



## Why mainstream parties change policy on migration: A UK case study-The Conservative Party, immigration and asylum, 1960-2010

Bale, T; Partos, R

This is a post-peer-review, pre-copy edited version of an article published in Comparative European Politics. The definitive publisher-authenticated version of: Bale, Tim, and Rebecca Partos. "Why mainstream parties change policy on migration: A UK case study–The Conservative Party, immigration and asylum, 1960–2010." *Comparative European Politics* 12.6 (2014): 603-619 is available online at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/cep.2014.21>

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## **Why mainstream parties change policy on migration: a UK case study – The Conservative Party, Immigration and Asylum, 1960-2010.**

Tim Bale and Rebecca Partos

Even the most cursory glance across Europe makes it clear that the presence of an electorally significant far-right/populist radical right party is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for mainstream parties and the governments they form to change their migration policies. If, therefore, we want to understand shifts in migration policy we would be well advised, before turning too quickly to look for the influence of the ‘niche’ anti-immigrant parties, to focus on the more conventional politics pursued by ‘mainstream’ parties. In order to do this, however, we need to take one step backwards in order to take two steps forward: if we want to explain why mainstream parties and governments change their policies on migration, we need to understand why they change their policies on anything. Below, we briefly outline a familiar and highly parsimonious model of party change before applying it to a detailed case study explored by process-tracing – an approach well-suited to an attempt to comprehend complex causation (George and Bennett, 2005) and to test whether a theoretical explanation which is already out there actually works (see Beach and Pedersen, 2012).

The UK Conservative Party is an illuminating case. This is not just because our previous work on the party (see Bale, 2011, 2012, Bale et al., 2011), despite its different focus, provides us with the empirical raw material that we draw upon below – material that, as well as party publications and public policy, encompasses internal party documents, such as briefing papers, correspondence and minutes from high-level meetings (most of which are housed either in the Conservative Party’s official archives or in those of its leaders) but which inevitably includes ‘softer’ sources like interviews and media coverage.<sup>1</sup> For a start, the Party has made significant changes in its immigration policy over the last 50 years. Indeed, in this period the Tories have rarely avoided the immigration issue for long. Moreover, the likelihood of changes in Conservative immigration policy being prompted by the far-right is low indeed: Britain’s plurality electoral system makes it difficult for fringe parties to win seats and few voters can be persuaded to vote for them – especially at general elections. This absence of serious competition on their more radical flanks mean that we can concentrate on all the other factors which may or may not cause a mainstream party like the Conservative Party to shift its policy. In addition, the extended timespan covered – unusual, since most explicit comparisons in political science are spatial rather than temporal – provides us with more variation, and, effectively, more ‘cases’ to analyse.

In summary, our analysis leads us to conclude that the ‘shock’ of losing elections matters but that leaders matter most, while factional turnover within parties may in fact be less important. We also conclude that any theory of party policy change also needs to take more seriously a) the requirement on parties to react to

events in the ‘real world’ and b) the fact that, in a competitive democracy, politicians are ideologically and instrumentally motivated to continuously monitor and then to reflect public (and party) feeling, and that this may be every bit as important as the periodic signals they are sent at elections. This accords with recent cross-national research on parties’ policy changes – research that suggests that election results are less likely to trigger changes than are shifts in public opinion. That said, we also observe significant shifts occurring even when there is broad consonance rather than a marked contrast or mismatch between the electorate’s and the party’s preferences. Our analysis also emphasises the fact that, while parties and in particular their leaders obviously attempt to control their environments – a case of ‘supply’, if you like, moulding (or trying to mould) ‘demand’ – they are ultimately obliged to adapt to those environments, too. ‘Demand’, whether it be some sort of external *force majeure* or simply changing public preferences (more often than not picked up on between elections or even after victories rather than defeats), also drives a good deal of what they do. In short, when it comes to immigration policy, parties have agency but they are as much acted upon as they themselves act.

