

**'Opposition-Craft': An Evaluative Framework for Official
Opposition Parties in the United Kingdom**

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Acknowledgements Page

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Abstract

This thesis offers a distinctive and innovative framework for the study of effective official opposition politics in the United Kingdom. While other work has focused on narrow aspects of life in opposition – such as leadership, media communications, or policy – this work draws together the entire scope of skills into a framework, described as ‘Opposition-Craft’, against which any official UK opposition can be tested for its effectiveness. Using Bulpitt’s 1986 paper on ‘Statecraft’ as its inspiration, this thesis compiles a similar set of key elements that an opposition must possess if it is to have any hope of victory at a general election. Bulpitt established a set of criteria around the key structural aspects of a good government which, if followed, would likely result in a governing party remaining in power. In that regard, ‘Statecraft’ focused on parties of government, whereas this new framework produces a similar set of criteria by which an opposition can be measured. Following the creation of the model in the opening chapter, subsequent chapters go on to test the framework against four distinct periods of opposition from 1980 onwards, each of which assesses a wide spectrum of electoral success: Michael Foot’s Labour Party, 1980-83, Neil Kinnock’s Labour Party, 1987-92, Tony Blair’s Labour Party, 1994-97, and David Cameron’s Conservative Party, 2005-10. By applying the model and forming judgements around their relative success, this project will evaluate why, during the post-war period, the Conservative Party has been more successful in opposition than the Labour Party. Thus, ‘Opposition-Craft’ is the first of its kind in that it presents a full exploration of all dimensions involved in the technique of opposition. In that regard, if Bulpitt’s notion of ‘Statecraft’ is the art of successful government, then ‘Opposition-Craft’ is the art of successful opposition.

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Abbreviations

AES	Alternative Economic Strategy
BBC	British Broadcasting Company Corporation
CCHQ	Conservative Central Head Quarters
CFG	Clause Five Group
CLP	Constituency Labour Party
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
EC	European Community
EEC	European Economic Community
ERM	Exchange Rate Mechanism
EU	European Union
FPTP	First past the post (electoral system)
HQ	Head Quarters
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NEC	National Executive Committee
NI	National Insurance
OMOV	One Member One Vote
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party
PM	Prime Minister
PMQ	Prime Minister's Questions
SDP	Social Democratic Party
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
VAT	Value Added Tax

Chapter 1: 'Opposition-Craft': The Model

Leading a party which has lost office and is seeking to regain it is no easy task (Bale, 2015, p.58)

Winning a general election is a tough assignment for any political party; winning one from the vantage point of an official opposition is an even tougher challenge. Success at a UK general election is the ultimate goal for any party seeking to govern the country, so it is unsurprising that a considerable amount of research has been undertaken into the strategies used to win elections. The first chapter of this thesis will extend the existing research into electoral success and will propose a model of behaviour and conditions necessary for an official opposition to win a UK general election. In later chapters we will then apply this model to a number periods of opposition in UK politics in order to analyse the success or otherwise of that party. At its core, this thesis will ask: what factors shape a political party's ability to get back into government after a spell in opposition? In answering that question, we will look at both internal factors, which can be influenced and controlled by an official opposition, and external factors, which largely sit outside its ambit.

Many academic papers have been written which explore the key conditions that must be met for a party to win power at a general election (see, for example, Ball, 2005; and Heppell, Seawright and Theakston, 2015). However, much of what has been written considers only narrowly-focused aspects of the conditions necessary for electoral success. For example, plenty of academic work has considered the position of party leaders as a specific aspect of electability central to the success or otherwise of a political party (see, for example, Clarke and James, 2015; and Aarts, Blais and Schmitt, 2013). Similarly, work has also been carried out that looks at specific parties and their efforts to win power (see, for example, Bale, 2016). The existing literature around electability could be considered narrow in its focus in that none of the work undertaken focuses on the full range of attributes necessary for electoral success. Neither does the existing academic work consider the task of winning power specifically from the perspective of an official opposition.

In a bid to embrace and then extend the existing research around the art of winning elections, this thesis will build a model of behaviour applicable for any official opposition in the UK parliament, of any political hue, hoping to win the subsequent general election. For

the purposes of clarity, the official opposition in a UK parliament is the party with the second-largest number of seats in the House of Commons (Webber, 2017). While many of the ideas set out in this project will be of use for any party of opposition, large or small, it is primarily a thesis built around the required attributes of an official opposition hoping to win power. In that regard, references to the 'opposition' made throughout this text refer to the official opposition in the UK parliament. This model will be known henceforth as 'Opposition-Craft'; its title having drawn inspiration from Bulpitt's celebrated work on 'Statecraft' (1986), which essentially looks at the art of maintaining power from the position of government. This thesis will seek to fill the gaps in the existing literature around electoral success, including gaps left by Bulpitt's 'Statecraft' model, by attempting to explain how parties of opposition are able to build winning electoral strategies.

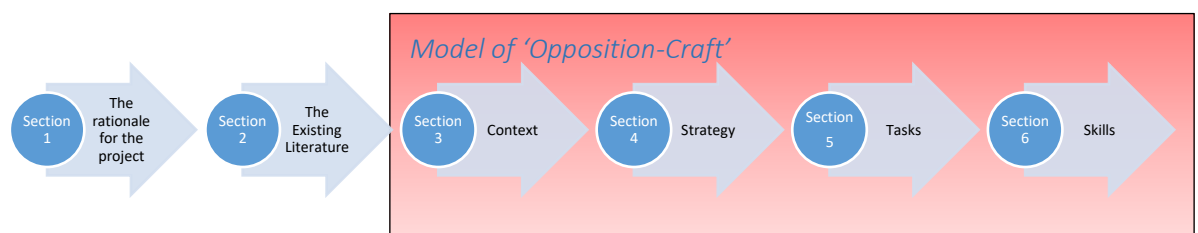
In order to investigate this topic, and to develop a model useful for parties of opposition hoping to win UK general elections, this research assignment uses a combination of approaches aside from the usual scrutiny of the academic work around the topic. It builds on the existing research by drawing on interviews and questionnaires with those in politics during the relevant periods. It also considers journalistic work, polling data, political speeches, and analysis of voting behaviour.

For research purposes, the writer reached out by letter and email to around sixty politicians associated with the four periods of official opposition, which form the case studies in Chapters 2-5. These politicians were invited to complete either a questionnaire or attend an interview. The questionnaires and interviews were developed in a bespoke format following extensive research into the period of official opposition, and into the role that those particular politicians played during the periods under analysis. Unfortunately, at the time when many of the interviews were due to take place, the Covid-19 crisis and subsequent national UK lockdown intervened, which meant that many of the interviews were cancelled at the last minute by the politicians involved. However, the writer was delighted to receive substantial responses from six politicians from a broad spectrum of backgrounds and parties (Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, and SDP). All respondents had at some point served at the top of their respective parties, and many of them were former members of either Labour or Conservative cabinets; indeed, two were former party leaders.

The bespoke nature of the interviews/questionnaires served to enhance the research as the politicians involved were able to comment on their time in opposition with the benefit of hindsight, but also with their personal views on the efficacy of the ‘Opposition-Craft’ model in mind. The research presented in this thesis combines that first-hand commentary with other sources of evidence like polling data and speeches, which all served to form a rich evidence base on which to rest the analysis. A wide of range of polling data (including, perspectives on leaders, attitudes towards policy, and general voting intention) is used extensively across all areas of this analysis and underpins key parts of the model.

The thesis will set out the context around the project in addition to completing a literature review of the existing work compiled around successful electoral winning strategies. From this analysis, and by noting the gaps in the existing work, we will develop a model of ‘Opposition-Craft’ with four key aspects: context, strategy, tasks and skills. In covering these four aspects, the model hopes to achieve what the existing literature has not managed; that is, to describe the full range of conditions necessary to win general elections when fighting that election from opposition. It will be for later chapters to apply this model to periods of opposition from 1980 to 2010 in order to assay the relative strengths and weaknesses of parties of opposition.

In that respect, the route map for chapter 1 will adopt the following structure:



1.1 Section1: The rationale for the project

While the case studies in Chapters 2-5 focus on the period 1980-2010, this analysis will touch on passages of official opposition across the post-war era. This passage of time has been chosen for a number of reasons, not least because it marks a critical juncture in British politics. Obviously, 1945 marked the end of the Second World War, but it also brought about the end of national government (Hermiston, 2016). Prior to 1945 there were a number of periods of coalition government where there was no clear demarcation

between one party rule and another. During this pre-war period the Labour Party emerged as one of the dominant forces in British politics, replacing the Liberals as the main alternative to the Conservatives (Laybourn, 1995). This period of transition meant that the delineation between the governing parties and official oppositions was not always crisp and resulted in a number of periods of coalition. In this more modern era, we have become more used to single-party governments and official oppositions; indeed, as an indicator of the emergence of the constitutional role of the opposition, the actual role of Leader of the Opposition that we are familiar with today was not officially constituted until the Ministers of the Crown Act of 1937. So, for the purposes of this analysis, it is more fruitful to consider the period after 1945 when the more recognisable two-party state emerged, but for the purposes of the case studies we will pay even closer attention to the period after 1980 up until 2010.

Since 2010 UK politics appears to have arrived at another period of transition – there have been two periods of government since 2010 in which the largest party has been unable to govern on their own, and there has been a referendum on the UK’s membership of the EU; the result of which challenged some of the political norms of the post-war era (Clarke, Goodwin and Whiteley, 2017). The seeds of the Brexit referendum result had grown over a number of years, as demonstrated by the rise in support for smaller parties, which called into question the sustainability of the two-party system. At the time of writing, we do not know the full ramifications of Brexit, but it appears that opposition parties in the UK are in a state of flux. Therefore, in understanding this context, it seems appropriate that the model of ‘Opposition-Craft’ is most applicable to the post-war era, as it will focus on single-party official oppositions seeking to govern on their own. Its usefulness as a model going forward will be explored further in the conclusion.

There is a cliché in British politics that suggests: ‘Oppositions don’t win elections; governments lose them’ (Balls, 2016, p.315). A number of elections can be cited in support of this political adage, for example the Labour government lost the election of 1979 following the “Winter of Discontent” (Hay, 2010a), and Labour in government lost again in 2010 following the global financial crash of 2008 (Hodson and Mabbett, 2009). According to Balls, ‘Every opposition victory for the last fifty years has generally had to be preceded by the government losing either its economic or its political credibility, and sometimes both. The opposition simply needs to be in the right position to take advantage’ (Balls, 2016, p.315). Balls notes that oppositions need to be well-placed to take advantage of the

governing party's unpopularity; here he may well have had in mind the 1992 and 2005 elections, where many of the normal contextual factors were in place for the party of opposition to win, but doubts remained about the state of the opposition at the time, and consequently the governing party won again. Thus, it is not always the case that governments lose elections; oppositions also have to be ready and fit to govern.

Like many clichés, however, the one used by Balls has a considerable weight of evidence embedded in its sentiment; since the Second World War we have had a number of periods of lengthy rule by one party or another, with both Labour and the Conservatives winning successive electoral mandates from governing positions as the party in opposition at the time was unable to form a winning electoral strategy. Indeed, other than the Heath government of 1970-74 (Ball and Seldon, 1996), every party of government since the Second World War has won at least a second term of office, which supports the notion that governing parties are at an advantage when it comes to winning elections.

However, contrary to the popular political cliché used by Balls, since 1945 there are a number of examples of where an opposition has won a general election and gone on to form a government, and not in all cases has that victory arisen simply from the unpopularity of the governing party. In the era under consideration, oppositions have won general elections in 1951, 1964, 1970, 1974*, 1979, 1997, and 2010* (* note that in 1974* and 2010* there was no outright winner of the election, rendering the success of those parties as limited). So, from the twenty general elections that have been held since the end of the Second World War until 2019, outright victories fought from opposition have only occurred on five occasions in those 74 years, and seven times if we include the hung parliaments which resulted in the party of opposition forming at least part of the subsequent government. That small number of victories indicates that the feat of winning an election from opposition is possible, but is certainly not the norm. For the purposes of this analysis we will consider 1974 and 2010 as qualified rather than outright successes.

1.2 Section 2: The existing literature

A number of models have been posited in academic work which seek to explain how parties win general elections either from government or from the position of those seeking to regain office. This analysis will draw on these models when constructing the model of 'Opposition-Craft', but it will pay special attention to the model of Statecraft as put forward

by Bulpitt (1986) as this model, shaped as it was for a party of government hoping to maintain power, formed the central inspiration for this project.

Ball (2005) wrote about the conditions of electability and the likely chances of success of parties seeking to regain office. He suggests that there are number of external factors which determine voting behaviour, none of which is in the gift of a party seeking to regain office. These are: the performance of the government, the condition of the economy, the public's perception of the 'state of the nation', the effects of international crises and external threats to national security, a hostile intellectual climate reflected in an unsympathetic media, the role of a third party (which may hold the balance of power), and changes to the electoral system (for example, extensions of the franchise).

Ball suggests that those external factors may well be linked to either the governing party's electoral fortunes, if the indicators are positive, or the opposition's electoral fortunes, if the indicators are negative. Either way, he suggests that 'several [need] to be present rather than just one alone'. So, contrary to what this thesis will later argue, Ball believes that parties of opposition are successful more by accident than by design. However, he goes on to argue that there are a further five aspects to opposition performance which may assist a party of opposition in winning power:

'Although it is the external factors that most affect voting intentions, there are five ways in which an opposition party can place itself in the best tactical position. The first of these is 'fresh faces': a new leader or leadership team, and especially the sense of a change of generations. The second is 'cohesion': the maintenance of unity and discipline within the party, which is essential to convey a sense of purpose and effectiveness. The third is 'visibility': a new agenda or a distinctive position, and a distancing from past unpopular policies and their legacy. Here it is important to have an impact upon the political elite and reorientation, and for this to be communicated to a wider audience. The fourth element links to this, and is 'efficiency': not just an improved or revived party organization, but the sense that the party is at least master of its own house, and can respond with speed and authority when the need arises. The final element is 'adaptability': a hunger for office, and a pragmatic or unideological approach which gives room to manoeuvre and seize the openings that appear.' (Ball, 2005, pp.4-5)

Ball observes that the job of regaining power is very much in the environment in which the opposition exists. While Ball acknowledges that a party can operate in a manner which will

enhance its electability, he concludes that its success will ultimately be determined by external factors over which it has little control.

Ball notes the importance of the leader as an aspect of electability. As we shall note throughout this analysis, the electability of the leader is central to the likely success at an election for a party of opposition. Much credence is attached to leaders and their abilities to present themselves as 'Prime Ministerial'. Many commentators have noted that the UK increasingly operates in a manner typically associated with Presidential campaigns in the US, in that a huge amount of attention is paid to the attributes and qualities of the leader (Allen, 2003). However, other academics have argued that it is 'easy to get carried away with the presidential analogy' (Webb and Poguntke, 2013, p. 653). Webb and Poguntke conclude that the UK is merely moving towards the 'personalisation' rather than 'Presidentialisation' of politics. Given the attention paid to the leaders of the main UK political parties, it is worth noting some of the work conducted on the qualities of US Presidents given the increasingly 'presidential' or 'personalised' nature of UK politics.

While pertaining to the US system, the Greenstein model (2009) of presidential performance contains themes useful for UK parties seeking to regain office, especially with regard to the image transmitted around the leaders of UK parties. Indeed, evidence exists of UK political parties borrowing ideas from US politics in order to form an electorally successful strategy (Newburn and Jones, 2005, p. 84). Whilst the Greenstein model does not explicitly reference 'electability' as the focus of its study into presidential performance, it is implicit in his work that, to be a successful President, the qualities outlined below need to be present.

Greenstein identifies a number of traits associated with an individual's skill and persona necessary to undertake successfully the Presidency. According to Greenstein, Presidents must: be effective public communicators in that they should be able to deliver excellent public speeches, and have organisational capacity to create a team full of staff able to disagree with the leader. This should be coupled with the ability to organise effective institutional arrangements to deal with the business of governance. The President should be able to 'put his stamp on public policy in the readily stalemated American political system' and have vision and the capacity to inspire with a set of overarching goals. The President should have cognitive style in that they must possess strategic intelligence to cut through problems and create successful policy accomplishments. This should be coupled

with emotional intelligence in the sense that they should have the mental stability to cope with the demands of the job (Greenstein, 2009, pp.225-31).

