More pertinent to our article are some quantitative studies examining the determinants of a party leader's survival rate – how long he/she remains in office. Seminal studies in this vein include Bienen and van de Walle (1991), Bueno de Mesquita et al. (1999, 2003) and Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson (1995). According to Bueno de Mesquita et al. (1999), the adaptability of leaders in the face of institutional boundaries and shifting political coalitions decides their political longevity. In a subsequent work, Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003) focus on the role of war and violent conflict in the survival of leaders. Burke (2012) shows that higher economic growth rates increase the likelihood of leader survival. By contrast, Chiozza and Goemans (2004) find that economic performance has a small effect, while political institutions have a very large effect. They also show that wars do not necessarily reduce the tenure of leaders, as compared to crises. By modelling party leadership survival as a function of electoral performance, Andrews and Jackman (2008) show the vulnerability of leaders to performance indicators. They also find that those elevated to the leadership close to an election are at a distinct disadvantage.

In this article, we attempt to gain more insight into the factors that might explain the survival prospects of party leaders by taking a different approach to those dominating the existing literature. First and foremost, instead of focusing on *institutional* settings of leadership selection or *situational* (political, economic and international) conditions at the time of succession, we propose a *perceptual* theory of leadership survival, focusing on the expectations of party constituents who have the power to remove a leader. Specifically, we argue that they 'benchmark' their expectation of a current party leader's performance by comparing it against their memory of that leader's immediate predecessor. We surmise that the constituents remember and recall things like their predecessors' political stances and their reputation for efficacy. As a result, some types of predecessors come out of these comparison processes as much 'harder acts to follow' than others. This study examines the extent to which this type of paired comparison explains the differential survival rates of party leaders, regardless of the prevailing party rules for leader (de)selection.

To do so, we use our new dataset, which includes information about not only prime ministers (or other 'effective primary rulers') but also opposition and minor party leaders in stable parliamentary democracies as defined by Lijphart (1999). As we explain later, this allows us to examine whether survival rates are different depending on whether leaders succeeded when their party was in charge of the government or not. To the best of our knowledge, this question has never been examined previously.

Below, we first describe our theory of leadership survival as being contingent upon stakeholders' perceptions in greater detail, and articulate a set of hypotheses. We then explain data and methods used to test our hypotheses in Section 3. In Section 4, we present and interpret the findings. Specifically, we show that party leaders who succeeded a (very) long-serving party leader and/or a leader who had also been the head of government experience lower longevity than others. Section 5 offers key conclusions and suggestions for further research.

2. Hard acts to follow

We propose a perceptual theory of leadership survival. Specifically, we focus on the ways in which the stakeholders form their expectations for a leader *in comparison with his/her predecessor*, and formulate our hypotheses.

2.1. Succeeding a long-serving leader

Whom a leader succeeds does, indeed, matter. This is most clearly illustrated in the cases of succession of so-called 'great leaders' – very long-serving founders or successful reformers of their parties. Their towering presence in the top job challenges their followers, critics and other stakeholders to imagine a future without them.

This is typical in non-democratic polities, where there are few institutional restraints on leadership removal. As a result, the ageing, illness and/or death of nation-builders and

dictators often create widespread uncertainty regarding their succession and regarding the future stability of their regime. The classic cases of communist party leaders who were also the heads of government, such as Josip Broz Tito (Yugoslavia, 1943–1980), Mao Zedong (People's Republic of China, 1949–1976), Kim Il Sung (North Korea, 1948–1994) and Fidel Castro (Cuba, 1959–2011), illustrate the point vividly.

Also in established democracies, a particular leader's longevity in office may give many people the feeling that things will never be the same without him/her. In the United States, an entire generation grew up listening to Franklin D. Roosevelt's (President, 1933–1945) 'fireside chats', a series of engaging and often soothing addresses in the dire circumstances of the Great Depression and later the war. Likewise, during the 1950s and early 1960s in Australia and Sweden, an entire generation reached adulthood living under one Prime Minister – Robert Menzies (1949–1966) and Tage Erlander (1945–1968), respectively. In Germany, the long reign of Helmut Kohl (Chancellor, 1982–1998) earned him the nickname 'Der ewige Kanzler' (the eternal chancellor).