### **Modelling Party Change**

There is widespread agreement that change – whether it affects a party’s personnel, its organisation or (our particular focus) its policies – doesn’t ‘just happen’ but must be driven by something. The most commonly cited independent variables or drivers of change, largely derived from the framework elaborated by Harmel and Janda and their co-authors, are, first, external shock (essentially, electoral defeat or loss of office); second, a change of leader; and, third, a change in the dominant faction (or coalition) that, to a greater or lesser extent, runs the party in question (see Harmel and Janda, 1994, Janda et al., 1995, Harmel et al., 1995, and Harmel and Tan, 2003). Investigating the impact of these drivers of change on Conservative Party migration policy allows us to conduct a further empirical test of the model, and – if necessary – to discuss drivers that it may previously have been underplayed or missed. Just as importantly, it allows us to connect the study of changes in migration policy to more general approaches to party politics – something we hope will bridge the disconnect between those who study public policy and those who study political parties (see Bale, 2008). We do this by pointing to particular changes in Tory immigration policy in the five decades between 1960 and 2010 and then tracing which (if any) of the three drivers of party change influenced that change. We also discuss other factors that, at times, turn out to have been equally, if not more, important.

What our detailed examination shows is that the relationship between, on the one hand, the policy changes that occurred and, on the other, some or all of the drivers of change – a relationship which in our case is summed up in Table 1 – is often as apparent as it is real. In short, while it might look at first glance as if our theory is doing its job, a close look at the case reveals, for instance, that the timing doesn’t quite work or that there is often an equally valid explanation for why the party did what it did. This is not to say that the drivers proposed by the theory are unable to explain anything about our case. It is simply to say that they cannot

explain everything. Most obviously, they need to be supplemented by expanding our definition of external shock beyond electoral defeat and loss of office to include a party's need to react to events in 'the real world', especially when it is in government. A theory of party policy change also needs to take more seriously the fact that, in a competitive democracy, politicians are ideologically and instrumentally motivated to continuously monitor and then to reflect public (and party) feeling – and that this may be every bit as important as the periodic signals sent to them at elections.

[Table 1]

## **The Sixties**

In 1962, Harold Macmillan, the then Tory Prime Minister, decided to take action on immigration. After years of delay, the government finally passed the Commonwealth Immigrants Act which ensured that henceforth only those British citizens whose passports were issued directly by the UK government would be exempted from immigration controls. On the face of it this momentous change can have had nothing to do with the shock of defeat or loss of office: at the general election of 1959, after all, the Party had secured a huge parliamentary majority. Nor had there been any change in leadership or in those in charge more generally.

It is therefore understandable that scholars have tended to emphasise that the tightening of the immigration regime had more to do with the sheer increase of numbers of Commonwealth citizens coming into the country after the breakdown of administrative controls (particularly in South Asia) and in spite of the fact that the British economy was (especially in relative terms) beginning to falter. Closer examination, however, reveals that the change in policy *was* in some ways a response to defeat – but that the response was *anticipatory* rather than *retrospective*. What mattered was the Party's conviction that, unless it took action on this issue (as well as on the economy and other issues), it would be in serious danger of losing the *next* general election – a signal it picked up from by-election defeats, opinion research, newspaper editorials, and feedback received 'on the doorstep' by canvassers and candidates at the general election which had just taken place.

Once the political (if not the actual) problem posed by increasing numbers coming into the country had apparently been contained, however, there was (surprisingly) little attempt on the part of the Tories to capitalise on their newly-minted legislation. Their 1964 manifesto not only contained just a couple of sentences on the issue but located them under the banal heading, 'Regional Development'. The Conservatives lost that election after thirteen years in power – but only by the narrowest of margins and after a campaign in which immigration hardly featured. It therefore seems unlikely in this case that defeat directly drove the tightening of the Party's immigration policy which swiftly followed. This began with a tough speech by former Prime Minister Alec Douglas-Home in February 1965 that called not just for tighter controls but voluntary, government-assisted 'repatriation'. By the 1966 election, by which time Home had been replaced as party leader by Ted Heath, the Conservative manifesto was promising a more conditional entry system, with strengthened health checks and an insistence that those coming in declare potential dependents; it also pledged that resources would be made available for voluntary repatriation.