Building on Greenstein's work, Heppell (2012) apply some of the themes set out in the presidential model in order to create a set of four criteria by which we can assess UK Leaders of the Opposition: 'proficiency at public communication, ability to construct a policy platform, ability at party management and emotional intelligence' (as quoted in Bale, 2015, p. 65). Heppell's work concentrates on the leader as the critical determining factor in electability and, like Greenstein, he concentrates on some of the core personality aspects, such as the ability to communicate and the possession of emotional intelligence, all of which determine the electability of a leader.

Writing with Seawright and Theakston about what makes a successful Leader of the Opposition, Heppell also asks: 'Are they resilient and authentic?'. Heppell, Seawright and Theakston suggest that resilience is a key characteristic required of an opposition leader, and their ability to demonstrate that personality trait to the electorate is critical to their 'suitability as a potential Prime Minister'. The ability to stand up to the rigours of opposition and the scrutiny that it brings is a test-bed on which the electorate will form their opinion on a leader's suitability for the office of Prime Minister. They also point to the need to be authentic as another key personality trait which determines the success or otherwise of opposition leaders. Heppell, Seawright and Theakston illustrate their argument by describing Neil Kinnock's struggles to appear 'serious' and 'statesmanlike' as Leader of the Opposition aspiring to be Prime Minister, which ultimately made him simply look 'uncomfortable' and presumably 'inauthentic' (Heppell, Seawright and Theakston, 2015, pp. 21-23).

Away from the focus on the leader, further work on electability was conducted by Harmel and Janda (1994) who argue that parties seeking to regain office must 'change'. Their paper on party goals and change set out a detailed exposition of the determining goals of parties; where power is the goal of that party then change is a necessary part of what they must do if they are to regain it – for why else would they be out of power if their party did not need to change? 'Change', for Harmel and Janda, could result from external shocks, such as 'changes in the proportions of votes and seats received by the party' (Harmel and Janda, 1994, p. 267). The changes required might be a change in leadership or a change in the dominant faction within the party, which signals a change in direction; electoral defeat

or imminent defeat might be the touch-paper that is lit to bring about that change. Either way, their paper set out how a party might change and relates that change to electability.

Building on Harmel and Janda's 1994 model of party change, Bale (2016) concentrates specifically on the Conservatives and their ability to adapt in opposition in order to win back power. Bale looks at the Conservatives both in government and in opposition and draws conclusions on the Tories' ability to change using the model proposed by Harmel and Janda to underpin his work. He concludes that the Tories were always willing to change because of the external shocks as described in Harmel and Janda's model, such as defeat or imminent defeat. For the Tories, that change has been about changing leader, direction or dominant faction in the party. Bale concludes that the Tories were willing to change in both government and opposition in order to stave off defeat or to regain power. The 'change' that Harmel and Janda, and Bale, point to is commonly termed in political parlance as 'modernisation'. In the course of this analysis, we will explore themes and literature around modernisation as an aspect of the 'Opposition-Craft' model.

Because governing parties have won a number of elections since the war, much has been written on why they often go on to win further terms of office. That winning preponderance of governing parties was explored in Bulpitt's thesis and notion of 'Statecraft'. Bulpitt draws together a model which can be used to assess the success or otherwise of governing parties. Writing in 1986 specifically about the Thatcher administration, Bulpitt focuses on what parties of government and their leaders must do in order to win elections, demonstrate governing competence, and retain power.

The term 'statecraft' has been part of the English language for centuries and is defined as 'the art of government'. It is a term that originates from the 1640s, but did not come into popular English usage until the 1820s when its meaning morphed into a term used to describe numerical data that was collected and then classified on the performance of government (see, Online Etymology Dictionary). Since the performance of government has become increasingly measured and analysed, scholars have become interested in the craft of governing well.

Scholarly interest has meant that extensive work has been undertaken on how governing parties manage to maintain power by winning successive elections. Bulpitt's 1986 paper 'The Discipline of the New Democracy: Mrs Thatcher's Domestic Statecraft' sets out a

theory, to be known henceforth simply as 'Statecraft', which articulates the main areas of effective governance which must be achieved if a party of government is to win another term of office. So, in that sense, what is statecraft? In Bulpitt's own words: 'it is the art of winning elections and achieving some necessary degree of governing competence in office' (Bulpitt, 1986, p. 21).

Bulpitt's theory sets out five key elements which need to be achieved if the governing party is to remain in office. In a similar structure, our theory of 'Opposition-Craft' will set out a number of key tenets which must be achieved if a party of opposition is to attain power and form a government. However, and for clarity, Bulpitt's theory pertains to parties of government and not to parties of opposition, and in that regard his theory is not entirely applicable to oppositions seeking to form governments. This is why our thesis will draw inspiration from Bulpitt's work, but it will shape a model more useful for parties of opposition.

To understand the theory of 'Opposition Craft', as proposed in this thesis, we must first of all understand the central ideas behind Bulpitt's theory of statecraft. Statecraft proposes five key elements, namely: party management, a winning electoral strategy, political argument hegemony, governing competence, and another winning electoral strategy. Bulpitt believes that party management is a 'continuous problem for party leaders', but he also regards it as something that party leaders needed to master, as the state of the party had a 'considerable influence on leadership activity'. In Bulpitt's view, party leaders need to ensure that all components of the party (MPs, party administration, constituency associations, etc.) work together to ensure the smooth running of the party machine. Leaders seeking re-election to government need to ensure their party is at least 'quiescent' to have any hope of power (Bulpitt, 1986, p. 21). Bulpitt suggests that governing parties need to be functional and supportive in order to manage the rigours of an election and to demonstrate to the electorate that the leader is in control of his/her party.

For Bulpitt, creating a winning electoral strategy involves producing 'a policy package and image capable of being sold successfully to the electorate'. In doing so the party must unite around this package and instil hope that the collection of policies can win an election and enable the party to govern effectively. In times of incoherence in the party system, the policy package may also contain a nod towards a stance useful for governing in a coalition

should a hung parliament arise (Bulpitt, 1986, p. 21). What Bulpitt proposes is the need for a suite of policies that coherently appeal to both the party and the wider electorate.

Bulpitt argues that a political argument hegemony is a 'much cruder and more comprehensive concept than ideology or theory'. He claims that one party has an argument that is generally accepted by the electorate, in contrast to its opponent's argument which is rejected. For example, the Labour Party of 1997-2010 argued for investment in public services over tax cuts, whereas the Conservatives, at the time, argued against this line. Labour's election victories during those years suggested that they had won the political argument on that front and the Conservatives were rejected. Bulpitt indicates that winning the political argument hegemony gives parties self-confidence and supports good party management (Bulpitt, 1986, pp. 21-22).

He also argues that the prevailing orthodoxy is to consider that policy choice is central to voters when electing governments, however he suggests that 'government is not just about policies, it is also about competence'. He claims that effective governments only implement policies that they have a good chance of enacting competently. Therefore, the most effective forms of government are those that carefully select their policies to ensure their successful implementation, which ultimately creates an impression of competence, rather than opting for policies that simply articulate well with the governing party's ideology (Bulpitt, 1986, p. 22).

Finally, Bulpitt suggests that governments need to find another winning electoral package that can be sold to the electorate. This suggests a form of statecraft *cycle*, as we have come full-circle again to the creation of an election-winning strategy. However, Bulpitt is keen to state that, whilst a party is in government, this strategy will arise as a result of the other elements of statecraft (outlined above) coming together, but not necessarily in any sequential order. Thus, Bulpitt believes that governments can be assessed against these criteria and their success, or otherwise, can be determined against how many of those dimensions governing parties are able to achieve. He is also keen to note that a hierarchy exists in his framework, in that he claims that 'governing competence' is possibly 'of more significance than any of the others' (Bulpitt, 1986, p. 22).

The models described above, including Bulpitt but also, Ball, Greenstein, Bale, Harmel and Janda, Heppell, Seawright and Theakston, each have their merits from which we will draw.

Several key themes emerge from this work, including: the importance of the leader, the context in which the party operates, the platform on which they govern, the necessity for change, the governing competence they project, and the overarching strategy they employ. However, each piece of work has limitations in the sense that they concentrate on specific aspects of electability like, for example, leadership, or party change. Indeed, some of the models pertain to the US rather than the UK, and others merely concentrate on one political party rather than all. At the same time, the focus for some of the theories is the electability of governing parties rather than oppositions. So, there are constraints to all the existing models. With those restrictions in mind, our theory of 'Opposition-Craft' will embrace the ideas put forward in the existing literature, but it will seek to look only at parties of opposition in the UK, regardless of their political hue, and will consider the full range of attributes necessary for that party to win power. So, in effect, it will look at a wider set of conditions necessary for electoral success and thus fill any gaps in the existing literature. It will also partially reject the notion, as set out by Ball, that parties of opposition are at the mercy of the prevailing context and environment in which they exist. Conversely, it will suggest that the most effective oppositions have the capacity to shape that environment for their own ends.

The aim of the next four sections in this chapter is to set out a model by which we can subsequently assess successful or unsuccessful parties of opposition. To be clear about our terms of reference: successful parties of opposition are ones that win general elections and go on to form governments, and unsuccessful parties of opposition lose general elections and are unable to form governments. This chapter will create a model, built with various dimensions, by which we can assess whether a party of opposition is successful or unsuccessful.

1.3 Section 3: Context

We have noted the work of Ball (2005) and his determination that environmental factors are a critical factor in deciding the outcome of elections. We will draw on his work by considering the context and environment in which the opposition operates as a key determining factor as to whether it will achieve its ends. In that respect, the model will look at contextual factors which either enhance or detract from the opposition's chances of success. These include: the state and position of the governing party they oppose; the performance of the economy; and the immediate previous history of their own party, as a determinant of how credible they are as a potential government-in-waiting.

Environmental factors that favour governing parties are a challenge that some opposition parties will fail to overcome. On that theme and in email conversation with the writer, Lord Owen, former leader of the SDP, laments his own party's position in the early 1980s when faced with Mrs Thatcher's Conservative Party: 'Any consideration of Margaret Thatcher's re-election in 1983 must not overlook the Falklands War. The SDP was standing at 50% support prior to the Falklands but she was always going to win the 1983 election once we had won the Falklands back' (Owen, February 2020). Considering such factors, James and Buller wrote about Michael Foot's Labour Party of 1980-83 and question, 'could any Labour leader have defeated Thatcher in 1983 on the back of the Falklands War and an upswing in the economy? Factoring in such circumstances is clearly important when we make judgements about Labour leaders' (James and Buller, in Clarke and James, 2015, p.20). James and Buller's arguments articulate closely with Ball's sense that the environmental factors are critical in determining the outcome of elections. However, the model of 'Opposition-Craft' suggests that, while these factors are certainly important, there is much that a party of opposition can do about the environment in which they operate in order to neutralise some of the challenges they face.

By natural disposition, parties of government are at an advantage when it comes to occupying the centre ground of British politics (Quinn, 2008). By its very nature, what a government does is often quickly considered an aspect of the mainstream centre. When it enacts its policies these can speedily become part of the established order of things, so to oppose established government policy is by its very nature at odds with the centre. However, governments can signal a change in governing direction, often by change of leader, as, for example, with John Major in 1990 (Moore, 2019), or by a response to a seismic event, as, for example, with the banking crisis in 2008 (Baccaro et al, 2010). However, if a governing party is operating in benign circumstances, it is very challenging for oppositions to establish a successful counter narrative at the same time as occupying the centre ground. Thus, the model suggests that if a governing party is operating in the mainstream centre then those circumstances will be challenging for an opposition party to overcome.

According to Bulpitt (1986), successful governing parties are judged by their ability to respond to the key issues of the day. Polling evidence usually shows that the state of the economy is often the top priority for voters (or certainly close to it), hence why we will deal with this matter in a later section when considering the shape of the governing party.

However, voters also express their preferences against a range of other top issues, for example, immigration, the health service, education, defence, etc. Depending on the environmental factors, these issues will move around in terms of their relative importance to voters. The 'Opposition-Craft' model suggests that it is hard for parties of opposition to operate effectively in an environment when the governing party is successfully responding to the key priorities as expressed by voters. However, this thesis also suggests that it is part of the make-up of successful oppositions that they will set the agenda around key priority issues on which the governing party is weak, thus challenging their governing competence (Byrne, Kerr, and Foster, 2011, p.203).

The length of time a party has been governing is another aspect of how voters view the condition of the government. Parties that have been governing for long periods often suffer from voter fatigue and from the inevitable mistakes that increase in number with each year in office. In that respect, it is harder for parties of opposition to face governing parties in their first term of power than ones that have been around a long time (Heppell, Seawright and Theakston, 2015, p.27). New governments are often given the benefit of doubt, but that generosity of trust often fades over time. With the exception of the 2015 general election, in the post-war era every governing party has gone on to lose vote share in the subsequent general election even though they may have remained the winner of that election (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2016, pp.361-62). The erosion of its support is usually attributable to the length of time a party has been in office and the natural reaction of voters to its decision-making record (Spelman, March 2020).

The popularity of the Prime Minister is another consideration when determining the condition of the governing party. Our model suggests that facing a popular Prime Minister is a tough environmental factor for a party of opposition. Long-serving Prime Ministers like Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair were often more popular than their own parties for large stretches of their premierships (Wybrow and King, 2001); neither was defeated at a general election, and both were effectively deposed by their own parties, as the opposition they faced were unable to unseat them. However, unpopular Prime Ministers (such as Gordon Brown and, eventually, John Major) were removed by the electorate at general elections when defeated by the opposition. If the opposition faces a governing party with a skilled leader then there is little that party can do to combat this strength. However, an effective party of opposition can expose the weaknesses of a Prime Minister.

Governments often come to office with a mission or a key policy that defines their time in office. For example, the coalition government of 2010-15 was defined by its response to the economic crash of 2008 and its self-imposed commitment to pay down the country's deficit; most of its policy agenda coalesced around that goal (Beech and Lee, 2015).

Assessments of governments can be made by focusing on how close they came to achieving their original mission – hence why parties of government often campaign along the lines of 'much achieved, much left to do' as if to instil a sense of continuing mission. Voters will decide whether a governing party's mission is still relevant to their needs, or whether it deserves more time to meet its ends, but the earlier in the life of a government the harder it is for an opposition to claim that a governing party's mission has expired. It is the contention of this thesis that parties of opposition should seek to explain that a governing party has failed against its own pre-determined pursuit. An opposition should do this by accepting the goal of the government, but it should also propose an alternative method of achieving that same end. Alternatively, it can try to find an alternative priority for voters and consequently undermine the central aim of the governing party.

Articulating closely with these environmental arguments is the key issue of the performance of the economy, as Ball notes in his 2005 thesis. Competence in managing the economy is a central consideration for many voters (Mattinson, 2010, pp. 63-77). In that regard, a party of opposition opposing a government presiding over a successful economy with strong approval ratings faces a very tough uphill battle to supplant that governing party as the more competent in managing the nation's finances. This will be especially problematic if the public's perception of their own likely wealth in future years is in positive territory, and the economic predictions for future years are also healthy.

The economic position is one of the environmental factors over which a party of opposition has little control, and this articulates closely with the views set out by Ball (2005), and subsequently by James (in Buller, 2015). However, when changes to the economy occur, then a successful opposition will use that context to set out an alternative method of managing the economy. Unfortunately for an opposition that might mean waiting for a seismic shock to the economy, such as Black Wednesday in 1992 (Major, 2000), or the economic crash of 2008, for it to expose economic mismanagement. Because such events are rare, many parties of opposition are now crafting economic arguments around getting economies 'to work for everyone'. In other words, they suggest that the economy might be doing well, but not for specific sections of society. The model, therefore, suggests that it

would be best for an opposition to operate in conditions where a significant economic realignment occurs; but in the event that does not happen then the strategy must be to develop a narrative around getting the economy to work better for targeted sections of the electorate (Heppell, Seawright and Theakston, 2015, p.25).