Successors to such long-serving leaders face difficulties that arise out of the sheer fact of their predecessors' longevity. For one, long-term leaders generally have firm support bases within the party that have crystallized over time, leaving successors at a disadvantage in both challenging and reorganizing the long-entrenched party dynamics. Long-term party leaders also develop a 'taken for grantedness' among the party faithful; namely, it is their leadership style and political profile that dominate the party's political memory. In such political/psychological environments, what we call an 'attribution effect' may occur. A party's success during a long-serving leader's tenure is credited to the leader's credentials, not to exogenous factors. As a consequence, potential successors face significant challenges in dislodging constituency expectations, making the case for change difficult even in the face of declining fortunes of their party.

Historical examples are abundant. In his last years in office, Sir Winston Churchill (British Prime Minister, 1940–1945 and again 1951–1955) was a faint shadow of the vigorous anti-appeasement advocate and the wartime Prime Minister he once had been, but his successor-in-waiting, Anthony Eden (1955–1957), did not risk a major challenge against the living legend. From 2005 to 2007, the Australian Treasurer and deputy Liberal Party leader, Peter Costello, time and again retreated from the brink of openly challenging the four-term Prime Minister John Howard (1996–2007) as the party leader, even when Howard's public support was evaporating in the run-up to the 2007 election. Likewise, although Helmut Kohl had designated Wolfgang Schäuble as the next leader of Christian Democratic Union many years in advance, Schäuble never even considered challenging Kohl to implement the succession, even in the face of voters' growing exasperation with Kohl's continued and increasingly autocratic reign (Langguth, 2009). Schäuble ultimately became the party leader in 1998, after Kohl's election defeat.

The successors to 'great leaders' have to battle with established party expectations, and face an extraordinarily tough challenge to be seen and judged in their own right, rather than in the shadow of their formidable predecessor. Taking office without the 'idiosyncrasy credit' (Hollander, 1978) that comes with a record of survival and achievement as a party leader, the successors of 'great leaders' may have a much less imposing armour to fend off critics and rivals in politically lean times for the party.

For example, John Howard's eventual successor Brendan Nelson lasted less than a year, to be toppled by Malcolm Turnbull who did not survive for much longer himself. In both cases, the general public and party constituents did not see the kind of sovereign and electorally cunning leadership they had become accustomed to. Likewise, when Schäuble did become the party leader, he, like Nelson and Turnbull, inherited a party that was long accustomed to government and itself being ruled decisively by the 'big man'. Though being a long-time Kohl associate and clever back-room operator, Schäuble lacked Kohl's huge network inside the party and simply did not inspire the same level of internal unity and confidence, and could not survive the party financing scandal that broke out in 1999 and claimed his scalp in early 2000.

This is not to say that such successions are inevitably doomed. Counterexamples are also not hard to find, including John Major's (1990–1997) replacement of Margaret Thatcher (1979–1990) in the British Conservative Party, Olaf Palme's (1969–1986) replacement of 23-year Prime Minister Tage Erlander (1946–1969) in the Swedish Social-Democratic Party, and Wim Kok's (1986–2002) replacement of Joop den Uyl (1969–1986) within the Dutch Social-Democratic Party. All of these successors went on to win or prolong government for their parties in their own right.

Generally, however, it seems to suggest that successors to long-serving leaders face a greater weight of expectations shaped by constituent memories of the 'golden years' the party experienced under these 'great leaders'. We presume this makes it hard for these successors to assert authority in their own right, above and beyond the constant comparisons being drawn between them and their (soon legendary) predecessors. For these reasons, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Successors to a long-serving party leader experience *lower* longevity than other party leaders.

2.2. Succeeding party leaders who are or were prime minister

The prospects of new leaders may be also influenced by roles they inherit from their predecessors. The key question

here is whether, in becoming a party leader, they also become the head of government; more specifically, the prime minister, in our study that focuses on parliamentary democracies.