But if defeat does not explain the tightening of policy after 1964, then neither does the Party's change of leader nor any change in those who operated alongside him. For one thing, Heath's victory in the leadership contest did not usher in a wholesale change of those in charge. For another, Heath himself was famously liberal on anything to do with race (into which category, in the UK at least, immigration definitely fell during this period). Partly owing to this, and for all the hardening of the Party's line in the manifesto, the issue was barely mentioned during the 1966 campaign – even though the playing of 'the race card' by one of the Party's parliamentary candidates in 1964 had famously seen that candidate triumph when so many of his fellow candidates had lost to Labour.

This leaves only two plausible explanations for the policy changes between 1964 and 1966. First, they reflected the preferences of Heath's predecessor – and were therefore down to the leader but not to a *change* of leader. Second, they can be put down to a desire (though one which was more implicit than explicit) to respond to the fact that Labour, despite its criticisms of the 1962 Act when it was in opposition, retained the legislation when it entered government and even took steps to make it even harder for 'coloured' immigrants to enter the country in order to work. In other words, even if the Conservatives chose not to make hay with the issue, they were determined to retain (or, if one looks at opinion polls which suggest the public at the time saw little difference between the parties on the issue, regain) whatever electoral advantage it afforded them.

Whatever, the 1966 election saw the Conservative Party trounced by the Labour government that had beaten it so narrowly less than two years previously. Since, by the time the next election came around, the Tories had tightened their immigration policy still further, there is at least *prima facie* evidence for the impact of electoral defeat. After all, Heath led the Party at both elections with pretty much the same team in place on

both occasions, neither of the other two drivers – a change of leadership or dominant faction – was present (Bale, 2012: 127). Closer inspection, however, suggests things were more complicated.

Immigration was one of the few areas in which Tory policy changed in any meaningful way between 1966 and 1970 – a lack of development which, incidentally, casts doubt on the assumption that the bigger the defeat, the greater the change. But immigration policy only changed as the parliament wore on – and even then not as the result of any organised policy review but more in response to two events that occurred in early 1968. The first of these was Labour's breakneck and breathtakingly *illiberal* response to the threat of a large scale influx of 'coloured' immigration prompted by Kenya's decision to expel its Asian population. The second event was Heath's sacking of Shadow Cabinet minister, Enoch Powell, following his infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech which the Tory leader saw as an unforgivable attempt to exploit racial tension.

The problem was that Powell's message clearly resonated with grassroots members and Conservative supporters, actual and potential. In August 1968, for example, the Party's political education department distributed a briefing document on immigration and race to its local discussion groups: some 412 of them responded, 347 of them calling for an end to all immigration. This, plus strong feelings expressed in the parliamentary party and at Tory conferences, practically forced Heath (who received 2,756 letters in reaction to Powell's dismissal, only 12 of which supported it) to play catch-up in a series of speeches in the autumn and winter of 1968–9. This was partly because even he and his colleagues, despite their own liberalism, appreciated the electoral potential of the issue and partly because they hoped to prevent it getting out of hand by being seen to listen. What made the difference, then, between the Party's offer to the electorate at the 1966 election and its even more restrictive offer at the 1970 election was not the defeat suffered in the former but the fact that the Conservative leadership simply could not afford to go into the latter looking less tough than Labour on immigration and ignoring the overwhelming public support for Powell.

## **The Seventies**

In 1970 it was made clear that a Conservative government would ensure that there would be 'no further large scale permanent immigration' and, to this end, would consider 'a new single system of control over all immigration from overseas'. But at the next election, in February 1974, the Party went even further, its manifesto promising a review and possible reform of nationality legislation so as to bring down 'new immigration...to a small and inescapable minimum'. Why did this happen? Once again, if we were to restrict ourselves to our model's three drivers of change, we would be in trouble. After all, the party had won a spectacular victory in 1970, overturning a big Labour majority with one of the biggest swings in postwar political history, and the man responsible – Ted Heath – was not only still the Party's leader but a Prime Minister whose sway over his Cabinet colleagues bordered on the hypnotic.