The final contextual factor under consideration is the inheritance of the party of opposition. In other words, in what condition is the party of opposition itself? Very little academic work has centred on immediate inheritance of an opposition as a determinant of likely success at a subsequent general election; in that regard the model of 'Opposition-Craft' sets out to fill the gaps in the existing literature. A party of opposition recently ejected from power by the electorate will have personnel considered to be 'the old faces identified with the failures of the past' (Shephard, writing in Fletcher, 2011, p.52) and therefore, going forward, may struggle to gather trust from the electorate. Similarly, it will be hard for an opposition recently deposed from power to shake off the policy platform on which it has governed and stood on the general election it has just lost (Fowler, 2010, pp.180-89). Indeed, there has only been one example in the post-war era of a one-term opposition that has regained power at a subsequent general election; that was the Labour opposition under Wilson, which lost power to Heath's Conservatives in 1970, and regained it in February 1974. What made that feat even more remarkable was that election victory in February 1974 was achieved under the same leader who had lost power in 1970. However, the February 1974 victory was not an outright victory as it resulted in a hung parliament; indeed, the Conservatives actually won more seats than Labour in February 1974 but were unable to form a coalition with the Liberals, so ultimately lost power (Butler and Kavanagh, 1974). In that respect, the February 1974 election is not a reliable guide to suggest that first-term oppositions can regain power.

On the other six occasions since 1945 when an opposition party has either formed part of the government, or won a general election outright, none of those occasions has occurred during its first spell as the opposition. On all the occasions that a successful party of opposition has won power, it has done so having lost consecutive general elections and undertaken several periods of opposition before winning that power back. Therefore, as a first-term opposition, it is highly likely that this will form an insurmountable environmental factor for a party of opposition to overcome.

Parties of opposition often have various phases and several different leaders before they eventually regain power; for example, the Conservatives in opposition from 1997-2010 had five different leaders before resuming office (Bale, 2011a). Election defeats often mark out specific phases of an opposition, and the scale of the defeat may well form another environmental factor which we need to consider as part of this analysis. For example, the Conservative Party that Duncan-Smith inherited from Hague, following their 2001 defeat, had barely moved forward from their previous 1997 collapse. The Conservative Party was unreformed and its condition was barely distinguishable from its position in 1997. Thus, its road back to power from that position was to be lengthy (Snowdon, 2010, pp.75-81).

The inherited policy platform is another facet that we must consider. In 1983, Labour in opposition stood on a hard-left manifesto and lost heavily to the Conservatives. That hard-left position was then something that the party in opposition had to shift back towards the centre - a process that took many years (McIlroy, 1998, p.540). Gaining centre-ground credentials when starting from a policy platform that exists at the more extreme fringes of the political spectrum is challenging. This thesis suggests that oppositions that inherit partially-reformed policies and ones with platforms close to the centre ground of British politics have a far better chance of success than ones that exist on the political fringes.

Equally, oppositions have a friendlier environment in which to operate if they have only narrowly lost the previous general election. Governments with small working majorities over their major opponents often struggle to convey governing competence. Major's Conservative government of 1992-97 was beset with problems associated with its small working majority (Seldon, 1997, pp.519-46); all of which provided the Labour opposition with fertile territory on which to attack the government. Thus, the working majority of the governing party is an environmental factor over which a party of opposition has little control, but which clearly has an effect on the outcome of its performance in the subsequent passage of its existence.

In terms of the context in which a party of opposition exists, when it comes to testing the model against various periods of opposition in later chapters, the following statements and conditions listed in Figure 1 (below) will be posed:

Figure 1: Model of 'Opposition-Craft': Context

Context
This table lists the necessary contextual conditions for an opposition to thrive and potentially go on to form a government.
The Governing Party
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The environmental factors are sufficiently problematic for the government that an opposition has an opportunity to present its case</i> • <i>The governing party is governing away from the centre ground of UK politics</i> • <i>The environmental factors are volatile</i> • <i>The governing party has lost its reputation for competent governance</i> • <i>The governing party is not prioritising voters' priority issues</i> • <i>The opposition is able to raise the profile of its priority issues and these articulate closely with the voters' priorities</i> • <i>The governing party has been in office for more than one term</i> • <i>The Prime Minister is unpopular</i> • <i>The governing party's central governing mission has been achieved</i> • <i>The governing party's central governing mission no longer resonates with the electorate</i> • <i>The opposition accepts the central governing mission of the governing party</i> • <i>The opposition is able to articulate an alternative method of achieving the central governing mission of the government</i>
The Economic Position
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The opposition is more trusted to run the economy than the government</i> • <i>The electorate has a negative perception of their future wealth</i> • <i>There has been a seismic economic shock (e.g. a recession)</i>
The Inheritance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The opposition has been out of power for at least one term</i> • <i>The opposition has different policies and personnel than it had when it last left office</i> • <i>The opposition has undergone a period of substantial internal reform</i> • <i>The opposition has moved its policy platform towards the centre ground over a sustained period of time</i> • <i>The opposition was only narrowly defeated at the previous general election</i> • <i>The governing party only has a small majority or governs in a hung parliament</i>

The 'Opposition-Craft' model contends that the context in which an opposition operates is the most critical factor in its likely chances of success at a general election. Indeed, further to that it suggests that a favourable context is a pre-requisite for winning a general election. The large part of the environmental conditions outlined above need to be met for there to be any chance of electoral victory. However, it is not enough for the opposition to rely simply on environmental factors to deliver victory; it needs to hone its act to provide a credible alternative to the governing party. The following sections of the model outline the

strategy, tasks and skills an opposition must possess in order to prove its governing credentials.

1.4 Section 4: Strategy

The model will now focus on the strategy used to position the party of opposition onto ground likely to win in the subsequent general election. It will look at the opposition party's strategy on its policy platform, including its occupation of the political centre ground. It will consider the political narrative that it creates around its policy position and ask what story it is trying to tell about itself, including what signals it offers the electorate about how it might govern once elevated to office. It will also zoom in on the style of leadership on offer.

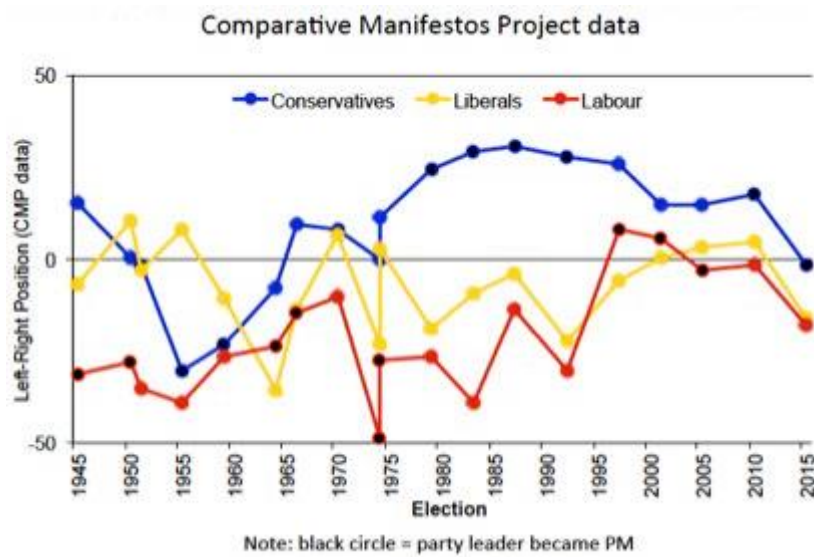
Much has been written about the virtues of the centre ground of British politics. Such is the magnetism of the centre ground to political parties seeking electoral success that Bale once described it as 'fabled' (Bale, 2011, p.151). Hindmoor argues that it is a common assumption amongst political scientists 'that parties must be at the centre if they are to win elections' (Hindmoor, 2004, p.5). In the era under consideration, there seems to be little doubt that the centre ground of politics is where UK elections are fought and won. In that respect, the model of 'Opposition-Craft' suggests that oppositions hoping to win power must position their policy platform on the centre ground of politics.

But what is the centre ground of politics? Hindmoor claims that political positions are a spatial metaphor and points to Downs's work, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, as the most celebrated exposition of that theory. Downs's argument centres on a spatial metaphor, which posits that voters have political preferences and that those preferences can be 'ordered from left to right in a manner agreed upon by all voters' (Downs, in Hindmoor, 2004, p.5). This left/right spectrum is one-dimensional and, in it, political parties select policies which sit somewhere on this left/right continuum. The argument goes that voters opt for the party closest to their own position on the continuum. Thus, it is electorally advantageous to position a party in the centre in order to have the best chance of garnering the most votes, as logically this is the position closest to most voters.

Hindmoor underscores this view by claiming: 'There is no successful electoral alternative to this position' (Hindmoor, 2004, p.5). So, the 'centre', for Downs, is the political space between left and right. For the purposes of this analysis we will work with the definition as set out by Downs.

Taking Downs's proposition, it is possible to look at party manifestos and chart the relative positions of the policy platforms taken in the manifesto. Using a balance of those positions enables us to place the manifesto of each party on the continuum of the left/right spectrum. In Figure 2 below, we can see the relative position of the Conservatives, Liberals and Labour at each of the general elections since 1945. The black dot denotes which of the parties won that year's general election. Focusing simply on the two main parties we can draw the conclusion that recent elections (1997 onwards) have all been won from the centre ground, although not necessarily by the party closest to the centre ground. But this conclusion is certainly not applicable to the pre-1997 position where a number of elections were fought and won from more left- or right-wing positions, for example, the Conservative victories of 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1992. Indeed, from 1974, the general winning policy position of either Labour or the Conservatives was either to be centrist or right-of-centre, with no party winning from an explicitly left-wing position. However, on the five occasions in the post-war period when an opposition has won outright, it has done so on four of those occasions with a more centrist programme than the party of government that it was fighting at the general election (1964 being the exception and, even on this occasion, the Labour opposition under Wilson had a fairly moderate left-wing manifesto). So, no party of opposition has won a general election in the post-war period with a radical programme of either left or right-wing policies.

Figure 2: Left-Right locations of UK parties since 1945



Source: Financial Times, 25th July, 2016

Establishing a policy position around the centre ground of politics is a central aspect of the model; but equally important is the ability of an opposition party to craft a narrative which articulates that the party is on the mainstream centre. The model of 'Opposition-Craft' proposes that parties of opposition should establish a consistent narrative around their political message, which emphasises at every point of contact that the party is positioned at the centre. But it must also build three other related messages into its narrative.

Firstly, an opposition should stress that its position is more mainstream and in-tune with public opinion than the position adopted by the government (see, for example, Gamble, 2010, p.643; and Wickham-Jones, 2005, p.653). It should effectively campaign with the message that the governing party is no longer on the centre ground and should seek to exploit opportunities that craft the image that the governing party is at the more extreme edges of the left or the right of the political continuum. Its narrative should create political space between it on the centre and the governing party somewhere either to the left or right of that place (Evans, 2008, pp.297-98).

Secondly, an opposition should suggest that its potential governing position is not radically different from that which has gone before. In other words, it should reassure the

electorate that it is an alternative government, but not a radically different one (Needham, 2005, p.351). Governing parties tend to benefit from their status as the government; in relation to the centre ground of politics that status affords them an axiomatic link with the centre, as what they have implemented has become an accepted given and part of the status quo. Pushing governing parties off that ground is difficult to achieve, but it can be partly brought about by oppositions if they are able to reassure voters that they own that sensible mainstream centre ground as well. To that end, an opposition must build some kind of policy relationship with the governing hegemony; its narrative must acknowledge the achievements of the governing party and suggest a natural progression from its opponent's position to its new policy platform (Heppell, 2008, p.578).

Thirdly, an opposition needs to develop the sense that it is a more capable party of government than the incumbent. Increasingly, voters cast their ballot according to which party they think is more capable and competent at delivering policy outcomes, or what is commonly known in political parlance as valence politics (Green, 2007). Thus, the model argues that the narrative must incorporate some sense of governing capability on the part of those at the top of the party of opposition. The development of a narrative around capability to govern is inextricably linked with the development of a narrative around a centre ground policy position, which is further supported by a reassurance strategy (Gould, 2011), as voters will be more inclined to believe in the capabilities of personnel seen to be in the mainstream centre.

Central to its positioning strategy is the style of leadership projected by the party of opposition. The leader's position is important in determining how a party might govern once in power. The model of 'Opposition-Craft' proposes that leaders of oppositions need to be placed closer to the centre ground of politics than the rest of their party. The leader's position, as different from the rest of the party, is a mechanism by which to communicate to the electorate that the leader will be a Prime Minister for all of the people and also to demonstrate that the leader will not be a creature owned and controlled by the rest of the party (Quinn, 2008, p.196 and p.181).

Not only does the style of leadership offered by a Leader of the Opposition refer to his/her political position relative to his/her party, but it is also about the particular type of leadership they offer. Party leaders often fit into one of two types of leadership: a) either they are an autocratic leader who can demonstrate a firm grip on their party by leading

from the front (McAnulla, 2012, p.178); or b) they are a more consensual type of leader rooted in a more democratic model of decision making (Foley, 2002, p.25). The model recommends that the opposition needs a leader who leans towards the autocratic end of leadership style as it more easily conveys the smack of firm governance. The electorate has to imagine the Leader of the Opposition as a Prime Minister; that image is more effectively developed by a Leader of the Opposition willing to provide firm leadership over their own party while in opposition. To demonstrate the smack of firm leadership, this model suggests that the leader must find necessary reforms of his or her own party as a means by which to demonstrate good governing capacity.

In terms of the strategy adopted by a party of opposition, when it comes to testing the model against various periods of oppositions in later chapters, the following statements and conditions shown below in Figure 3 will be posed:

Figure 3: Model of 'Opposition-Craft': Strategy

Strategy
This table lists the attributes that an opposition must possess in respect of the strategy it follows in opposition.
The centre ground
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The opposition is on the political centre ground</i>
Narrative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The opposition has a consistent narrative which articulates the sense that it is on the centre ground of politics</i> • <i>The opposition has a narrative that stresses it is more mainstream and closer to the centre ground than the governing party</i> • <i>The opposition is able to campaign with a message that tells the electorate that the governing party no longer represents the centre</i> • <i>The opposition is successfully able to create the sense that the governing party is on the far left/right</i> • <i>The opposition is able to use a narrative which suggests that its position is the natural progression from the existing governing hegemony</i> • <i>The opposition is able to demonstrate that it would govern more effectively than the party in power</i>
Leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The opposition leader's political position is closer to the centre ground than his/her party</i> • <i>The opposition leader's political position is different the rest of her/his party</i> • <i>The opposition leader has an autocratic style of leadership</i> • <i>The opposition leader demonstrates firm and decisive leadership over their own party</i>

It is the contention of this thesis that if an opposition has a favourable context in which to operate, and is then able to employ a strategy which places it at the mainstream centre of British politics then some of the fundamental conditions are in place for success at the subsequent general election. Yet there is more it must do in terms of the tasks and skills it must demonstrate to underscore its credentials for governing office.

1.5 Section 5: Tasks

Oppositions must carry out a number of functions: some are constitutional in nature, others are tasks they must undertake if they are to remain a viable party capable of government. The model will look at a number of tasks including: opposing the government and holding it to account, party management, parliamentary management, the execution of official duties, and media management. It is the contention of this thesis that oppositions should conduct those responsibilities in such a manner as to suggest that they are capable of forming the next government.

First amongst the opposition's tasks is the responsibility to oppose the government and hold it to account. It will undertake this task in a number of different forums: firstly, in parliamentary settings like the Commons, the Lords, and in select committees, but secondly out in the media and by campaigning on the doorstep. Officially, the duty is to oppose government business and test the executive to ensure that they have to explain their actions. Parties of opposition can use this platform to expose deficiencies in governing parties (Hockin, 1971).

However, effective oppositions will not always oppose the government on the grounds that they may share some of its values, so more appropriately they will use their powers in opposition tactically to develop a narrative about their own values and general direction of travel, if they were elected to office. In other sections of this model we have outlined the need for effective oppositions partially to accept the governing party's political hegemony; so, supporting government business on occasions can be a tool to develop that narrative (Johnson, 1997).