One train of thought is that to take over from an incumbent prime minister helps a new leader gain immediate gravitas by the role as the head of government. This idea may be similar to the idea of 'incumbency advantage', which is well documented in the literature of electoral politics (Ansolabehere et al., 2000; Gaines, 1998; Gelman and King, 1990; Levitt and Wolfram, 1997). Such studies generally posit an advantage from a combination of more media exposure and better grounding in the minds of a leader's constituencies, not in the least the voters.

This is frequently turned on its head, however. There are a number of reasons to expect the longevity of successors to a prime minister to be lower than that of successors to an opposition leader.

First, the analogy to the incumbency advantage may be misleading. Consider the circumstances in which parties choose a successor for an incumbent prime minister. The first obvious trigger is when a prime minister falls ill or dies. The involuntary dropping away of the incumbent sets up a sense of bereavement within the party, which may easily transform into a mythical and phantom presence of the predecessor among the minds of party members and voters. Any 'accidental successor' (Abbott, 2005), when compared with his/her predecessor's canonized past, is doomed to disappoint stakeholders.

The second, and much more common, trigger is when the party and the government have got themselves in a really serious mess: internal fighting, entrenched leadership rivalry, toxic scandals and plummeting polls. Because of the visibility and importance of the prime minister, and of the importance of the perception of stability and competence for the party in government, it is a necessarily high-risk and high-stake decision for a party to replace the head of government mid-stream. In such circumstances, even hitherto successful government leaders, such as Thatcher and Jean Chretien (Prime Minister of Canada, 1993–2003), may be forced out and their successors face a terrible burden of expectations: to learn how to govern as the new prime minister while at the same time restoring unity and hope for electoral survival to their divisive, even traumatized, party constituencies.

The difficulties these successors to incumbent prime ministers face are perhaps irrelevant to whether the transition was voluntary or not. Consider Julia Gillard's (2000 current) removal of Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (2006–2010; Prime Minister, 2007–2010). This involuntary resignation by Rudd is said to have tarnished the party's credibility (Coorey, 2010). Thus, from the early stage, Gillard had to defend herself against strong critics among party members and voters. Voluntary resignations also tend to be under a great deal of pressure or in the context of serious government dysfunction: Harold Macmillan's (1957–1963) departure as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and Charles Haughey's (1987–1992) as Taoiseach of Ireland are demonstrative of governments in serious trouble rather than the natural passing of the baton. In both cases, their successors had to manage party and public expectations in orchestrating an in-government transition, and such difficult tasks seem *prima facie* to have much greater scope for failure than doing so out of the spotlight of governing.

Considering these, we present the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Successors to a party leader who also is or has been the head of government experience *lower* longevity than successors to an opposition party leader.

The hypothesis pertains, in fact, to two (sub)types of successions: those of a party leader who is an *incumbent* head of government (or hereinafter, IHOG) at the time of leadership transition, and those of a party leader who is a *previous* head of government (PHOG) who has since then continued or returned as a party leader. We argue that just like the successors to IHOG, the successors to PHOG are likely to face challenges to meet the high expectations among party constituencies. This is because many PHOGs resign soon after their government's electoral defeat. While the election loss still lingers in everyone's memory, it is a difficult task for a new leader to build confidence among party members and to gain support from voters. Alternatively, previous heads of government may still exert influence behind the scenes – in fact many leaders who step down find it difficult to accept the new directions their successors take. Dom Mintoff (1949–1984), the hero of the Maltese Labour Party, cast a long shadow over his successors and his presence as a not-so-quiet backbencher would prove destabilizing for his successors many times over. By contrast, for a new leader of a party accustomed to losing, it is relatively easier to meet the lower expectations the party may have in either the polls or at the ballot box. Jeremy Thorpe's (1967–1976) leadership of the UK Liberal Party might be one such example – a string of by-election wins and a strong result in 1974 gave him an aura as a saviour of the party, despite the long-running controversies concerning his personal life and a lack of gains in parliamentary influence. For an opposition party, small gains might fortify a leader regardless of other factors.