Again, part of the explanation (however unsatisfying it might be to those of us who prefer to think of ourselves as social scientists) would seem to lie in what Harold Macmillan famously referred to as ‘events, dear boy, events’ – although these events impacted on policy change indirectly, via the impact that they had on feeling within the electorate and the Conservative Party. In 1972 Uganda decided to throw out its Asian population, many of whom were entitled to British passports. Acting on the legal advice of the Attorney General, the Cabinet decided it had no choice but to allow some 25,000 of those affected to settle in Britain. The decision was regarded by many Party activists as a clear breach of the spirit if not the letter of the Party’s manifesto commitments, and thus provoked resignations from constituency associations around the country. It also saw resolutions on immigration pour into the National Union Executive (effectively the head of the voluntary party). Just as it had done in the run up to 1970, this pressure, combined with readings of similarly inclined public opinion, helped ensure that policy was ratcheted yet another notch towards restriction.

By 1979, the Tories were promising to go even further than they had in 1970 and 1974. Their manifesto committed an incoming Tory administration not only to a new British Nationality Act that would define citizenship and right of residence but to a series of unusually specific, and restrictive pledges, on family and temporary settlement, on work permits, and on quotas. Can we, on this occasion at least, explain the change by pointing to one or more of our model’s drivers? The answer would seem to be a resounding yes! Defeat in February 1974 did not prompt a notably harder line in the second election fought that year in October – in spite of the fact that the evidence appeared to show that it may well have had something to do with the swing back to Labour in the West Midlands in the wake of the government’s supposed ‘U-turn’ on Ugandan Asians and Enoch Powell’s recommendation that people opposed to European integration vote for Labour. Nor is there much evidence of a direct link between the tightening of policy and the Party’s subsequent defeat in October 1974. What that second defeat did do, however, was to trigger a change of leader and, in so doing, a change in the dominant faction running the Party and making its policy.

Margaret Thatcher became leader of the Conservative Party in February 1975 and soon signalled to her Shadow Home Secretary, Willie Whitelaw, that she wanted a tougher line on immigration. Frustrated with his apparently slow progress, and convinced by a big increase in resolutions on the subject to the party conference from local constituency associations (up from 17 in 1975 to 140 in 1976 in the wake of a number of high-profile cases), and by a sensational parliamentary report, Thatcher then used a television interview at the end of January 1978, to light a fire under him. She speculated that ‘by the end of the century there would be four million people of the new Commonwealth or Pakistan here’, to observe ‘that is an awful lot and I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture’, and to point out that ‘taking in 40 or 50,000 a year’ was far too much. As a result, she said, the Conservatives ‘must hold out the prospect of a clear end to immigration’. Whitelaw, although

privately furious, stayed in post and, in the wake of an overwhelmingly favourable public response to his boss's remarks, a line harder than the one he had originally intended to announce was duly unveiled.

Whether Thatcher's intervention meant that she was following her predecessor, Ted Heath, in having to respond to public and grassroots feeling triggered by events is highly debatable given her own decided views on the issue were already well known to colleagues. Nor is there much hard evidence that she (or her advisors) actually saw the National Front as a significant electoral threat to the Conservatives, even if she was genuinely concerned that ordinary people might be tempted to vote for what she regarded as a lunatic fringe. Far more likely is that she really meant it when she suggested that allowing such parties to make the running on immigration was a dereliction of democratic duty on the part of much bigger, mainstream parties: in other words, when she said 'We are not in politics to ignore peoples' worries: we are in politics to deal with them', she really meant it (see Bale, 2013). Happily for her, of course, there was little difference on immigration between Conservative activists and the average voter. Nor was there any contradiction (as there had been for Heath) between her belief that politicians should respond to public feeling (and in so doing promote the electoral interests of her party) and her own feelings on the issue in question.

### **The Eighties and Nineties**

In government between 1979 and 1997, the Conservatives, having quickly fulfilled most of their pledges including a new Nationality Act, made few if any significant changes to immigration policy. Their manifestos reminded voters of two things. First, that control had been achieved on the 'firm but fair' basis which was said to underpin good race relations. Second, that while the increased numbers of people claiming asylum generated by post-Cold War conflicts would be dealt with fairly, they would not be allowed to abuse British hospitality. In practice, there were one or two *ad hoc* instances where the Party's policy of putting 'an end to large-scale immigration' into the UK was set aside. The earliest was the abandonment of the 1979 manifesto promise to prevent male spouses and fiancés settling in Britain and to establish a register of Commonwealth wives and children eligible for settlement – the latter falling victim to sheer practicality, the former to legal opinion suggesting it would contravene the ECHR. But even more bitterly fought was a Bill, given its second reading in April 1990, allowing 50,000 Hong Kong Chinese and their families the right of abode in the UK subject to a points system rewarding skills and English — a move designed to calm the fears of the Colony's richest and most vocal residents as the inevitable handover to China drew nearer. Inasmuch as we need to explain such minor changes, then, they appear to have had nothing to do with the three classic drivers of party change but can instead be put down to *force majeure*.