While the official business of opposition is conducted in parliament, oppositions will also take their responsibilities to oppose the government out into the media and onto the doorstep during campaigns. Elsewhere in our model we will note the need for oppositions to maintain an effective media strategy; implicit within that strategy is the need for

oppositions to fulfil their official function of opposing the government. The model of 'Opposition-Craft' suggests that all efforts in achieving those ends should be about exposing the deficiencies of the governing party, but should also be about subtly drawing parallels with what the party of opposition would do if elected to office.

Fundamental to the tasks an opposition party must carry out is its responsibility to manage its affairs in parliament. It must use its status as the official opposition to shadow the government at all levels in parliament (Johnson, 1997). This duty will involve the leader challenging the Prime Minister at Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs), and shadow ministers challenging cabinet ministers during ministerial questions. According to the UK Parliament website, the opposition's 'role is to examine the work of each government department and develop policies in their specific areas'. Thus, it has a very clear task in its parliamentary work. This thesis suggests that a party of opposition should use its official function in parliament to demonstrate its effectiveness and readiness for government.

Plenty of academic work has considered the impact of PMQs and most has concluded that it is largely rhetorical posturing (see, for example, Bates, Kerr, Byrne and Stanley, 2012, p.253). However, it remains a focal point for the public and, for many, it is the only aspect of parliamentary business that the wider electorate tune into. In that respect, it is the proposition of this thesis that PMQs acts as a stage on which the Leader of the Opposition can present his or her offer to the public. An effective parliamentary performance at PMQs is a mechanism for aspirant opposition leaders to show themselves as potential Prime Ministers.

The same is true of shadow cabinet ministers and their role in parliament in opposing their opposite number on the government benches. While their responsibilities in parliament receive nothing like the media interest that PMQs garners, effective performances in the Commons or Lords by shadow ministers can generate an impression of a party ready to assume the responsibilities of government. Bulpitt (1986) discusses the notion that governing parties need to create the sense of governing competence; this thesis posits that oppositions must do much the same from their place on the opposition benches in parliament.

Effective oppositions can also use their parliamentary roles to catch out governing parties. A number of tactics can be used in parliament to disrupt the business of government, each

of which, if successfully deployed, can present the government as in disarray or as having lost control. Oppositions can use their voting rights to work unofficially with disenchanted backbench MPs from the governing party to inflict parliamentary defeats on the government. This is an especially effective line of attack if the government has a slim majority or is working in coalition with another party (Seldon, 1997, pp.519-47).

Increasingly, parliament uses select committees to conduct its business. According to Benton and Russell, over the past 30 years 'they have become better established, gained resources, and attracted increasing media attention' (Benton and Russell, 2012, p.2). These committees can be used as another parliamentary forum in which to hold the government to account. While committee membership is made up to reflect the balance of power in the Commons, committees are chaired by members drawn from either side of the House; in that regard, leading players in the opposition can present themselves in leading parliamentary roles. Here again, effective oppositions can use parliamentary management as a means by which to present themselves as an alternative government (see also, Hardman, 2019, pp.106-08).

Part of the responsibilities of a party seeking to regain office is effective party management. The ability to demonstrate that the party is in good working order is another tool by which to demonstrate readiness for office. Bulpitt's Statecraft model argues that parties need to be managed well in order to maintain power. He suggests that all wings of the party, and aspects of the party's structure (e.g. MPs, MEPs, constituency associations, administration, etc.), need to be kept content with the direction of travel. Bulpitt argues that factions within the party need to be at least 'quiescent' to work effectively (Bulpitt, 1986, p.21). Our model of 'Opposition-Craft' advocates that this 'quiescent' position is a necessary condition for oppositions hoping to regain power.

Party unity is a helpful ingredient in demonstrating readiness for power, but our model does not in any way suggest that difference must be stamped out, and supports the idea that a 'quiescent' position is a preferable place to be. For example, elsewhere in the model, it has been suggested that it can be helpful for the leader to be positioned more towards the centre than the rest of the party. A quiescent party would accept the differing positions of its wings and leadership. Effective party management is about leading all wings in a general direction and avoiding in-fighting, it is not about intolerance of positions at odds with the leadership (James and Buller, in Clarke and James, 2015, p.27).

The responsibilities associated with party management also extend to a party's membership. Expanding the base of party membership can be an indicator of a party's popularity, especially if the membership is drawn from a number of political wings. Successful parties are often described as coalitions of broadly like-minded people. The model subscribes to the notion that a well-managed party will be one that widens its base to appeal beyond narrowly-focused policy and will include mass membership drawn from a variety of political positions (Marshall, 2009, p.9). That large membership should be able to mobilise its supporters to work on the ground and work towards persuading the wider electorate to vote for the party. Large parties, however, need to be tightly managed (see, for example, Snowden, 2010, pp.217-18). Voters need to be reassured by the party leader's decision-making skills (Heppell, Seawright and Theakston, 2015); effective party management by a small group of staff is the most preferable way to demonstrate this skill as effectively that will be the model used for decision making should the party form a government.

The opposition leader will conduct a number of official duties. These include attendance at state occasions like banquets, laying wreaths at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday, and attending royal weddings etc. While these duties are relatively easy to fulfil, they are highly symbolic and are consequently opportunities for the Leader of the Opposition to present her/himself as Prime Ministerial, and thus suggestive of another strand of the governing competence as described by Bulpitt (1986). It is surprising how many Leaders of the Opposition have come unstuck while carrying out these relatively simple duties and have not observed the political marketer's advice that: 'Successful politicians have always recognised the importance of image over issues' (Egan, 1999, p.496). Thus, this thesis asserts that the execution of official duties is a critical test for leaders of parties of opposition to enhance their prime ministerial image.

Another aspect of their official duties is the power of patronage. Like the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition can place supporters into the House of Lords (via the House of Lords Appointments Commission, and subject to approval by the Queen and the PM). This responsibility is, again, symbolic of how that leader might operate if elevated to the premiership. The media will scrutinise appointments as indicative of the style and flavour of leadership that a leader might provide going forward. For example, a party wishing to demonstrate its pro-business credentials may elevate a high-profile business leader into the Lords. In that respect, 'Opposition-Craft' suggests that the Leader of the Opposition

must make appointments that are seen to further their agenda as set out in their policy platform (Rampen, 2016).

As most voters select parties based on what they see in the media, it is essential that a party hoping to win power manages the media well. This thesis focuses on the post-war era, but it is worth noting at this point that the media has evolved in that time through different technologies, so that we now have a vast array of different forms of media, all of which must be managed by the party of opposition. In that context, media management is not a fixed entity (Wring, 1995). In whatever form the media is shaped, it is the responsibility of parties of opposition to fulfil a number of their functions through the media. The media cover these functions and, in that regard, they form the mouthpiece by which the opposition communicates with the electorate. For many voters, the party is what it is, as presented in the media; the two are indistinguishable. Thus, the importance of strong media management cannot be overstated. It therefore requires good relations with the media in order to enact a media strategy across varied media formats (Wring, 2002).

For a large part of the post-war period, party media strategies have had to encompass TV, radio and the print media. All of those outlets are still important and require organisation, but now parties must also wrestle with the demands of the internet and social media. The range of media outlets has increased in recent years, but the essential principles around a media strategy remain the same (Fairclough, 2003, p.1). Therefore, the model indicates that the first principle of a media strategy should be about conveying a favourable brand image; it is essential that voters have a favourable view about the core values of the party. The party must use every conceivable opportunity to enhance that brand and neutralise any negative associations with the image.

The opposition should also communicate a consistent message across all of the available media outlets. Voters need to know in very simple terms what the party is about, and that message should be repeated consistently across all formats of the media. A targeted approach to messaging should also be adopted in specific marginal constituencies. The media strategy needs to be intelligent enough to target specific voters in specific parts of the country in order to take full advantage of the first-past-the-post electoral system (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2016, pp.256-57).

In terms of the tasks undertaken by a party of opposition, when it comes to testing the model against various periods of oppositions in later chapters, the following statements and conditions shown in Figure 4 (below) will be posed:

Figure 4: Model of 'Opposition-Craft': Tasks

Tasks
This table lists the tasks that an opposition must undertake effectively if it is have a chance of winning the next election.
Opposing the government and holding it to account
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The opposition is selectively able to oppose (and where relevant support) the government in parliamentary settings</i> • <i>The opposition is selectively able to oppose (and where relevant support) the government outside of parliamentary settings (e.g. the doorstep and the media)</i> • <i>The opposition is effective in communicating deficiencies to the electorate</i> • <i>In opposing the government, the opposition is able to develop a narrative about how it would do things in manner more in tune with the wishes of the electorate</i>
Parliamentary management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The opposition leader is effective at Prime Minister's Questions</i> • <i>The opposition leader appears 'prime-ministerial' during Prime Minister's Questions</i> • <i>The shadow cabinet are effective at ministerial questions</i> • <i>The shadow cabinet and opposition leader are able to demonstrate governing competence through parliamentary performances</i> • <i>The opposition is able to inflict parliamentary defeats on the governing party</i> • <i>The opposition is able to use select committees to highlight governing deficiencies and project governing competence</i>
Party management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The opposition is in a quiescent state with regard to its competing factions</i> • <i>The opposition leader is able to lead all wings of the party towards one common goal</i> • <i>The opposition is able to expand its membership base and enthuse people from all wings of the spectrum in which it operates</i> • <i>The opposition can mobilise its supporters to fight the electoral ground war</i> • <i>The opposition is tightly managed by a group of effective leaders</i>
Execution of official duties
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The opposition leader is able to carry out official duties effectively and project a 'prime-ministerial' image</i> • <i>The opposition leader is able to use powers of patronage and appointments to signal a positive direction of travel</i>
Media management

- *The opposition is effective at managing its media relations*
- *The opposition is able to convey its organisational ability through its strong media management culture*
- *The opposition is able to use all media formats to convey its messages effectively*
- *The opposition is able to convey a positive brand image through the media*
- *The opposition is able to communicate simple core messages about its offer through the media*
- *The opposition is able to target key voters with key messages through its media management*

For a party of opposition, the chances of success in a general election are held largely in the context in which it works and the wider strategy around policy and leadership that it adopts. But it is in its tasks that an opposition will demonstrate its credibility to form a government. Conducting its functional duties is central to voters' perception of the party as a realistic alternative. That credibility can be enhanced further if it is effectively skilled on a number of key fronts.

1.6 Section 6: Skills

Effective oppositions will garner credibility through expert communication, organisation and decision-making skills. They should also be led by someone with an appropriate image and emotional stability suited to the demands of the job of being Prime Minister. The model proposes that effective oppositions will enhance their claim to office if they are able to conduct these skills to a high standard as they will positively magnify the impact of their strategy and their tasks in opposition. Effective skills may also enable the opposition to accentuate the more helpful aspects of the context in which they work.

The term 'modernisation' is widely defined amongst academics (see, for example, Bale, in Fletcher, 2011, p.151; and Dommett, 2015, pp.251-55) but, for the purposes of this model, modernisation will be considered in the terms outlined by Finlayson. Finlayson suggests that '[modernisation] can be understood and explained by focusing on it from three angles: its rhetorical function; its concrete reference and its deployment as a strategy for governance' (Finlayson, 2003, p.67). Parties of opposition must modernise and convey this process of modernisation to the electorate in the following ways: communication of internal party reform, communication of a policy platform, and communication of modernisation.

In keeping with the ideas set out by Hamel and Janda (1994) regarding party change, a modernisation agenda suggests that a party must demonstrate that it has reformed by modernising in order to gain credibility. Those reforms must be outward facing so that the electorate is aware that the reforms have taken place. The reforms should exemplify that the party is moving closer to the aspirations of the electorate. They also need to be set in a context whereby the party leader is 'seen' to be reforming his/her party as a means by which to communicate to the electorate that s/he is able to reform the country, if elected to office (see, for example, Dommett, 2015; and Kerr and Hayton, 2015).

The model suggests that the modernisation agenda must extend, also, to communicating a new policy platform. Bulpitt (1986) argues that parties, when formulating an electoral strategy, need a policy platform that resonates with the electorate. This thesis suggests that this policy platform should also be thematically linked under a simple banner, suitable for the times in which it would be enacted, which together could be plausibly and credibly delivered. The process of arriving at this new policy platform should be explicitly conveyed to the electorate. By doing so, the party will demonstrate to voters that it is modernising and moving closer to the aspirations of the voting public, and explicitly fulfilling the 'party change' agenda as set out by Harmel and Janda (1994). This model contends that modernisation should be a theme running through all methods of communication and should form part of the explicit appeal of an aspiring party of government. By modernising, the party of opposition is axiomatically more credible in the eyes of the electorate as it more responsive to the context in which it might govern.

Oppositions are often caught between, on the one hand, communicating in detail what their policies are, and therefore giving the governing party the opportunity to pick their policies to pieces – a strategy known as *pointillism* – and, on the other hand, communicating a set of values and general policy direction, which runs the risk of the opposition party being accused of having few or no policies to implement, a strategy known as *impressionism* (see, for example, Heppell, 2012). The model of 'Opposition-Craft' suggests that effective oppositions should opt for the impressionism approach by setting out a general direction of travel they would take the country in if elected to office. Oppositions should not supply details of policy proposals as these are less effective to communicate and can be dissected negatively by the governing party. The impressionism approach also leaves greater room for manoeuvre once in government (see, for example, Norton, in Lee and Beech, 2009, pp.31-44).

The opposition should be skilled in communicating its values and general direction of travel up to and including the general election it hopes to win. It must find as many opportunities as possible by which it can communicate those values and general direction of travel (see, for example, Blair, 2010, p.92). It must also have sufficient and suitable lines of argument to rebut the charge that it is not setting out its policy agenda in detail, for that will inevitably be the charge levelled at a party merely setting out its general drift. In order to set out a general direction of travel, the model suggests that parties should find symbols to communicate their direction. For example, the symbol may communicate party reform, or it may indicate new policy positions. It is important that parties find key moments to suggest shifts in position and explicitly convey these to the electorate (see, for example, Mandelson, 2010, p.183).

The skill involved in finding those symbols will be varied. Party leaders can pick fights with their own party to symbolise their own political positioning as different from the main body of the party (Gamble, 2010, p.643). They can produce policy that is counter-intuitive to the traditional stereotype of the party (Bale, in Fletcher, 2011, p.151). Whatever the symbol, it must be used to get noticed in a positive light and underscore the party's plausibility as a party of government.

With reference to political marketing, Lees-Marshment (2001) points to three types of party: a product-oriented party which 'argues for what it stands for and believes in'; a sales-oriented party which 'focuses on selling its argument to voters'; and a market-oriented party which 'designs its behaviour to provide voter satisfaction' (Lees-Marshment, 2001, p.696). Lees-Marshment's model directly correlates with successful and unsuccessful parties, in that she was able to link market-oriented parties with electoral success. The model proposes that aspiring parties of government must be market-oriented parties. They should be willing to imbue their long-standing values with policies and behaviours that satisfy the voters and they must do this in a manner which is plausible to voters; parties cannot jettison long-held values, but they should articulate those values in a fashion that is attractive to voters.

Support of the media has been seen by many opposition parties as helpful in securing votes. Much has been written about the link between favourable press coverage and election victories; some academics have concluded that there is not a great deal of causal link between voting behaviour and favourable press coverage (see, for example, Wring and

Deacon, 2010). However, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that oppositions have adopted strategies to win over the media in order to advance their cause. Successful oppositions have historically managed to win over large parts of the media (see, for example, Radice, 2010, p.94).

The model suggests that parties of opposition should capture the attention of the media, attempt to garner positive coverage, and persuade media outlets to support their cause. To achieve that end, they need to be skilled on a number of fronts: they need to adopt a media strategy that explicitly places their party reforms and new policy platform in the eye of the media; they should spin their message to achieve the best possible coverage of their aims; and they should also create relationships with media outlets to win over their endorsements at election time (Jones, 2000).

Through the media, oppositions need to reassure the electorate about their ability to govern. To that end, deft skills are required when paradoxically asking the electorate to enthuse about the party of opposition as a 'party of change', while at the same time reassuring the electorate that radical and risky change is not on the way. However, our model of 'Opposition-Craft' argues that this is exactly what parties of opposition must do if they are to secure power.