In short, we argue that Hypothesis 2 is valid regardless of whether a succession was to IHOG or to PHOG. Both IHOG successors and PHOG successors have a lower longevity rate than successors to an opposition party leader without taking the top seat in his/her career.

3. Methods

To test these hypotheses, we use our own dataset covering 23 parliamentary democracies around the world (Australia, Austria, Barbados, Botswana, Canada, West Germany/

Germany, Denmark, Great Britain, Greece, India, Ireland, Israel, Jamaica, Japan, Luxemburg, Malta, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Trinidad and Tobago) for the post-World War II period.[1] We focus on these countries based on Lijphart's selection of 36 democracies (1999). Thirteen countries were not included in the dataset, however, for several reasons. They include countries in which a singular party leader is not easily established (France, Italy, Switzerland, Costa Rica and USA),[2] countries that had ceased to be considered 'free' according to Freedom House and thus no longer satisfied Lijphart's original categorization (Colombia and Venezuela), and countries with which our coders had insufficient access to English sources (Iceland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Papua New Guinea, Mauritius and Finland).

The dataset includes 448 leaders from 66 governing and opposition parties,[3] and each observation contains information about when each leader entered and left power, as well as other relevant personal characteristics.[4] Acting or temporary leaders were not counted. There are a small number of individuals who became a party leader more than once in non-consecutive periods, but we treat them as independent observations.[5]

3.1. Main variables

The dependent variable of our analysis (*Incumbent Longevity*) is the number of years (more precisely, the number of days divided by 365) each leader was in power. This duration variable is censored as of 1 October 2009; namely, the values of our dependent variable for all 'current' leaders are measured up to the censored date.[6] It ranges from as little as 47 days in the case of Sir Donald Sangster's leadership of the Jamaican Labour Party to an epic 12,852 days (>34 years) in the case of Dom Mintoff's leadership of the Maltese Labour Party.

Although the arithmetic mean would postulate that leaders on average lead their parties for 5.9 years, the skewed nature of the longevity distribution means that the large majority of leaders fall far short of that time period. Specifically, nearly a quarter of leaders (N=110) did not make it to the end of a second year in office, and about 40 percent (N=177) did not reach beyond a third year. Bueno De Mesquita and Siverson (1995) likewise have shown that the most perilous period for new leaders is the first two years, which are hard to survive. At the other end, and equally remarkable, more than 20 percent of party leaders survived for ten or more years in office (N=95). What we see, then, seems to be a crash or crash-through pattern of party leadership; namely, most party leaders leave office quickly but there is a sizeable proportion of leaders with a very long haul who cannot be ignored.

There are several main independent variables we use to test our hypotheses. The first (*Predecessor's Longevity*) is the number of years (the number of days divided by 365) a predecessor was in power.[7] Our expectation (Hypothesis 1) is that it has a negative effect on the length of a successor's tenure.

The effect, however, may not necessarily be linear; namely, the effect of an increase in the predecessor's tenure from 1 year to 2 years may not be the same as the effect of an increase from 10 years to 11 years. Considering this possibility, we also use an alternative specification for the predecessor's tenure length. Specifically, we divide the observations into three groups (almost equally into 149, 149 and 150) and use two dummy variables for the second and third groups – *Medium-Term Predecessor* and *Long-Term Predecessor*. The base category is the first group (*Short-Term Predecessor*). The average longevity of predecessors is 1.6 years for the first group, 5.4 years for the second group and 14.7 years for the third group. We expect negative effects for these dummy variables; namely, compared to leaders who followed a predecessor with a short tenure, those who succeeded one with medium-term to long-term tenure are more likely to leave office at any given time. This negative effect is expected to be particularly large if a predecessor was a long-serving leader.