### **The Noughties**

The first and second of those drivers – electoral shock and consequent loss of office, followed immediately by a change of leader, were clearly in play after 1997. But did they impact on changes in Conservative immigration policy? The answer is yes, but more indirectly than directly. There was certainly a change in



emphasis by the time the next general election was fought in 2001. Unusually, immigration itself was not mentioned in the Conservative manifesto. Instead the focus was on the Party's promise to make the UK a 'safe haven, not a soft touch, on asylum', claims for which were all but assumed to be 'bogus' and causing 'chaos'. The Tories, it promised, would end Labour's mismanagement of the system by speeding up the claims process, detaining new applicants and setting up a 'Removals Agency' to deport those whose applications had been rejected.

No one seriously thought, however, that the Tories had been swept away in Tony Blair's first landslide victory because of their poor performance on asylum before 1997. Any hardening of policy (or the rhetoric that passed for policy), therefore, was not a direct response to defeat. However, the sheer size of Labour's victory, combined with its huge and continuing poll leads on 'bread and butter' issues like the economy and public services, drove the Conservatives' new, thoroughly Thatcherite leader William Hague and his inner circle (though by no means all his Shadow Cabinet colleagues) to conclude that their best bet was to focus on the issues where their own populist instincts were in tune with those of the voters, namely Europe and asylum. The approach did not, however, pay off and it duly suffered another heavy defeat.

That second defeat did not lead the Party to conclude that it had been mistaken to argue that Labour would, in the phrase used by Hague in a speech to his party conference, turn Britain into 'a foreign land': indeed, it played the same tune, only louder. By the time of the next election in 2005, Hague himself was long gone, replaced first by the hapless Iain Duncan Smith and then by the more competent, but equally Thatcherite, Michael Howard. In policy terms the stress was still on restriction but had shifted back from asylum to 'controlled immigration' – one of the five promises that featured on the front cover of the Tory manifesto. Inside the manifesto, immigration was given its own section, yet was also referred to in passages on health care, safer communities and terrorism. Specifically, the Party proposed a points-based system for work permits, an annual (but undefined) limit on the number of immigrants, along with a fixed quota for asylum seekers and the establishment of a British Border Control police force, as well as the suggestion that the Party would, if necessary, tear up Britain's commitments under the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees to get its way.

The thinking behind the even tougher policy was, once again, a somewhat desperate desire – given the Party's continuing failure to seriously erode Labour's lead on the economy and public services – to appeal to voters on one of the few issues on which Tory instincts seemed to chime with theirs. Howard and his advisors, it is true, were slightly concerned that any trickle of Tory voters to the populist, Eurosceptic, anti-immigration UK Independence Party (UKIP) might help Labour retain key marginal seats. But their main motivation was the conviction that the Conservatives' leader could only be sold to the public as an authentic and instinctive right-winger – with policies to match. Indeed, if they had had their way, Howard would have finished the campaign by raising the abuse of family reunification by immigrants from the Indian sub-continent.

That he did not do so was apparently down to one of his closest advisors – an MP called David Cameron who had impressed Howard not because he shared his ideological convictions but because he was both bright and a brilliant communicator. Cameron's subsequent victory in the 2005 Conservative leadership contest, plus the fact that it followed another hefty election defeat and ushered in a dominant (though never completely dominant) 'modernising' faction, means that all three drivers of change were present in the run-up to 2010.

The Tories' new leader and those around him clearly got the message from three consecutive drubbings that the Party could not go on as it was. Yet, in fact, policy ultimately changed rather less (or, more precisely, changed in a less liberal direction) than initially predicted. For just over a year-and-a-half, Cameron said nothing about immigration – a silence which (along with counter-intuitive initiatives on, for example, the environment) was all of a piece with the modernisers' determination to 'decontaminate the Tory brand', particularly in the eyes of more liberal middle-class voters, many of whom had come to see the Conservatives (to use an unfortunate phrase first used by one of the modernisers) as 'the nasty party'. Thereafter, however, the Party began to talk about it once again, albeit in a rather less direct way so as to make it obvious that it was still on the side of those who thought that things had gone too far but at the same time harder for its opponents to charge it with 'playing the race card'.