To reassure voters, parties need to position themselves skilfully as new, exciting and fresh-faced, as suggested by Ball (2009). Essentially, they need to represent 'hope', but at the same time create the sense that they are the natural inheritors of the responsibilities of government from the current governing party, as suggested by Bulpitt (1986). Their policy platform should be one that rights the wrongs of the existing government, but that should not be presented as a radically different prospectus. In that respect, there needs to be a coherent link with the past coupled with an exciting vision of the future. Much of its credibility needs to be bound up with its acceptance of the governing party's political dominance (see, for example Gould, in Needham, 2005, p.352).

In reassuring the electorate, the opposition must house a team filled with skilled and credible alternative leaders, led by a credible alternative Prime Minister. Part of the reassurance should stem from the sense that the team is fresh-faced, yet somehow more competent. Thus, arguing strongly on valence issues naturally acts as an effective counter-balance for a party proposing a vision of change (Needham, 2005, p.351). The opposition

must demonstrate is that it is led by an individual who possess the skills and image of an alternative and credible Prime Minister (McAnulla, 2012, p.180). The role of party leader is central to the likely chance of success of a political party (see, for example, Heppell, Seawright and Theakston, 2015) and polling evidence suggests that there is a very nearly a direct correlation between election victories and parties led by candidates perceived to be the most capable Prime Minister (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Most Capable Prime Minister*

Year	1950	1951	1955	1959	1964	1966	1970	1974	1974	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005	2010	2015
Poll Lead	No data	No data	No data	+22	+27	+24	+36	+6	+22	+19	+31	+18	+9	+17	+37	+19	+4	+15
Win or Lose				Win	Win	Win	Lose	Win	Win	Lose	Win	Win	Win	Win	Win	Win	Win	Win

*Data from 1959-1974: Table information sourced from 'British Political Opinion 1937-2000: The Gallup Polls' (King and Wybrow: Politico's Publishing, 2001). Data derived from net satisfaction ratings for PM and Leader of the Opposition. Table states net difference between the two leaders. *Data from 1979 onwards: Table information sourced from Ipsos MORI: <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/37/Most-Capable-Prime-Minister-Trends.aspx>. Questions asked: 'Who do you think would make the best prime minister (followed by party leader names)?' Table only takes account of the top 2 candidates. Table refers to the final poll taken before the general election and indicates the poll lead that the preferred candidate took into that general election. *'Win or Lose' indicates whether the candidate leading the poll of net satisfaction rating or 'who do you think would make the best prime minister?' goes on to subsequently win or lose the subsequent general election. By win or lose the subsequent general election we mean goes to form the next governing party.

In thirteen out of fifteen general elections for which polling data is available, the candidate leading the poll went on to win. Both 1970 and 1979 are anomalies, but can be explained in the sense that both took place in times of economic uncertainty. However, in the majority of cases the party led by the more popular leader went on to win. Reflecting on this correlation inevitably leads to the conclusion that the skills and capabilities of the party leader are essential if a party of opposition wishes to become the government.

Finlayson suggests that the symbolic status of the leader is a central plank of any party of opposition hoping to form a government. He goes on to contend that the leader must be skilled in a range of ways; not only must s/he display charismatic appeal, but s/he must also reflect the will of the people and be seen as a unifying figure around whom the British people can coalesce. Thus, their task is extraordinary: '[o]n the one hand, they must appear more efficient and skilled than anyone else; at the same time they must appear "one of us"'. Finlayson went on to argue that, '[w]e might say that the contemporary image of leadership, in Britain certainly, requires the appearance of extraordinary ordinariness' (Finlayson, 2002, p.590).

Like Greenstein (2009) and the Heppell, Seawright and Theakston (2015) models, Finlayson suggests that opposition leaders must possess a range of testing skills, some of which may appear to be contradictory in nature. They must have their personality, communication skills and image placed at the forefront of their party's fight for power, but such is the relentless focus on the leader that any flaw in their leadership skill or image will be ruthlessly exposed. So, the model suggests that party leaders wishing to become Prime Minister need to give the impression that they are special and possess statesmanlike appeal, but at the same time must appear ordinary and easy-going.

The model also proposes that party leaders need an image that presents them as standing to one side of their party and not appear to be a creature 'of' their party. Successful Leaders of the Opposition have often positioned themselves more towards the centre ground of British politics than the position occupied by many of their members. 'Leaders might deliberately harbour an antagonistic relationship in order to prove to the wider public that they are different' (James and Buller, in Clarke and James, 2015, p.27). The skill of political positioning is about conveying to the electorate an image which demonstrates that the leader is more centrist than their party members; but it is also designed to demonstrate an impression that they are not controlled by their membership. In wishing to convey the image that they are prime ministerial, party leaders need to detach from their party in order to create the sense that they will govern for all the people and not just those inside their party (Driver and Martell, 2000, p.148; and Heffernan, 2013, p.4).

Most commentators are agreed that British general elections are won from the centre ground (see, for example, Bale, 2011, p.151; and Hindmoor, 2004, p.5). Rooting the leader's image as a centre-ground politician is an essential part of a successful opposition leader. It also helps to channel the idea that the leader is in tune with where most of the electorate are positioned, enhancing their credibility amongst the electorate. So, in Finlayson's notion of 'extraordinary ordinariness', centre-ground appeal on the part of the leader is very much part of the 'ordinary'.

It is also helpful if the party leader has a useful backstory by which s/he can convey to the voters an impression of how they might govern. The party leader who is able to tell a story of how they rose from rags-to-riches tells a thousand stories about how they may act as Prime Minister, in the same way as a party leader able to parade their family in front of the world's media tells the voter that s/he is family-friendly. Some successful party leaders

have also managed to use their background to convey the image that they are somehow slightly different from the rest of their party, which again can instil confidence in them as a credible Prime Minister in the eyes of the electorate (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2010, p.73). The model suggests that an image of modernity is essential for an opposition leader to demonstrate that s/he has the answers to the problems of today. The media will be quick to expose any aspect of a party leader's attributes which may appear problematic for the electorate. So, a leader who is too old, too 'weird', or too old-fashioned will struggle to become Prime Minister (see, for example, Bennister, 2012, p.1).

In order to achieve the governing competence, as described by Bulpitt (1986), the leader needs effective managers around them, so the shadow cabinet should be packed with personnel capable and appropriately skilled to carry out big cabinet jobs. They, too, need a strong image that inspires confidence in the electorate that those around the party leader are capable individuals. Successful oppositions have had shadow cabinets with members who have gone on to be termed 'Big Beasts' when they have arrived in cabinet positions (see, for example, King, 2015). But their star has usually risen while toiling in opposition, crafting positive press and high public profiles. Some have achieved this by driving policy initiatives of their own that resonate with the electorate. This model suggests that shadow cabinet members must be skilled at handling the media and speaking in public. They should cement their image as credible leaders in formulating popular policies.

When discussing US Presidents, Greenstein (2009) notes the need for organisational capacity. With that in mind, the model of 'Opposition-Craft' suggests that a party of opposition should be skilled at organisation both at a national and local level. Its organisational skills will convey an impression of credibility to the electorate if they are able to demonstrate that they are effective in this area. On the national level, the opposition must set out its policy platform to the electorate; it must transmit its message through all the available forms of national communication (e.g. party-political broadcasts, billboard advertising, etc.). In putting forward positive messages about its policy platform, the national campaign must also quickly and robustly rebut any claims made about it by its opponent. Again, it must use every conceivable channel of communication to enact these rebuttals (see, for example, Gould, 2011, pp.171-72).

As well as leading the national campaign in the media, the party must also organise itself so that it takes full advantage of the UK's first-past-the-post electoral system. It must,

therefore, direct its campaign towards targeting marginal constituencies. Swing voters in marginal constituencies must be identified and appealed to by the campaign (see, for example, Bale, 2015b, pp.47-49). The model indicates that work in the marginal constituencies must be supported by an organised party machine at a local level. It must use the national resources where possible to identify key voters who can swing a constituency with their votes. According to Cowley and Kavanagh, 'new technology enables parties to garner large amounts of data about individuals and personalise their communications accordingly' (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2016, pp.256-57). The party on the ground needs to be able to use this information to get the local message out, and at the same time it should reinforce national campaign themes to specific voters. In a more traditional campaigning sense, local parties also need to be skilled in getting out their vote.

Heppell, Seawright and Theakston (2015) argue that opposition leaders need to be effective decision makers. The model, obviously, suggests that they must be effective managers, but they should also be *seen* to be effective managers. Many successful Leaders of the Opposition have used reform of their parties as a vehicle by which to demonstrate to the electorate that they are effective managers (Farnham, 1996, p.588). The skill of effective management can take many forms, but is best conveyed to the electorate by ruthless and/or surgical changes in personnel which can symbolise a change in direction for the party (Harmel and Janda, 1994). The party leader must innovate to alter his/her party in a direction approved of by the wider electorate (but not necessarily by the party), and do so by the swift removal of party shibboleths and underperforming colleagues. By operating in such a manner, opposition leaders can demonstrate good decision-making skills, which is another criterion by which the electorate assess potential Prime Ministers.

Similarly, the model contends that the party leader should be surrounded by members of a shadow cabinet who are also effective at making decisions. Small teams of big players making decisions towards the goal of getting elected can be effective, if they are united in direction and strategy. While the leader should explicitly set the direction of travel, the surrounding players should make important symbolic gestures on the part of the departments they shadow. Interplay between key members of the opposition can be critical in making the direction of travel of a party of opposition explicit for the voters. Again, the credibility of the wider team can be noted by their ability to manage and make decisions in opposition and achieve some semblance of governing competence, as

described by Bulpitt (1986), albeit from the position of opposition (see discussion on valence politics in Green, 2007, pp.629-55).

Greenstein (2009) notes that successful US Presidents were able to control their emotions in office in order to deal with the demands of the job. He sees emotional stability as a three-dimensional skill which, if possessed in abundance, could become a negative in the sense that the President could be seen as detached and lacking in creativity, but seen more positively could show that the President is able to cope with extraordinary demands. However, if the President is not fully in control of those emotions then it is possible that they may have credit in terms of creativity, but they may also have a problem when coping with the demands of the job. Thus, a balance between the competing sides of emotional stability is an enabling factor in presidential success (Greenstein, 2009, pp.225-31).

Building on Greenstein (2009), the model suggests that the opposition leader should possess the requisite levels of emotional stability to cope with the demands of becoming Prime Minister. The role of the Prime Minister in the modern world is seen as becoming ever more 'presidential' or 'personalised' in nature (Allen, 2003; and Webb and Poguntke, 2012). In that respect, the Leader of the Opposition must be seen as someone who would be able credibly to lead the nation and have the personal capacity to deal with those demands. In many ways, Greenstein's notion of the emotional stability required of US Presidents resonates with Finlayson's thesis of 'extraordinary ordinariness' (Finlayson, 2002, p.590) in that we need a Prime Minister to have extraordinary skills in keeping their emotions in check, but not so much so that they become seen as aloof or detached.

In terms of the skills displayed by a party of opposition, when it comes to testing the model against various periods of oppositions in later chapters, the following statement and conditions shown in Figure 6 (below) will be posed:

Figure 6: Model of 'Opposition-Craft': Skills

Skills This table lists the skills required on the part of an opposition.
Communication

- *The opposition has explicitly changed since it was ejected from government*
- *The opposition has been internally reformed in an explicit manner obvious to the electorate*
- *The opposition has got a new policy platform seen as closer to the aspirations of the electorate*
- *The new opposition policy platform is thematically linked to form a coherent vision for the country*
- *The new opposition policy platform is seen as a modernised position which resonates with the electorate*
- *The opposition has adopted a strategy of impressionism whilst communicating its policy platform*
- *The opposition is able to rebut effectively the charge that it is light on details as a consequence of using the impressionism strategy*
- *The opposition is able to set out a general direction of travel which resonates with the electorate*
- *The opposition is able to communicate effectively a set of values that chime well with the electorate*
- *The opposition has found symbols which resonate with the electorate and exemplify changes to the policy offer*
- *The opposition has found symbols which resonate with the electorate and exemplify internal party reform*
- *The opposition models itself on Jennifer Lees-Marshment's model of a 'Market-Oriented Party'*
- *The opposition is able to market itself with values attractive to voters, but does it in such a way that does not jettison its traditional brand*
- *The opposition benefits from a favourable media*
- *The opposition is able to communicate its internal party reforms and new policy platform through the eyes of a favourable media*
- *The opposition is able to project an image of positive 'change'*
- *The opposition is able to create the sense that they are the natural inheritors of the responsibilities of government*
- *The opposition is able to reassure voters that they can provide a link with and progression from the governing hegemony*
- *The opposition is led by new, yet credible, leaders (including a credible alternative Prime Minister)*

Image

- *The opposition leader has the image of an alternative and credible Prime Minister*
- *The opposition leader has a substantial poll lead when it comes to who would make the most effective Prime Minister*
- *The opposition leader fits the 'extraordinary ordinariness' image as set out by Alan Finlayson*
- *The opposition leader has statesman-like appeal*
- *The opposition leader is not seen as 'of' their party*
- *The opposition leader is seen as a centre-ground politician*
- *The opposition leader has a useful back-story*
- *The opposition leader has an image associated with modernity*

Organisation

- *The other leaders in the opposition have positive images that suggest governing capability*
- *All the key leaders of the opposition are skilled at communicating and handling the media*
- *The opposition is sufficiently organised to suggest it has governing capability*
- *The opposition is able to organise the delivery of its message across all forms of media*
- *The opposition is able to quickly and effectively rebut negative claims made about it*
- *The opposition is able to organise itself to take advantage of the first-past-the-post electoral system*
- *The opposition is sufficiently organised to be able to target key voters in key marginal constituencies*
- *The opposition is effective at getting its vote out on polling day*

Decision making

- *The opposition leader is a decisive decision-taker*
- *The opposition leader is able to take decisions over the direction of the party that explicitly signal a change in direction to voters*
- *The opposition leader is able to make effective appointments and remove ineffective personnel*
- *The opposition leader is able to signal a positive direction of travel for the party through their explicit decision taking*
- *Other leaders in the opposition are also decisive and effective decision makers*

Emotional stability

- *The opposition leader has the emotional stability to cope with the demands of being Prime Minister*
- *The opposition leader has the emotional intelligence to approach the job in a manner that connects effectively with the competing demands*

In demonstrating the skills outlined above a party of opposition will likely magnify its suitability for office if it has a positive message to sell. However, the skills and tasks of opposition are redundant if the party has not got a strategy that places it at the mainstream centre with a leader who looks and sounds like a potential Prime Minister. It also needs the context in which it operates to be favourable to have a chance of success in the subsequent election.

1.7 The case for 'Opposition-Craft'

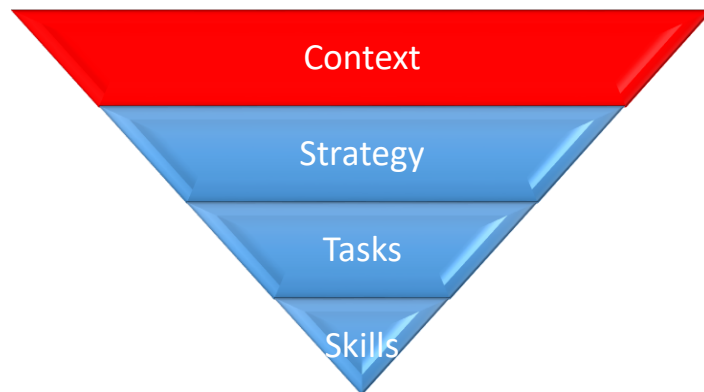
In setting out the model of 'Opposition-Craft', we have formulated a detailed explanation of the necessary skills and conditions that need to be met for a party of official opposition to win a UK general election. However, it is not the contention of this thesis that every facet of that model needs to be met before the environment is right for a win at a general election by an opposition party. Indeed, given the number of variables in play inside the model, it is probably not possible for all those conditions to be in place at any one given time. Given that context, our analysis of official oppositions will show that some aspects of the model have more bearing over the likely chances of success than others and, thus, a hierarchy exists in the model.