The other variables for our Hypothesis 2 are concerned with the type of succession that occurs. We use the following two dummy variables. The first variable (*Previous Head of Government Succession*) is coded as 1 if a predecessor had been the head of government (i.e. the prime minister in our study) at some point previously but was the leader of a non-governing party at the time of succession, and zero otherwise. The second variable (*Incumbent Head of Government Succession*) is coded as 1 if a predecessor was the head of government at the time of succession, and zero otherwise. The base category (*No Head of Government Succession*) is for cases in which a predecessor has never led a governing party. The number of observations is 86, 103 and 259, respectively. As we discussed earlier, our expectation is that both IHOGs and PHOGs are harder acts to follow than party leaders who have not held the head of government position at any point in their career.

3.2. Should we control for institutional changes?

A range of other factors can influence party leaders' longevity. To control for other determinants, we run a set of stratified proportional hazards models where 'strata' (i.e. groups) are political parties,[8] and estimate the effects of our independent variables with the strata-specific baseline hazard.[9] Like commonly used OLS regressions with fixed effects, this approach can effectively control all observable and even unobservable party-specific variables, as long as they are constant within the period of our investigation. Since each party is obviously specific to each country, it can also control all country-specific variables. Importantly, these country-specific and party-specific covariates include a range of institutional settings, which are deemed relevant

in shaping the duration of political leaders, such as whether or not a country has a Westminster system, a two-party system and/or a fixed election cycle.

Some institutions relevant to the duration of political leaders, however, may not be constant within the period of investigation. A potentially important one is the rule for leadership selection. Generally speaking, the process by which party leadership is determined has been gradually democratized and broadened, particularly over the past two decades (e.g. in the UK, Portugal and Greece). This trend includes institutional changes to give more opportunities for removing leaders, such as the introduction of specific post-election leadership reviews in Canada. The institutional changes, however, also worked in the other direction in some countries. For example, the reforms in both Italy and Japan during the 1990s attempted to stabilize leadership, and shifted power and initiative away from constantly warring factions. There are also a large number of countries whose leadership selection rules have also remained relatively unchanged for the duration of the period (e.g. in Australia, Spain and the Caribbean countries).

Then, an important question is whether and how we control for such institutional changes. We argue that it is not necessary – or even wrong – to control for any variable measuring whether the rule of selecting a leader has changed during a specific period for a specific party. This is because such a change is highly likely to be a *consequence* of a predecessor's longevity, one of our key independent variables. Adding such 'post-treatment' variables into the analysis introduces serious bias in our estimates (Rosenbaum, 1984). This 'post-treatment bias' has not been sufficiently acknowledged in the social science literature until recently (see King, 2010).

Let us explain this important point at length. Consider that there are three leaders succeeding one another – Leader Z to Leader X, and then Leader X to Leader Y. We want to estimate whether the longevity of Leader X affects the longevity of Leader Y. There are three potential cases of rule changes we should consider.

The first case is a rule change during the period of Leader Z's tenure of office. The new rule is likely to affect the longevity of *both* Leader X and Leader Y in the same way. Therefore, this rule change itself cannot explain why and how the longevity of Leader X affects the longevity of Leader Y.

The second case is a rule change during the period of Leader X's tenure of office. This rule change may be a *consequence* of Leader X's longevity. For example, a long-serving leader may change his/her party's rule in order to stay in office for an even longer period. Alternatively, other factions or would-be leaders may change their party's rule to end Leader X's tenure. This change is also likely to affect the longevity of Leader Y, Leader X's successor. In this case, importantly, *the longevity of Leader Y is still a consequence of the longevity of Leader X, because the rule change is a consequence of the longevity of Leader X.*

Methodologically, it is inappropriate to control for a rule change during the predecessor's tenure in regression analysis. In a standard regression framework, the estimated effect of X on Y, given a control variable Z, measures how much Y will change if X changes and Z does not change. If Z is, however, at least in part a consequence of X, when X changes, Z *must* change as well. Thus, it does not make sense to assume that Z remains constant when X changes. This is the essence of the fundamental problem arising from controlling for post-treatment variables.