The Conservatives' 2010 manifesto (rather ironically in view of the negative implications of the Party's new policy for British firms) filed immigration under business and a commitment to 'attract the brightest and best to our country'. For the first time ever perhaps, there was an explicit focus on economics, with the promise that, under a Tory government, only those who would add value to the British economy would be welcome since 'immigration today is too high and needs to be reduced'. While retaining the pledge to establish a Border Police Force, the Party promised to bring down net migration from hundreds to tens of thousands per year by bringing in a cap on the number of non-EU migrants admitted annually, tightening up on student visas and introducing English language tests for those coming to the UK to get married. The fact that all this represented yet another hardening of the Party's line was not, as time went on at least, due to Cameron needing to placate his internal critics. After all, there were very few of them – at least in public – after it began to look like he would win the next election. Instead, it represented a clear-eyed calculation on the part of the leadership that it would now go largely unnoticed by the AB liberals (impressed as they were by his reasonable tone and his declared desire for 'a grown-up debate' on the issue) but would nevertheless be appreciated by the C2 voters the Conservatives also needed to woo away from Labour in 2010. It was also legitimated by Prime Minister Gordon Brown's desperate promise in September 2007 to create 'British jobs for British workers' – and made all the more palatable by being overseen by a Shadow Minister (Damian Green) with a reputation for being as 'progressive' as it was possible to be in the twenty-first century Conservative Party.

## **Conclusion**

Significant changes in migration policy made by the Tories in both government and opposition from 1960 to 2010 can be explained by looking at the role of three drivers of party change. However, there is no *a priori* reason to believe that any one of the three drivers invariably trumped the others. Indeed, that is precisely the point: pre-eminence and precedence are empirical questions that we should be looking to answer. In the process of formulating that answer, it also becomes evident that other drivers are important and that, not for the first time, correlation of the kind that can be identified by ‘eyeballing’ Table 1 is not causation. The latter is far better reflected in Table 2, which summarises the historically and evidentially more convincing explanations for the same ‘headline’ changes.

[Table 2]

In the case of Conservative immigration policy between 1960 and 2010 it so happens that leadership is the most important of the three drivers of change, with the loss of elections and office playing a lesser part than one might predict, and any dominant faction playing only a minor role. Policy rarely shifted in direct response to defeat at the ballot box and, even if it shifted indirectly, such shifts were no bigger than some of those which occurred in the wake of victory. The move to limit unrestricted Commonwealth entry in 1962 and then to allow a sudden influx of tens of thousands in 1972 are the most obvious cases in point. Nor, incidentally, is there much evidence that the shifts that occurred in the wake of defeat were more significant when that defeat was heavy than when it was narrow. The Tories only narrowly lost the two elections of 1974 but were soon promising the end of an era by pledging to treat Commonwealth citizens like any other ‘aliens’. They lost massively in 1997 but, although the rhetoric was ramped up, the actual measures proposed were small beer in comparison. Likewise, the policy shifts that do occur after election defeats are not necessarily in the expected direction. Why, for instance, did David Cameron tighten Tory policy still further in 2010 after his party had lost three elections in a row promising at each successive contest a more

restrictive regime? Moreover, why did he do so despite the fact that it was an article of faith amongst his fellow modernisers that such an approach had alienated the electorally crucial liberal middle-classes?

Whether Cameron was correct to do what he did should not detract from our overall finding that leaders did – and do – make a difference. *Pace* Harmel and Janda and their colleagues, however, policy change need not be driven by a *change* of leader; it can equally well be driven by an existing leader changing his or her mind. There are many reasons why that might happen, but the most obvious include, firstly, the need to respond to party and public feeling, whether it be triggered by particular cases or by developing trends, and, secondly, what might fairly be termed *force majeure* – international crises or legal agreements and decisions that cannot be wished away (see Ford et al., 2014). Predictably, perhaps, such external events are more acutely felt in office than they are in opposition – which may well explain why at least some of the promises made when outside government have to be broken in it.