It is important to set out that hierarchy and demonstrate which aspects of the model hold more importance than others, as this will be one of the determining factors when demonstrating the level of success or otherwise that a party of opposition might enjoy when evaluated against a period of opposition. The model has thus far set out a series of facets which must be in place in order to win a UK general election from the position of opposition, but we also need to acknowledge that opposition parties may act in ways contrary to the model, or they may enact only part of the model. In that respect, this analysis will not only look at the model in terms of whether an opposition has succeeded and therefore implemented the entire model, it will also need to evaluate whether an opposition has been a total failure, a partial failure, a partial success or a total success. We will link these passages of opposition with the extent to which the party of opposition has implemented the model.

On the basis that the analysis needs to establish the relative success or failure of opposition parties, it is necessary to set out the relative importance of the constituent factors of the 'Opposition-Craft' model. The model set out four macro-level areas of analysis, these were: context, strategy, tasks and skills. Each area had a number of micro-level evaluation

tests (see tables above) associated with them, which are to be considered when assessing whether the conditions are in place for success at the ballot box. However, at the macro-level, it is the contention of this thesis that there is a difference in the level of importance of the areas of the model; this is best viewed pictorially, as in Figure 7.

Figure 7: The inverted relationship between aspects of the 'Opposition-Craft' Model



The context in which an opposition operates is the single biggest determinant of its likely chances of success in an election. Almost by default, an opposition which enjoys a context of economic uncertainty, facing a government that has turned its back on the centre ground, while at the same time benefitting from having been re-modelled itself in opposition, with a set of policies close to the aspirations of voters, has a great chance of winning a general election. Without that context, it seems unlikely that an opposition will win.

It is not enough, however, for an opposition simply to have an excellent context in which to operate. It must do more to turn that 'chance' of winning a general election into a reality. This model suggests that the opposition must have a centre-ground strategy coupled with strong leadership. It should also fulfil that strategy by conducting its tasks effectively and complete them with a range of skills should it wish to exploit the hand it has been dealt and create a case for government.

The model is clear in that the context is most important aspect, followed in order of importance by the strategy, tasks and skills. To be clear, in no sense is there a case to suggest that the context alone is a sufficient criterion on which to guarantee victory, but a favourable context is a necessary pre-condition for electoral success; without it, opposition parties will not be successful. Therefore, the context provides the opportunity for electoral

success; the strategy, tasks and skills are the tools by which an opposition may exploit that position. In that regard, oppositions have considerable agency in their own success.

In order to test the robustness of the ‘Opposition-Craft’ model that we have created here, it is now for subsequent chapters of this analysis to apply this model, and test against the thematic links outlined above, to periods of opposition that were either successful or unsuccessful. Here, we will identify the relative strengths and weaknesses of each identifiable period of opposition. Chapters 2-5 of this analysis will be devoted to an analysis of four periods of opposition from 1980-2010. The objective is to understand the extent to which each period of opposition followed the model. This thesis will then draw parallels with the relative success or failure of the period under consideration. However, this analysis will prove not be a simple distillation of whether an official opposition has followed the model or not; it will question the degree to which the model has been applied and will subsequently assess the degree of success or failure set against the proportion of the model utilised.

For the evaluation, we will need to think about the success or failure in four categories; all of which provide a more nuanced set of evaluative judgements than a simple conclusion of ‘success’ or ‘failure’. In that respect, each of the four periods of opposition will fit into one of these four evaluative judgements: successful, partially successful, unsuccessful, or a total failure. Chapters 2-5 will consider the following:

Figure 8: Evaluative Judgements

Section	Period	Result	Evaluative Judgement
Chapter 2	Labour 1994-97	Labour opposition won with a majority of 179 seats	Successful
Chapter 3	Conservatives 2005-10	Hung parliament. Conservative opposition were the largest party with 306 seats	Partially successful
Chapter 4	Labour 1987-1992	Labour opposition lost but gained 42 seats. Conservative government won with 21-seat majority	Unsuccessful
Chapter 5	Labour 1980-1983	Labour opposition lost. Conservative government won with a 144-seat majority	Total Failure

Using the 'Opposition-Craft' framework of analysis, the table above indicates the evaluative outcome of the study. For example, the analysis will conclude that the period 1994-97 was a 'successful' era of opposition, as it will also conclude that this period scored highly when set against the 'Opposition-Craft' model. In contrast, the period 1980-83 will be considered a 'total failure' and will consequently show that this period of opposition did not compare favourably when assessed against the 'Opposition-Craft' framework. The analysis will demonstrate that there is a direct correlation between adherence to the framework and electoral success.

The analysis, however, will draw more subtle conclusions than a simple declaration of success or failure. For example, in Chapter 4, we will argue that the period 1987-92 for Labour under Neil Kinnock was 'unsuccessful' in its outcome, as it resulted in the return of a Conservative government. However, we will ask whether this period of opposition should be considered a 'total failure'? No, because Labour, while not the ultimate victors in this election, moved forward electorally from a base of 229 seats in 1987 to returning 271 seats in 1992. Thus, there was progress at the 1992 election, but it did not result in power. In Chapter 3, we will consider the Conservative opposition under Cameron as 'partially successful' because: a) it moved forward electorally from a seat count in 2005 of 198 to 306 seats in 2010, and b) it moved into government in 2010, despite not winning an overall majority. Thus, this analysis is not all about success and total failure, as will be argued in Chapter 2 and Chapter 5 respectively, but it will also be about the greyer areas in between, as will be illustrated in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

It is notable that the evaluation concentrates on three periods of Labour opposition and only one period of Conservative opposition. Over the 74-year period between 1945 and 2019, Labour were in government for roughly 30 years and the Conservatives for 44. In that respect, Labour has spent more time in opposition than the Conservatives in the post-war era (Rosen, 2011, p.155). Indeed, its comparative success at general elections has led some commentators to refer to the 20th Century as a 'Conservative century' (Seldon and Ball, 1994). It therefore seems appropriate to devote more of the evaluation to Labour in opposition rather than the Conservatives. All four periods of opposition under analysis occurred between 1980 and 2010. While reference will be made to approaches to opposition that span this 74-year time period from the end of the Second World War, these passages from 1980 - 2010 of opposition have been selected, in part, because the model contains evaluative criteria based around media and communications methods; while these

strategies were applicable in the earlier part of the era under consideration, they are more fruitfully analysed when compared against more modern eras of opposition from 1980 onwards. In short, media and communication strategies are simply more pertinent when considering later periods of opposition.

More space in this analysis is given over to Labour in opposition than the Conservatives because, as the evidence will show, there is perception that Labour has a higher mountain to climb than the Tories when seeking election to office. As a political machine, the Conservatives are far more nimble than Labour and have a much less rigid internal party structure, all of which makes party change designed to seek electability much easier for them. This is most notably exemplified by their willingness to change leader, if they see electoral advantage in such a move. Labour, on the other hand, has often been encumbered by its comparatively more formalised structures, which make party change far more difficult to achieve. By way of example, and in contrast with the Conservatives, Labour has often held onto its leaders despite overwhelming evidence that they are hindering their party's electoral prospects. The differences between the parties and how they are able to respond to the principles set out in the model are explored throughout the case studies in Chapters 2-5, but the emphasis on Labour is deliberate because they perhaps have more to gain from the model than the Conservatives, which is a theme returned to in the conclusion, Chapter 6.

It is also important to note that next four chapters of this analysis will focus on periods of opposition that are linked with the tenure of the leader, in addition to a link to the resulting general election. For example, in Chapter 5, the analysis will focus on the period 1980-83. This period has been selected to start when Michael Foot was elected leader of the Labour Party in 1980 and ends at the 1983 general election. The periods under consideration do not run in a simple general-election-to-general-election format. The model is inextricably linked with the notion of leadership, and a significant proportion of the framework is tied to questions around the leader's performance. Therefore, it seems sensible to focus the investigation on time periods associated with a single leader, which subsequently measures that period by the result at the associated general election.

Under the terms set out above, there have been 24 periods of distinct and substantial opposition since 1945. In order to build and then subsequently test this notion of 'Opposition-Craft', this project has required careful selection of the four case studies

(Chapters 2-5) from those 24 periods in order to exemplify the principles of the model. To be explicit, the case studies were chosen to match best the four evaluative judgements. For example, why was Blair's Labour, 1994-97, chosen instead of Attlee's Labour in 1945? On the face of it they both won huge landslides, so surely they could both be deemed 'successful'? Yes, they could, but there were differences: Blair fought from the position of opposition, which is more in keeping with the model than Attlee, who had served as Deputy Prime Minister in the national government during the war and in the years leading up to the 1945 election. Thus, Labour was not in opposition prior to the 1945 election. Other such decisions were taken in the selection of the case studies in order to best exemplify the efficacy of the model, but in the conclusion (Chapter 6) a high-level overview is given across all 24 periods of official opposition.

The framework for analysis, as set out in this chapter, will form the structure of assessment for each of the four periods of opposition under scrutiny. It will test each period against the four central principles of the model: context, strategy, tasks, and skills. Following that analysis, we will conclude each of Chapters 2-5 with renewed focus on: a) the context, as this forms a fundamental test which will be as good as insurmountable if the conditions are not met, b) the leader, as s/he is pivotal to the likely chances of success, and c) the policy platform, which if not in tune with the aspirations of the electorate will not translate into a winning strategy. The context, the leader, and the policy platform are aspects of the model which cut across the four central principles of 'Opposition-Craft', so this forms a suitable place to conclude the study of each era of opposition.

Chapter 2

Tony Blair, 1994-97: A masterclass in how to operate in opposition

2.1 Introduction

The model of 'Opposition-Craft' considers the era 1994-97 to be a successful period of opposition. It resulted in Tony Blair's opposition Labour Party (or New Labour, as it came to be known) winning the 1997 general election with a massive 179-seat majority. Labour won 418 seats, gaining 147 seats more than they won in 1992, on an 8.8% swing. By any measure, that was an electoral success and the largest winning margin of any general election in the post-war era (Butler and Kavanagh, 1997).

As we will conclude in this section, Blair was the recipient of a fortunate context in which to operate, but nonetheless throughout those three years in opposition he steered his party in a manner closest to the textbook model of how to operate in opposition as set out in the 'Opposition-Craft' framework. Blair translated an excellent set of circumstances into a stunning electoral victory at the 1997 election; but, for some at the top of the party at the time, the size of the victory still came 'as quite a shock' (Blunkett, March 2020). This chapter will explore the strategy followed by the party to bring about this election victory, which brought the party into government for the first time since the late 1970s.

2.2 Academic Perspectives on the Blair Era, 1994-97

The fact that Labour won the 1997 election so comprehensively is reflected in the literature on that period. There is little in terms of criticism of Labour as an opposition outfit as it enacted an almost-flawless operation in opposition, and when measured against the criteria set out in the model it scores very highly. Most of the literature concentrates on the various factors that Labour got right in opposition, which contributed to its stunning performance in the election. It also focuses on some the favourable contextual circumstances in which Blair led his party, which simply further augmented their strategy in opposition. In that regard, the existing literature on the Blair era in opposition can be broken down into the following themes or perspectives:

Firstly, there is literature which evaluates Blair as strong leader with a positive image and who was seen as a potential Prime Minister in waiting. That literature appears to be split along two complementary lines: there is the literature that focuses on his young, modern

and accessible image that accentuated his appeal in the media (Bennister, 2012), and there is also literature that assesses his performance as an explicitly strong-and-autocratic style of leader, which was designed to appear more 'prime ministerial' than the incumbent, John Major (Finlayson, 2002). Both strands of that literature convey the sense that Blair as an individual was the messenger-in-chief for the party's communication strategy, thus inviting the electorate to view Labour as Blair, and Blair as Labour (McAnulla, 2012). That literature also observes the distance between Blair and his party in the sense that he was personally seen as more centrist than his party. Thus, by placing so much emphasis on his personal appeal, the electorate was given the sense that Labour was perhaps more moderate than it was in reality (Quinn, 2008).

With Blair as central to Labour's messaging, the second strand of literature on the era concentrates on Labour's internal party reforms. It looks at Labour's efforts around further modernisation from the Kinnock (Westlake, 2001) and Smith (Stuart, 2005) eras that had gone before. It notes reforms around Labour's marketing and communications strategy with special emphasis placed on its ability to 'spin' its political communications in the media (Rentoul, 2015). This literature also notes the considerable effort Labour made to turn national newspapers into its support base (Jones, 2000). In accordance with the terms set out by Lees-Marshment (2001a), Labour finally became a market-orientated party under Blair and thus some of the literature concentrates on the party's use of focus groups and other such tests of the market to develop its offer (Mattinson, 2010).

In that respect, the third theme of the literature is devoted to Labour's policy offer under Blair. Some academics note that Labour simply continued its strategy of tacking to the centre ground (Kenny and Smith, 1997), a journey initially undertaken during the Kinnock and Smith era, but others note that Labour indulged in a successful strategy of 'triangulating' on policy, a strategy borrowed from the 1992 Clinton campaign in the US (Rawnsley, 2010). In following that approach, Labour was successfully able to neutralise some of its policy deficiencies and appeared to offer the electorate something new on a number of key policy areas, which more widely enabled the party to claim that it was a 'big tent' of political ideas with wide appeal (Dorey and Garnett, 2012). Further literature on Labour policy at the time notes the party's impressionism offer in the sense that it was light on details but heavy on the general direction of travel it would have taken if elected to office (Radice, 2010). There is also commentary on the symbolic gestures Labour took

towards policy and plenty of examination is given over to Labour's 'Clause IV moment' (Farnham, 1996).

Finally, a number of commentators point towards the advantageous political context in which Labour was to operate in the mid-1990s. Some of that literature focuses on the state of the Conservative administration, which at the time was beset with internal strife over the Maastricht Treaty and the UK's relations with its European partners (Seldon, 1997). Others note concerns over John Major's leadership style (Foley, 2002). A further angle on the context of the time is the position of the Labour Party when Blair inherited the mantle of leadership; Labour was already well ahead in the polls and had undergone significant change following its defeats at the previous four elections (Smith, 1994). Thus, some have latterly concluded that Labour was so well-placed in the mid-1990s that it was inevitable that the party would win the subsequent general election regardless of who led the party or what its policy platform would encompass (The Guardian Website, 11th April, 2017).

This chapter will reject the notion that Labour's victory in 1997 was inevitable. The model repudiates the idea that all oppositions have to do is to take advantage of the incumbent government's misfortune to win elections; Labour won so comprehensively in 1997 because on every level it presented itself as an alternative and credible government. This chapter will also argue that Labour were successful in framing the arguments in the mid-1990s by taking the context in which they operated and presenting their offer as the solution. In other words, they exacerbated the negative context in which the Conservative government operated. In that regard, the electorate were confident to give the party a huge mandate to govern.

Where there are gaps in the existing literature it is on that very point and around Labour's ability to frame the political environment on their offer. This chapter will provide analysis of the framing strategy employed by Labour. For example, Labour communicated the notion that Major was a weak PM and also provided the solution in projecting Blair as a strong leader (McAnulla, 2012). By way of further illustration, Labour recognised that it had a problem with its past. With that in mind, it framed the argument by acknowledging its failed past and provided the solution in the guise of a new party, or 'New Labour' as it became known (White and De Chernatony, 2008). Labour became experts of owning the

context, shaping the agenda, and providing the solution. This analysis will consider those issues and foreground how important they were with respect to Labour's winning strategy.

2.3 Context

By 1994, the Tories had been in power for fifteen years with four consecutive general election victories under their belt. For 11 of those years, they were led by Margaret Thatcher, who was deposed in acrimonious circumstances in November 1990 having formed a reputation as a divisive PM (Seldon, 1997, pp.117-22; and Moore, 2019). Viewed very much as the unity candidate, John Major took over from Thatcher largely because 'he was able to tap into the support of the numerically much more important centre of the party' (Cowley, 1996, p.214) at a time when divisions were evident in the Conservative Party.

Whilst Thatcher's fall from power was multi-faceted in its origins, her departure centred on a number of key issues: a) Europe, b) the Poll Tax, and c) leadership style (Slocock, 2019). Towards the latter part of Thatcher's reign, divisions in the Conservative government emerged about the UK's relationship with Europe (see, for example, Campbell, 2015, p.328). Whilst Thatcher was a proponent of the European single market, she was cautious about closer integration with European partners. Others in the party, largely those on the more traditional one-nation Conservative wing, were at odds with her stance. This difference in standpoint on the European issue would open up a schism in the party that continues to this day (see, for example, Dorey, 2017).