There have been some recent attempts by statisticians and methodologists to deal with this problem and to estimate causal *mechanisms* in a new framework called 'causal mediation analysis' (e.g. Imai et al., 2011). In our manuscript, however, instead of trying this new approach, by dropping post-treatment variables, we estimate the *total effect* of the predecessor's longevity on the successor's longevity. This total effect is a function of many things that may happen during the period of a predecessor's tenure – namely, variables now called 'mediators'. We admit that our statistical analysis does not unpack this 'black box' (Imai et al., 2011). This unpacking exercise, however, requires further theoretical specification and much advanced methodological sophistication. We leave such an inquiry for future research.

The third case is a rule change during the period of Leader Y's tenure of office. This rule change may be a function of the longevity of Leader X, his/her predecessor, or the longevity of Leader Y himself/herself. It may be not only a consequence but also a cause of the longevity of Leader Y. For the same reason discussed above, we should not control whether or not a party's rule changed during the period of Leader Y's tenure as a control variable.

Similarly, many things may happen during Leader X's tenure, as well as during Leader Y's tenure – elections, political scandals, changes in public attitudes, intra-party and inter-party conflicts, etc. Again, as they are likely to be *consequences* of Leader X's longevity, we do not add them as control variables to estimate the effect of Leader X's longevity on Leader Y's longevity.

3.3. Individual-specific or time-specific controls

Although we emphasize the importance of dropping variables that are at least in part consequences of our main independent variables, we can control for variables that are by no means consequences of the main independent variables. First, we add a successor's age (*Age*) variable, as older leaders are at higher risk of being physically unwell and unable to stay in office.[10] Leaders who were older than the average age at the time of succession (50.5 years old) survive, on average, for 4.6 years (N=206), whereas the average tenure among below-average, younger leaders is 7.0 years (N=242).[11] The younger a leader is, the longer his/her longevity.

The second variable (*Year*) is calendar year in which a leadership succession occurred. Our data suggest that political leaders' terms in office have been decreasing in recent decades. Specifically, the average duration is 8.1 years (N=40) among those who succeeded before 1960, 7.6 years (N=119) among those who succeeded in the 1960s and 1970s, 6.1 years (N=181) among those who succeeded in the 1980s and 1990s, and 2.9 years among those who succeeded after 2000 (N=50).[12] This final finding is no doubt influenced by the fact that many contemporary leaders in the database are still in office, and their longevity is determined by the censored date for the dataset rather than what their actual time in office will be.

Finally, we add a variable (*Female*) coded as 1 if a successor is female; otherwise it is zero. Although we do not have a good theory to predict the direction of its effect, female leaders have a slightly different survival rate than male leaders. The average length of tenure among female leaders is slightly shorter (5.7 years, N=33) than male leaders (6.0 years, N=415), but we should also note the small overall proportion of female party leaders.

4. Results

The results from regression analysis based on the stratified Cox's proportional hazards model are presented in Table 1.[13] Note that the estimates shown are hazard ratios.

The estimated hazard ratios for the predecessor's longevity is 1.021 in Model 1 (without control variables) or 1.024 in Model 2 (with control variables); namely, a one-year increase in the predecessor's longevity is expected to increase the hazard ratio by about 2 percent. The magnitude of the effect is small, and the effect becomes significant at the 5 percent level only after other pre-determined covariates are controlled (Model 2). This is not necessarily consistent with our expectation.

This puzzling result, however, may be due to the problem in our model specification. As discussed earlier, the effect of the predecessor's longevity may not be linear. Model 3 (without control variables) and Model 4 (with control variables), which use two categorical variables to capture the potential non-linearity, show that as compared to leaders who succeeded short-term predecessors, those that succeeded long-term predecessors are about 50–59 percent more likely to be out of office at any given elapsed time since succession: hazard ratio = 1.505 in Model 3 and 1.579 in Model 4. These estimates are significant at the 5 percent level with and without other covariates. The difference between short-term and medium-term predecessors is small (hazard ratio = 0.886 in Model 3 and 0.989 in Model 4) and statistically insignificant.