The Conservatives' case, then, at least when it comes to immigration policy in the fifty years following 1960, fits nicely with Harmel and Janda's (and their colleagues') finding that electoral 'shocks' matter but that leaders matter most, while factional turnover is of lesser importance. But it also supports more recent cross-national research on parties' policy changes which suggests that election results may be less likely to trigger them than are shifts in public opinion (Adams et al., 2004; see also Ezrow et al., 2011). Unlike that research, however, we observe significant shifts occurring even when there is broad consonance rather than dissonance between the electorate's and the party's preferences. Further research could usefully take into account our finding that many of the changes in policy are often driven by two other factors. The first is developments in the global environment. The second is parties' believing that, by tightening their country's migration regime, they will not only outbid and outperform their opponents electorally but also fulfil their democratic obligation to respond – 'thermostatically' perhaps (see Soroka and Wlezien, 2009 and Jennings, 2009) – to voters' insistence that government protect national borders and culture. To remind ourselves of this, however, is not to assert that parties' stances are somehow purely demand-driven. How can they be when, as so many scholars point out (see Aaroe, 2012), the public's sense of what is politically urgent or desirable is partly a function of what parties themselves say and do?

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**Table 1 Policy changes and the proposed drivers: a striking but often superficial relationship**

Decade	Headline changes	Electoral shock	Change of leader	Change of dominant faction
1960s	1962 - Commonwealth Immigrants Act tightens up citizenship and immigration controls			
	1965 – PM Douglas-Home calls for voluntary, government-assisted repatriation	✓		
	1966 – Conservative manifesto calls for more conditional entry system	✓	✓	
1970s	1970 - Conservative Party promises end to ‘further large scale permanent immigration’	✓		
	1972 – Conservative government allows expelled Ugandan Asians to settle in UK			
	1974 – Party commits to review of nationality legislation in order to severely reduce net migration	✓		
	1978 – Conservative Leader Thatcher calls for ‘clear end to immigration’ 1979 – Conservatives propose a British Nationality Act to re-define citizenship and right of residence	✓	✓	✓
1980s and 1990s	Abandonment of 1979 manifesto promise to establish register of Commonwealth wives and children eligible for settlement			
	1990 – Bill allows 50,000 Hong Kong Chinese to settle in UK before handover of colony to China			
2000s	2001 – Conservative manifesto focuses on asylum and asylum-seekers	✓	✓	

	2005 – Conservative campaign puts renewed emphasis on ‘controlled immigration’; proposes cap on net migration, quota for asylum-seekers and border control police	✓	✓	
	2005 – Cameron becomes leader; issue of immigration rarely mentioned by leadership for first 18 months or so	✓	✓	✓
	2010 – Conservative campaign puts stress on immigration policy, but focus is on economic impact of immigrants; migration to be brought down to ‘tens of thousands’	✓	✓	✓

**Table 2      What really mattered**

Decade	Headline changes	Brief explanation
1960s	1962 - Commonwealth Immigrants Act tightens	Party’s conviction that, unless it took action, it would be in serious danger of losing the next election even