Further unrest was caused by Thatcher's uncompromising stance on the new Poll Tax policy (Smith, 1991). North of the border, there was considerable disgruntlement in Scotland about the Poll Tax as it had been introduced there a year earlier than in the rest of country. Effectively, Scotland had been used as a test bed for the new policy, much to the annoyance of many Scottish voters. By the time it was introduced to the rest of the UK, anger had spilled over causing widespread demonstrations and rioting because of the implementation of the new tax (see, for example, Seldon, 1997, p.109).

Both issues, Europe and the Poll Tax, symbolised a Prime Minister increasingly isolated from her senior colleagues and party, many of whom did not support her on these key policies (Ingham, 2019). By this same period, Thatcher had also adopted an overly-autocratic approach to governing the party and the country. Her style was seen as abrupt

and 'hard-faced' (Campbell, in Clarke, Bale, James and Diamond, 2015, p.331). Following her victories in 1979, 1983 and 1987, many in the party started to see Thatcher as an electoral liability (see, for example, Bale, 2011a, pp.22-25). She was initially challenged unsuccessfully for the leadership in 1989, but by 1990 divisions had deepened and she was forced into a leadership election by her former cabinet colleague, Michael Heseltine (Seldon, 1997, p.109).

That leadership election resulted in Thatcher's departure from Downing Street to be replaced by Major (Heppell, 2008a). Major promised to ditch the Poll Tax and heal divisions over Europe, so for many he represented a more moderate way forward for the Tories, especially as his leadership style was viewed by some as more consensual in its approach (Foley, 2002, p.25). That unity of purpose took the Conservatives to narrow victory in 1992 when many pundits expected Labour to win (see, for example, Crewe, 1992, pp.493-94; see also Chapter 4).

However, things were to turn sour for the Tories soon after their unexpected victory at the 1992 election (Butler and Kavanagh, 1992). By the autumn of that year, the country was forced out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM), which resulted in a devaluation of the pound (Aykens, 2002). In the midst of that humiliating exit from the ERM, interest rates were hiked up to 15% in a failed bid to maintain the UK's position in the ERM. That strategy ultimately failed, and with it the Conservatives' long-held reputation for competent management of the economy was left in tatters. According to Sanders, 'the Conservatives' failure to manage the aftermath of the ERM crisis inflicted serious and sustained damage on their electoral fortunes' (Sanders, 1999, p.252). The model of 'Opposition-Craft' asks whether there has been any seismic event which shifts the political weather, as this can move the environment in favour of an opposition party. Departure from the ERM and the ensuing crisis provided that event. Whilst this occurred in 1992, before the period under scrutiny, the aftershocks and reputational damage to the government were still being felt when Blair became Labour leader in 1994 (see Blunkett, March 2020).

In the context of the UK's departure from the ERM, divisions over Europe remained in the Conservative Party and, by 1994, the government was beset with problems and infighting over the issue (Holmes, 1998). More specifically, differences over the Maastricht Treaty and closer European integration were at the forefront of political debate. In that respect,

the governing party that Blair's Labour was facing was riven with problems, paralysed with divisions, and losing its reputation for competence (Seldon, 1997). In accordance with the model, that was fertile territory for the opposition to fight.

The government was also still pursuing the Thatcherite agenda of the 1980s in that it was continuing, for example, the programme of privatisations (Backhouse, 2002). By the 1990s, the programme had rolled out to privatisation of the rail network. However, by that point the electorate had tired of privatisations and did not see them as a priority (see Ipsos-MORI (a)). The Conservatives were also hostage to some of their earlier policies on social issues pursued under the Thatcher government. As the country moved into a more socially liberal environment in the 1990s, the Tories were associated with socially illiberal measures such as Section 28, a policy which explicitly banned the promotion of same-sex relationships in schools (Wise, 2000, p.1).

Thus, the reform agenda that the Conservatives were initially elected on in 1979 was largely complete. Free market measures and trade union reforms were essentially all enacted and embedded into a new political settlement (Hanson, 1991). Therefore, the central mission of that Conservative government was in some senses complete. Together with that settled state, the electorate had moved on from the priorities of a decade earlier and, in that regard, it was not clear what the central purpose was of Major's government in the mid-to-late 1990s (Seldon, 1997)- an environmental factor which the model of 'Opposition-Craft' suggests is conducive to parties of opposition.

Labour, too, had moved its policy platform to accept much of the Thatcherite settlement, which had been fought over in the 1980s (Smith, 1994). Market reforms, as implemented by the Thatcher government, were pretty much hard-wired into the political landscape, as they were accepted by the public and by both the major parties (Smith, 1994, p.714). Therefore, with the governing party's reforms enacted and an opposition posing no threat to the settled state, the government again looked impotent and without purpose – according to Andrew Adonis: 'They [the Conservative government] had no compelling forward agenda' (Adonis, February 2020).

In that context, the Labour opposition of 1994-97 faced a Conservative government that had lost its reputation for sound economic management. The Conservative government was also riven with infighting over fringe issues like Europe, and was pursuing a policy

agenda at odds with the priorities of the electorate. Therefore, the Conservatives had effectively vacated governing on the centre ground of politics, which left space open for Labour (Fowler, 2010). In addition, Labour accepted much of the more popular reforms as undertaken by the Tory government and posed no risk to the refashioned market economy (Kogan, 2019). In the terms set out in the model of 'Opposition-Craft', this was an ideal set of circumstances for the opposition to prove effective.

The Tories' weakened position during this era was augmented further by questions about Major's leadership (Hennessy, 2000, pp.471-73). Major came to the helm of his party in part because he represented a direct contrast with the more combative style of leadership displayed by Thatcher. His 'consensual style of leadership' (Theakston, 2002, p.301) was the tonic the Conservatives needed back in 1990 when he acceded to the leadership of his party. After a number of years in power, however, Major began to look 'incompetent, ineffective, weak' (Theakston, 2002, p.304), and his style of leadership did not help that reputation.

Major's problems stemmed from divisions over Europe. But his problems in his party were not limited to the preoccupations of backbench MPs; divisions over the European issue were embedded right across his parliamentary party and included members of his own cabinet (Hennessy, 2000, p.455). Such was the rancour on display at the time, Major's leadership was questioned by senior colleagues, who often briefed journalists of their disquiet (see, for example, Bale, 2011a, pp.18-20). Under fire from his own side and with his leadership undermined, Major decided to call his opponents' bluff and threw down the gauntlet in a leadership contest in 1995. He challenged colleagues to 'put up or shut up' (Childs, 2012, p.285). Major won his self-imposed leadership contest, but it did not stop the voices-off continuing to undermine his premiership. The Tory rebels did 'put up', but they did not 'shut up'.

By the Blair era of 1994-97, the Conservatives under Major had a leader who was considered weak, indecisive and was unpopular with the electorate (see, for example, Ipsos-MORI (b)). This context provided a fine contrast for Blair to set himself against in opposition, especially as Blair was seen to possess many of the attributes of a skilled leader that Major lacked (Foley, 2002). Figure 9 below exemplifies the poll leads that Blair enjoyed when the public were asked who would make the best Prime Minister. The data show that Blair maintained a healthy lead on that front up until the 1997 election.

Figure 9: Who would make the best Prime Minister?

Date	John Major	Tony Blair	Paddy Ashdown	Don't Know
Jul 1994	15.2%	32.2%	21.1%	31.5%
Jan 1995	14.7%	43.5%	12.5%	29.3%
Jul 1995	20.8%	41.8%	10.8%	26.6%
Jan 1996	17.2%	40.6%	14.2%	28.0%
Jul 1996	18.4%	37.7%	14.8%	29.2%
Jan 1997	28.2%	38.6%	14.2%	19.1%
Apr 1997	25%	41%	12%	21%

Source: Wybrow and King, 2001, p. 203

In all aspects of the context surrounding the governing party that Labour faced in the period 1994-97, the environment was highly favourable for a party of opposition. Set against the model of 'Opposition-Craft', this set of circumstances would score favourably for Blair's Labour Party in opposition. But what of the economic conditions of the era?

By 1994, the UK economy was on the road to recovery following the ERM crisis of 1992 (Aykens, 2002), but the Tories' reputation for economic management was lost (Alderman and Carter, 1995, p.453). Polls at the time suggested that Labour was more trusted to run the economy than the Conservatives. A Gallup poll indicated that Labour was trusted to run the economy by 58.2% compared with 27.5% for the Conservatives – a lead of 30.7%. Labour maintained large leads over the Conservatives on this issue from 1994 through to the election in 1997 (see Figure 10 below, Wybrow and King, 2001, p.117-18).

Figure 10: With Britain in economic difficulties, which party do you think could handle the problem best - the Conservative Party or the Labour Party?

Date	Jul 1994	Oct 1994	Jan 1995	Apr 1995	Jul 1995	Oct 1995	Jan 1996	Apr 1996	Jul 1996	Oct 1996	Jan 1997	Mar 1997	May 1997
% Labour Lead	25.7	26.8	29	26.7	22.9	25.1	22.6	23.5	16.7	17.9	8.3	13.7	30.7

Source: Wybrow and King, Gallup Polls, 2001, pp. 117-8

Despite voters' views on who was best suited to run the economy, polls suggested that their perception of future household wealth was actually in positive territory; more precisely, by 1997, 76% of those polled suggested their future wealth would either stay the same or improve (Wybrow and King, 2001, p.311). All of which suggested that, despite the

disenchantment with the Conservatives, perceptions around the economy were good, which according to the model should be a problematic set of circumstances for a party of opposition.

Despite the doubts around government's ability to manage the economy, inflation was under control, unemployment was falling, and house prices were rising. According to Wybrow and King: 'The view was widely held that the feel-good factor was of great political significance and that when the feel-good factor was positive the government of the day prospered electorally and that when it was negative the government suffered electorally' (Wybrow and King, 2001, p.306). However, contrary to Wybrow and King's assertion, during the Major era these factors did not translate into popularity for the Tories (Wybrow and King, 2001, pp.18-19). According to the model, this economic context should not have been conducive to effective opposition performance. In explanation of that counter-intuitive position, Lord Smith of Finsbury claims that: 'People still remembered the catastrophe of "Black Wednesday" and the collapse of sterling – and the removal for a generation of the Conservatives' reputation for economic competence. So the gradually improving economy of 1997 didn't have much traction with the public' (Smith, February 2020).

Buller and James argue that 'New Labour was blessed with benign economic circumstances' (Buller and James, 2012, p.546) and that those positive conditions actually helped Labour to win power. According to them, the strengthening economy gave voters the confidence to vote Labour precisely because the economy was doing well. Adonis argues that the increasing prosperity of the mid-1990s was never going to help the Conservatives on the grounds that 'Major had obviously lost control of his party and was semi-discredited by Black Wednesday' (Adonis, February 2020), which is also a view shared by Lord Blunkett: 'We were able to paint what happened in September 1992 [Black Wednesday] as a Conservative failure in the economy in the way that they painted what happened in 78/79 against Labour' (Blunkett, March 2020). Thus, the Conservatives appeared structurally flawed at this point, but what of the condition of the Labour party by the mid-1990s?

By 1994 Labour had had been out of power for fifteen years and lacked association with its most recent spell in power, 1974-79 (Shaw, 2000). Tested against the first principles of the 'Opposition-Craft' model, Blair's Labour Party was not a first-time opposition and therefore did not come with the political baggage associated with a party recently deposed from

power. Importantly, according to the model, the first spell in opposition often forms an insurmountable contextual problem for a party of opposition to overcome. In that regard, as a fourth-term opposition, Labour was in a good place in terms of the context in which it operated.

Many have described the era of 1979-94 as 'Labour's wilderness years' (see, for example, Shaw, 2000, pp.112-42); a pejorative description which articulates the party's inability to formulate a platform for government that chimed with the aspirations of the electorate in the late 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. Its drift off into the political wilderness was obviously not something the party designed as its destiny, but if there was to be an advantage to its time out of power it was that it created a distance between itself as a governing party of the 1970s and the party it presented itself as in later years. That distance from power was to form a key component of its electoral appeal in the era under scrutiny (Gould, 2011).

By 1994 then, the context in which Labour had lost power in 1979 had changed completely in the sense that the intervening 'wilderness years' had eradicated the stain of government from its record. Indeed, if anything, by 1994 Labour suffered from the opposite problem of having a lack of governing experience. By the time Labour came to power in 1997, according to Richards, 'few of the incoming ministers had any experience of government. Blair was the first prime minister since MacDonald to take office with no ministerial experience. His front bench did not contain a single individual with cabinet experience' (Richards, D., 2009, p.109). In that regard, Labour was open to the claim was that it was inexperienced to govern.

The 'Opposition-Craft' model suggests that parties in opposition that have recently been deposed may well struggle to regain office as they are tainted with their time in government. This was not a problem that Blair's Labour party faced. Most of the key personnel from the 1974-79 government had moved on and did not form any party of Blair's shadow cabinet. Of Blair's top team, only a few had ministerial experience in minor positions (Richards, D., 2009, p.119); thus, Blair's team lacked the association with key personnel that had been rejected from government in 1979.

Labour's policy platform, too, was far removed from what it had been when it was ejected from power in 1979 (Kavanagh and Dale, 2000). Indeed, Labour's policy position had

initially shifted left after the 1979 defeat under Michael Foot, 1980-83, (see Chapter 5) only to be followed by years of a strategic move rightwards under Kinnock, 1983-92, and Smith, 1992-94 (see, for example, Westlake, 2001 and Stuart, 2005). The rightwards direction on policy placed Labour closer to the centre ground of British politics, but the party still struggled to locate the electorate. Its various policy positions in the intervening years, 1979-94, may not have always been popular with the electorate, but they served to distance the party from the policy platform that had been rejected in 1979 (Shaw, 2000, pp.112-42).

The party Blair inherited had been on a journey since it had been ejected from office in the late 1970s (Hay, 1994). Having initially tacked left in the early 1980s and then subsequently lost by a landslide at the 1983 general election, the party began a journey commonly known as 'modernisation' under Kinnock (Smith, M., 1994). In substance, that journey saw its policy platform move towards the centre ground of British politics, but 'modernisation' for Labour in that period was also about a process of internal party reform.

In the early 1980s, Labour found itself subject to infiltration from far-left groups (Crick, 2016). The militant tendency flourished in Labour under Foot, but as part of the reforms undertaken by Kinnock many of those party members were subsequently expelled from the party, as Williams suggests: 'The new NEC majority wanted to expel Militant's 60 full-time organisers and its eight adopted parliamentary candidates' (Williams, 1983, pp.49-50). Reform of its membership was symbolic of the party modernising in the eyes of the electorate and moving towards a more moderate image although, as Williams argues, 'the treatment of the Militant Tendency assumed vastly exaggerated symbolic importance for both sides' (Williams, 1983, p.49). More symbolically, and as part of its modernising journey, the party reformed its communication strategy and image branding; gone was the red-flag imagery and in was the red rose. The party also developed a communications strategy, which was widely hailed as having improved Labour's professionalism in the market (see, for example, Wring, 2005, pp.81-100).

In policy terms, the shift towards the centre under both Kinnock and Smith was marked. For example, in 1987 Labour went into the general election still proposing a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament (Jones, 1996, p.120). In electoral terms this was a disastrous policy, albeit one popular with hard-left members of the party, but deeply unpopular with the electorate at the height of the Cold War (Wybrow and King, 2001,

p.105). By 1992, Labour had ditched this policy and was now in favour of nuclear arms. Its appeal widened and it consequently drew in centre-ground voters put off by its earlier extreme positions (see Chapter 5).

By the time Blair came to lead his party in 1994, the party was very much on the journey towards being modernised both in policy and party reforms (Jones, 1996). This journey was reflected at both the 1987 and 1992 general elections in which both polls saw Labour increase its vote share and seat count, but not sufficiently so to gain power (see, for example, Butler and Kavanagh, 1988; and Butler and Kavanagh, 1992). In connection to that, Blair was the beneficiary of a party that had changed from its elector nadir in 1983, and one that had moved forward and was on a path that was proven to pay electoral dividends. Again, when tested against the model of 'Opposition-Craft' the only conclusion that can be drawn is that Blair was fortunate to take up the leadership at a time when the condition of the party was not only reformed but on a trajectory that was leading towards power.