In sum, we are inclined to support our Hypothesis 1, but in a conditional manner; specifically, the results suggest that the tenure length of one's predecessor has a significantly negative effect only when it is *very* long. Longevity may constitute a threshold effect; namely, it only becomes a noticeably complicating factor once it has exceeded a certain point. It may take a decade or more of a particular party leader to reign before he/she starts to become a kind of iconic benchmark that complicates the life of a successor. Further examination of how and why predecessor longevity becomes relevant in the longer term must be left for future research.

Table 1. The results of survival analysis.

Model	1	2	3	4
Predecessor's longevity	1.021*	1.024**		
	[1.68]	[2.06]		
Medium-term predecessor			0.886	0.989
			[–0.60]	[–0.06]
Long-term predecessor			1.505**	1.579**
			[2.09]	[2.47]
Previous HoG succession	2.203***	2.226***	2.103***	2.136***
	[3.47]	[3.77]	[3.40]	[3.74]
Incumbent HoG succession	1.898***	2.176***	1.758***	2.023***
	[3.28]	[4.00]	[2.85]	[3.62]
Age		1.046***		1.044***
		[4.96]		[4.76]
Year		1.026***		1.025***
		[6.03]		[5.64]
Female		0.725		0.673
		[–1.09]		[–1.41]
Observations	448	448	448	448
Wald Chi-square statistic	21.30	79.01	28.49	89.69
Log pseudo likelihood	–492.84	–468.75	–489.36	–466.58

The dependent variable is Incumbent Longevity. The estimates shown are hazard ratios. All models are based on a stratified proportional hazards model where strata are 66 parties. The robust clustered z statistics are in parentheses, where clusters are also 66 parties. HoG = Head of Government. ***$p<0.01$, **$p<0.05$, *$p<0.10$.

The results for two categorical variables measuring the types of leadership successions *Previous Head of Government Succession* and *Incumbent Head of Government Succession* show that compared to leaders who succeeded leaders without any experience as the head of government, the hazard ratio of those who succeeded heads of government double at any given time, ranging from 1.758 to 2.226. The effects are highly significant at the 1 percent level. These results are consistent with our Hypothesis 2.

Interestingly, the comparisons of hazard ratios for these two variables suggest that whether a predecessor was the head of government at the time of succession or not does not matter. In each estimated model, the difference between the two hazard ratios is statistically insignificant at any conventional level. These results are consistent with our initial expectation: Both PHOGs and IHOGs are (roughly) equally difficult to follow for successors.

The estimated hazard ratios for control variables also show some interesting patterns. First, younger party leaders are more likely to stay in office for a longer period. We can only speculate as to why this is: voters in parliamentary democracies may be more likely to show tolerance to younger leaders in a way that they are not with well-worn members of the establishment. Alternatively, these young leaders may be more skilful in interpreting voters' voices and reflecting them in policy process. The answer may be situational too; namely, young leaders tend to be reformers who signal generational change, which often means necessary renewal for a tired party.

Another finding is that the average leadership tenure has been on the decline in recent decades, which may be related to increasing pressures to being seen to 'score' and yet to avoid scandal generated by the proliferation and intensity of the electronic media's coverage of politics. The growing density of polling and the 'perpetual campaign' are particularly problematic for opposition party leaders, who find themselves with shorter and shorter periods in which to establish their credentials before being replaced.

Furthermore, there is no statistically significant difference between the tenure length of female leaders and that of male leaders. Female politicians likely have different supporting bases than male politicians and face a wide array of obstacles to gaining the party leadership (as evidenced by the very small number of female party leaders, even in contemporary decades). Yet, once a female politician becomes a party leader, it seems that there is no significant difference in their longevity, though this finding is perhaps skewed by a couple of highly successful female leaders (e.g. Thatcher and Merkel).

5. Conclusions

Leadership successions are seldom completely smooth affairs, no matter how well they are planned for or how thoroughly successors have been groomed. However, successors to a very long-term leader and successors to the incumbent or former head of government face particular challenges in securing a mandate of their own. Our results suggest that these challenges are not trivial ones and constitute a 'hard acts to follow' effect, which complicates and intensifies risk for certain leadership succession scenarios.