	up citizenship and immigration controls	though it had won easily in 1959.
	1965 – PM Douglas-Home calls for voluntary, government-assisted repatriation	Personal initiative by Home: no evidence that immigration seen to have played a role in Party's narrow defeat in 1964.
	1966 – Conservative manifesto calls for more conditional entry system	Party determined to retain (or regain) whatever electoral advantage issue afforded it after Labour government took an unexpectedly tough line in 1964/5.
1970s	1970 - Conservative Party promises end to 'further large scale permanent immigration'	Decisions to tighten policy incrementally taken in response to party and voter concern (ramped up by Enoch Powell) but also because the (largely liberal) Tory leadership simultaneously appreciated the potential of the issue, the need not to be outdone by a 'tough' Labour Home Secretary, and believed that they could prevent it getting out of hand by being seen to 'listen'.
	1972 – Conservative government allows expelled Ugandan Asians to settle in UK	Acting on legal advice the Cabinet decided it had no choice but to allow some 25,000 of those affected to settle permanently in Britain.
	1974 – Party commits to review of nationality legislation in order to severely reduce net migration	Response to party concerns and public opinion.
	1978 – Conservative Leader Thatcher calls for 'clear end to immigration' 1979 – Conservatives propose a British Nationality Act to re-define citizenship and right of residence	No evidence that immigration had cost the Party either election in 1974, but party concerns and public opinion about immigration rising. Stopping it is electorally advantageous but is also democratic duty.
1980s and 1990s	Abandonment of 1979 manifesto promise to establish register of Commonwealth wives and children eligible for settlement	Deemed unpractical and possibly in contravention of ECHR.
	1990 – Bill allows 50,000 Hong Kong Chinese to settle in UK before handover of colony to China	Designed to calm the fears of the Colony's richest and most vocal residents as the inevitable handover to China drew nearer.
2000s	2001 – Conservative manifesto focuses on asylum and asylum-seekers	No evidence that issues played any part in 1997 defeat but leadership decided – faute de mieux – to focus on issues where their own populist instincts were in tune with those of the voters, namely on Europe and

		asylum.
	2005 – Conservative campaign puts renewed emphasis on ‘controlled immigration’; proposes, cap on net migration, quota for asylum-seekers and border control police	Party’s continuing failure to erode Labour’s lead on the economy and public services, leaving little alternative but to pitch to voters on one of the issues on which Tory instincts seemed to chime with their own.
	2005 – Cameron becomes leader; issue of immigration rarely mentioned by leadership for first 18 months or so	Stress on immigration and asylum in 1997 and 2001 deemed not only insufficient but counterproductive. Silence part of attempt to ‘decontaminate the brand’, and gain ‘permission to be heard’ before reintroducing tough line with lighter touch.
	2010 – Conservative campaign puts stress on immigration policy, but focus is on economic impact of immigrants; migration to be brought down to ‘tens of thousands’	Having gained ‘permission to be heard’, the Party can return to issues it owns, albeit dealt with in a more nuanced way.

<sup>1</sup> Details of the sources used in Bale (2012), which covers organisational, personnel and policy change in the Conservative Party during the period 1945-1997 can be found on the following pages, all of which contain footnotes which allow readers to trace either original archival sources or more detailed primary and secondary sources, which are not themselves cited here in order to make the most of limited space: Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962) 70, 127; immigration and asylum (seekers) 92, 95, 96, 104, 124, 127-128, 129, 131, 137, 142-144, 152, 161, 163, 181, 186, 208-209, 216, 224, 237-239, 271, 293, 298, 300, 301, 306, 310-311, 311; asylum seekers 271; citizens and citizenship 70-71, 73, 95, 128, 163, 183, 204, 208; ethnic minorities 143, 194, 217, 238, 249; race relations, general 96, 128, 137, 142-145, 148, 206, 217, 224-5, 238, 310, Race Relations Bill (1965, 1968) 142-143, 145. To take one example, Heath’s handling of the immigration issue between 1968 and 1970 is referred to on p. 143-4, the footnotes for which (notes 67-70) refer both to more detailed published sources but also to Shadow Cabinet minutes in the Conservative Party Archive, held in the Bodleian Library, Oxford in file CPA LCC 1/2/1, 10, 11 and 12. By the same token sources for the period 1997-2010 are provided in more detail in Bale, 2011, which provides a general account of the Party’s long years in opposition but contains some discussion en passant of immigration and asylum (pp. 102-3, 108, 113-4, 117-18, 120-3, 125, 130, 156-7, 160, 171, 173, 176, 179, 181, 197, 207-8, 209, 211, 213, 223, 236, 240, 242, 244, 247, 251, 256, 319, 358, 373, 397, 405-6, 409) and Bale et al., 2011, which provides a more detailed discussion policies in recent years. The framework explored here is not employed in that book or in that journal article. The framework is employed in Bale (2012) but in order to discuss party change more generally. Bale (2013) covers immigration and asylum over the entire twentieth century and therefore inevitably touches on some of the same material. However, it does not apply the same framework nor does it proceed chronologically, working instead through three themes (public opinion, leaders’ personal views, and whether the

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Party was in government or opposition) in order to explore both its increasingly restrictive stance and why its tendency to use populist language varied considerably.