These results also suggest further room to refine and test our perceptual theory of leadership transition. Previous studies of party leadership succession have mainly focused on the roles of institutional settings and situational conditions. We do not deny them as important. Yet, we argue that one should also consider the psychology of stakeholders who have power to remove a party leader. They form their expectations of the performance of a new leader in light of their experiences with his/her immediate predecessor. As a consequence, particularly powerful or otherwise iconic predecessors become hard acts to follow. We believe that an important research agenda in the literature of political leadership is to combine institutional and situational factors intertwined with psychological factors to explain party leader longevity and succession.

Poorly timed and poorly executed leadership changes are both common and deeply problematic for political parties. In the worst cases, they can lead to complete destabilization within a party, incessant leadership speculation and rivalry, and protracted abandonment by the voters. More research is needed as to why the 'hard acts to follow' effect exists, and how leaders and parties can minimize the odds of succession traumas.

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Notes

1. Party leaders who were in office as of 1945 are included in our dataset. Thus, in some cases those leaders might have assumed office as early as 1926.
2. This was usually because the system of government divides effective political leadership (e.g. USA) or because office-holding and effective leadership may not coincide (e.g. Italy pre-*mani pulite*).
3. We include parties that had formed government (either outright or in coalition) during the period studied. We exclude some parties meeting this criterion due to limited information.
4. We collected information from a range of sources, including party and government websites, *Keesing's World News Archives*, the *New York Times* and other international news outlets, national political histories, and some of the existing case and comparative studies of leadership succession (e.g. Calvert (1987), Davis (1998) and various articles in a special issue on party leadership; for example, see European Consortium for Political Research (1993)).
5. As a robustness test, we estimated our models by dropping these observations, but our conclusion drawn from these results is unchanged.
6. In our dataset, there are 63 leaders still in power as of 1 October 2009.
7. It is adjusted to the difference from the minimum.
8. We use the Cox proportional hazard model, as there is no prior belief about the functional form of the baseline hazard (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones, 2004: 66; Andrews and Jackman, 2008: 667).
9. As we assume that observations are independent across political parties but not necessarily within each party, we also estimate clustered robust standard errors of coefficient estimates, where clusters are the strata.
10. It is adjusted to the difference from the minimum.
11. As a robustness check, we tried to use this dichotomized variable (whether a successor's age is age at the time of succession was above the average) instead of *Age*, but the estimated effects

of our main causal variables (i.e. their direction, the magnitude and the level of significance) did not change substantially.

12. These simple averages may suggest a non-linear effect on the dependent variable. Adding squared and cubed terms to account for a non-linear effect did not yield substantially different results, either.
13. An important assumption in Cox proportional hazards models is that the hazard ratio is constant at any given time. A common way to test this assumption is to run a regression of residuals on time and test the null hypothesis that the slope is zero for individual covariates and jointly zero for all covariates (Grambsch and Therneau, 1994). The test results (available upon request from the authors) show that all control variables, individually and jointly, have no statistically significant effects, at the 10 percent level of significance, on the variation in residuals.

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Author biographies

Yusaku Horiuchi is Associate Professor of Government and holds the Mitsui Chair in the Study of Japan at Dartmouth College. He is the author of *Institutions, Incentives and Electoral Participation in Japan: Cross-Level and Cross-National Perspectives* (Routledge 2005), and has published articles in *American Political Science Review, American Journal of Political Science, Journal of Politics, British Journal of Political Science* and *Comparative Political Studies*, among others. His recent work includes the applications of natural experiments in various electoral settings.

Matthew Laing is a postdoctoral researcher from the Australian National University, specializing in leadership, comparative politics and American government and history. His current work concerns the development of prime ministerial government in Australia, and has recently published on the subject of Stephen Skowronek's political time as it concerns Australian prime ministers and the presidency of Barack Obama.

Paul 't Hart is professor of public administration at Utrecht University and associate dean of the Netherlands School of Public Administration. He is co-editor of *Political Psychology*. His own research is on political and administrative leadership, crisis management, public accountability and policy evaluation. His latest book is *Understanding Prime Ministerial Performance* (Oxford University Press, 2013).