Blair also benefitted from the parliamentary position of the Labour Party in 1994. The Conservatives only narrowly won the 1992 election and were returned with a slim, 21-seat majority (see, for example, Butler and Kavanagh, 1992). The model of 'Opposition-Craft' demonstrates that parties that govern with narrow majorities can find that the opposition they face can make life very difficult for them. By the time Blair had acceded to the leadership in 1994, the Tories' majority had narrowed yet further as result of by-election losses. Indeed, by 1996 the Tory majority had been wiped out altogether and they effectively operated as a minority administration (Independent Website, 13th December, 1996). According to Lord Blunkett, a shadow cabinet minister at the time, that situation advantaged Labour: 'Because it [the Conservative government] didn't have an overall majority it was floundering' (Blunkett, March 2020).

In parliamentary terms then, Blair was the recipient of a good set of circumstances in which to act. The parliamentary arithmetic was such that it was possible to inflict defeats on government business and bring about embarrassing climb-downs. For example, Labour defeated part of the 1994 budget when the Tories had proposed an 'imposition of VAT on fuel and power' (Major, 2000, p.603). The ability for Labour to defeat the Major administration in this era added to the sense that it was a government in decay. Therefore, the parliamentary context that Labour worked in during the period 1994-97 was conducive

to effective opposition. On a number of levels, Blair led the Labour Party at a time that was fortuitous in terms of the condition in which he inherited his party.

2.4 Strategy

On policy, Blair's New Labour sought to fight the Conservative government from the centre ground of politics (Finlayson, 2003). Writing in his memoirs in 2010, Blair comments, 'I wanted us to be emphatic, to be in the centre ground from belief, with passion, and with total clarity that left our past behind' (Blair, 2010, p.84). For Blair, there were a number of related issues tied into his desire to plant Labour at the centre: a) he wanted a more moderate policy platform on which to campaign; b) he was not overly concerned by a purist sense of what the 'centre' was, but concerned himself more in presenting Labour as 'mainstream'; c) he wanted to project an image of 'change', but also he wanted to see Labour as a natural progression from the Tory government; and, d) he wanted Labour to convey governing competence. Thus, the 'centre' for Blair was perhaps a looser definition than the one set out by Hindmoor as discussed in Chapter 1, but certainly that is where he wanted Labour positioned to fight the next general election (Hindmoor, 2004).

While it was clear that Blair moved Labour further towards a more centrist position, it was not at all the case that he went about that task in a direct fashion. The strategy New Labour employed around political positioning was to create an entirely new environment around the 'centre' (Fairclough, 2003). Blair's rhetoric in opposition suggested that he wanted to take politics in a different direction; for example, in his first speech as Labour leader, he sought to describe his change agenda: 'It [his change agenda] will change traditional dividing lines between right and left' (Blair, 1994). In seeking to eschew traditional left/right dividing lines, Blair suggested that he was something other than the normal leader of a political party defined by whether he was on the left or on the right of the political spectrum (Driver and Martell, 2000, p.148). Effectively, he sought to suggest that he was taking Labour to a totally 'new' place in politics.

Along with that new environment came a new language to describe what was effectively the 'centre'. The term 'third way' was coined to demonstrate to the electorate that Labour was neither left nor right but, by implication, it was centrist. There were other bits of language too, such as the 'big tent', a political metaphor which suggests that anyone, left or right, could join Labour's project (Fairclough, 2003). The language of modernity was also conjured to describe Labour's new positioning - words like 'new', as in 'New Labour' and

'New Britain', and then 'young' as in 'young country', were all about drawing up dividing lines between the political past and the ideological dividing posts of 'left' and 'right'. Blair also liked to use the word 'mainstream' to describe the Labour Party he was leading – thus suggesting that the Labour platform was where the voters were positioned (The Economist Website, 23rd October, 1997).

Blair conveyed the sense that Labour would no longer fight from the left but would reach out to the electorate from the centre and, in doing so, suggested that the centre was entirely new political environment (Kenny and Smith, 1997). In truth, though, while the language was different from traditional centre-ground posturing, Blair was merely continuing the journey towards the centre that had begun under Kinnock, and that had been furthered by Smith, as supported by Kenny and Smith, who claim that Labour's approach had nothing innovative about it at all. They argue that it was simply a rightwards journey as made by Kinnock and Gaitskell before Blair. In Kenny and Smith's view, Labour's leadership had always known that the electorate would not accept a pure socialist agenda, therefore in seeking power Labour has always gravitated towards the centre. According to Kenny and Smith, Blair simply 'represents a new version of an old tune – the willingness of Labour leaderships to accommodate themselves to the prevailing policy consensus' (Kenny and Smith, 1997, p.222). Hindmoor also claims that Labour simply followed a well-worn path towards the centre, '[i]n presenting itself as being a party at and of the centre, New Labour is only doing what others have done before' (Hindmoor, 2004, p.4; see also, Lack, 2014).

In furthering the centre ground strategy, Blair's party became known for 'triangulating' on policy (Shaw, 2002). Triangulation in politics is a strategy that takes two opposing views and stakes out a position somewhere between the two. The language around triangulation is critical in marking out a new position, and in some cases can involve using the language of both left and right to describe a new political location. Inevitably, if a party is positioning itself between two identifiable stances then it is marking its territory in a more centrist position (Rawnsley, 2010, p.526).

Before coming to the leadership of his party in 1994, Blair showed himself as capable of triangulating on policy. Most famously, as Shadow Home Secretary, Blair used the slogan 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' (Sopel, 1995, p.157). Here, by triangulating, he placed together right-and-left-wing positions and conjoined them with the adjective

'tough'. Labour continued to triangulate on issues like patriotism, an issue which the right under Thatcher had claimed as their own and on which Labour was traditionally seen as quite weak (Evening Standard Website, 25th April, 2015). In his 1995 conference speech as leader, Blair said:

Let's build a new and young country that can lay aside the old prejudices that dominated our land for generations. A nation for all the people, built by the people, where old divisions are cast out. A new spirit in the nation based on working together, unity, solidarity, partnership. One Britain. That is the patriotism of the future. (Blair, 1995, as quoted in Gould, 2011, p.247)

According to Gould, 'in a few sentences Blair brought together his core values, his commitment to community, his demand for renewal, and finally his patriotism' (Gould, 2011, p.248). Again, the language is important in that he grabbed hold of traditional right-wing rhetoric with words like 'patriotism' and mixed it with typically left-wing terms like 'unity' and 'solidarity'. By the mid-1990s, Labour were well-versed in the language of triangulation and the resultant centre-ground positions it staked out for the party.

The triangulation strategy around the centre was a tactic used by the 1992 Clinton campaign in the US (Rawnsley, 2010, p.526). That strategy involved taking issues on which the opponent was strong followed by the use of new language to appropriate it. New Labour appeared to follow this same strategy in the 1994-97 era. According to Gamble, Labour attempted to tackle the Conservatives on economic credibility, crime and patriotism, which were all areas of Conservative strength until Labour began to occupy them with renewed language and confidence. Therefore, by specifically focusing on these areas Labour began to give the impression that it was repositioning itself closer to the centre (Gamble, 2010, p.643).

Hindmoor (2004) argues that Labour was expert at creating the political space and framing the arguments around the centre ground of British politics. On substantive issues like Europe and the economy, Blair's party was aware of the potential for the Conservatives to harness votes associated with those issues. In combatting Conservative strengths, Hindmoor argues that New Labour worked in opposition to turn such matters into valence issues. For example, on the question of Europe, when the issue was framed as a sovereignty issue, the Conservatives came out strongly, so Labour attempted to turn it into

a valence matter by arguing that issues over Europe were all about which party would have more 'influence' over the EU, not whether the UK should be in or out of it (Daniels, 1998). Similarly, on the economy, 'while in opposition, Blair sought to rid New Labour of its tax and spend image' (Hindmoor, 2004, p.151). By adopting the Conservatives' spending plans for the first two years of the next parliament, the issue became a valence matter in the sense it was all about which party was more credible at running the economy rather than a debate about policy differences. In response to a question from the writer, according to Lord Chris Smith, a shadow minister at the time: 'We were ultra-cautious (too cautious) in making spending commitments' (Smith, February 2020). Whatever the reservations of some in the shadow cabinet, New Labour were highly effective at framing political arguments.

On the centre-ground aspect of the 'Opposition-Craft' framework there is no doubt that New Labour were positioned at the centre. Even in policy areas where Labour was not directly at the centre, in those circumstances the party was able to frame the debate to give the impression that its stance was centrist in its approach (Wring, 2005). That positioning strategy enabled Blair's party to present the Conservatives as extreme, incompetent and governing away from the centre or mainstream concerns of voters, thus framing the arguments around Labour's solutions. The model also calls for oppositions to develop a narrative around their offer, so what did Labour do in the mid-1990s to enhance their offer?

To develop the sense that Labour was 'mainstream', Blair used a number of vehicles. Writing in *The Times* in 1995, Blair cemented Labour's position: 'The truth is that the electorate now sees Labour as the sensible mainstream party' (quoted in Blair, 2010, p.98). That kind of narrative was helpful on two fronts: firstly, it conjured the sense that Labour was divorcing itself from its leftist past and, secondly, it provided a useful distinction with the increasingly right-wing Conservative government who, by implication, were no longer governing in the 'mainstream' (see also Lack, 2014) – again, framing the argument to suggest that Labour was the solution to a political problem.

As discussed in earlier sections, the Conservatives' reputation for sound economic management had been tarnished, and on social policy they were seen as 'mean-spirited' (Bale, 2011a, p.5). Thus, Blair's narrative that Labour was more 'mainstream' than the Conservatives had credibility. But Labour had to develop a coherent sense of itself around

what it would do in government in order to provide a useful contrast with the Tories. For Labour that involved describing what it would *not* do rather than what it would proactively enact in government. For example, Labour pledged *not* to raise income tax (see Figure 11 below). The idea and communications around not raising income tax was part of a wider strategy to gain economic credibility and to reassure voters that Labour was not about to ditch the free-market reforms enacted by the Thatcher government (Backhouse, 2002).

Figure 11: Labour advertising campaign



The model of ‘Opposition-Craft’ asks whether oppositions are able to accept the governing hegemony of the existing administration; in seeking to rule out income tax rises, Labour acknowledged the Tories’ position on low taxation and did not seek to alter it. According to Hindmoor, ‘While in opposition, Blair sought to rid New Labour of its tax and spend image. By the time of the 1997 election, he had committed the party to the “golden rule” of only borrowing to fund investment, had embraced the Conservatives’ spending plans, and had promised to leave both the basic and higher rates of income tax unchanged’ (Hindmoor, 2004, p.151). In accordance with this thread of ideas, as set out by Hindmoor, low rates of income tax proposed by Labour were symbolic of a party in favour of free market economics. Therefore, Labour signalled to voters that it posed no threat to the post-1980s economic settlement. This policy direction required shadow cabinet ministers to show restraint around spending pledges, and not all were comfortable with this approach. According to Chris Smith: ‘I was the Shadow Secretary of State for Health, and I wasn’t allowed to make any commitments other than that we would save money on less bureaucracy and put it into health care. It wasn’t a terribly strong message’ (Smith, February 2020).

Labour also put together coherent communications around valence issues. According to Hindmoor, 'valence issues do not simply exist. They are constructed' (Hindmoor, 2004, p.149). Labour's communications suggested that the Tories were incompetent and were also not effective stewards of the governing machinery. The Tories' travails over Europe and the economy after the ERM crisis did nothing to support their credentials as effective managers, but according to Hindmoor, Labour were not simply the recipients of good fortune in facing a hapless Conservative administration, they were agents of their own success around those issues: 'New Labour sought to construct Europe, tax and spend, and ownership as valence issues on which it held the political centre' (Hindmoor, 2004, p.149). In that regard, Labour effectively framed the arguments to suit their own ends.

Labour successfully presented the Tories as incompetent by successfully exacerbating the Conservative Party's problems around issues like sleaze (Independent Website, 23rd April, 1995). During that era, a number of Tory politicians were caught up in scandals of a personal nature, which were made worse because they were set against the backdrop of John Major's 'Back to Basics' campaign (The Guardian Website, 9th October, 1993). That campaign was all about restoring traditional values into the fabric of UK society. Conservative politicians' inappropriate behaviour provided a useful backdrop for Labour to exploit the government's woes over Major's campaign. The communications on sleaze all fitted the ongoing sense that the government were incompetent and in decline (see, for example, Seldon, 1997, pp.403-04). The 'Back to Basics' campaign served to underscore the Tories' image as out of touch with an increasingly liberal Britain and connected them with 'right-wing personal morality' (Seldon, 1997, p.403). Again, Labour used the context for its own ends and framed the arguments accordingly.

In accordance with the model, the spatial political position that Blair occupied was perceived by the electorate to be closer to the centre of politics than his party (Sopel, 1995). Whilst conducted a number of years after the era under consideration, a 2004 poll conducted by *YouGov* found that Blair was seen as more centrist than his party. On a scale which rated left-wing positions as minus ratings, and right-wing positions as positive ratings, Blair rated as +4, which marked him as 'of the centre', whereas his party was seen as 'slightly left-of-centre' on -25 (as cited in Quinn, 2008, p.181). Therefore, the public saw Blair as somehow different from his party, an attribute endorsed by the model.

Blair wanted to indicate to the electorate that he was different from the traditional Labour brand (Driver and Martell, 2000). One example, illustrative of this positioning strategy, was when Blair chose to support Harriet Harman after she decided to send her son to a selective and grant-maintained grammar school, which at the time appeared directly to flout Labour's traditional stance on such schools (Independent Website, 20th January, 1996). Supporting that decision angered many on the left of Blair's party, but his support for Harman gave the electorate the impression that, as Prime Minister, he would not be dictated to by his party. Therefore, the ensuing row within the party may have been superficially damaging to Labour, but it served Blair's leadership well in the sense that it conveyed an impression that he was a strong, centrist leader who was not at the mercy of his own party. Blair himself noted that, '[t]he country had to know that if I was going to be their prime minister, I would be "of the party" but removed from it' (Blair, 2010, p.95). Thus, distance from the party seemed to form a key part of Blair's leadership strategy.

The rhetoric Blair used would often demonstrate his distaste for the left of his party. He was open in his criticisms of Labour's perceived failings. In 1995, he told his party conference, 'Leave the battles of the past. Ballots, peaceful picketing, proper conduct of industrial disputes, these [Conservative] laws are staying' (Blair, quoted in Wickham-Jones, 2005, p.668). His blunt words were designed to underscore his no-nonsense approach to leadership, but also developed further the sense that he would not be a prisoner of the left, thus reassuring voters sceptical of Labour. Gamble notes that 'Blair also pioneered the technique of appealing to voters, particularly centrist voters and swing voters, by disagreeing with his party, and even picking fights with sections of it' (Gamble, 2010, p.643). Margaret Beckett claims that there was a group around Blair, led by Mandelson, 'who thought they had to be seen to take on and defeat the party' (Beckett, 2013, as quoted in Lack, 2014). Her view articulates the notion that internal party 'fights' were deliberate and symbolically distanced the leadership from the grassroots: 'That in itself was a symbol. That in itself was a good. That in itself would help us to win the next election' (Beckett, 2013, as quoted in Lack, 2014).

Blair surrounded himself with a team of advisers and focused decisions in that small group rather than outsourcing them to the wider party: 'Tony basically surrounded himself with people he already trusted and whose views he already respected' (Beckett, 2013, as quoted in Lack, 2014). Blair was not interested in political fixing or deal making. He wanted his leadership to be seen as decisive and clear (McAnulla, 2012, p.178). Blair was also happy to

wield the knife when it came to removing colleagues from posts. One example from his early days as leader came when he removed Larry Whitty, the party's General Secretary. According to Sopel, 'Blair moved quickly and decisively against him, pushing him into a political siding. It was speedy and firm' (Sopel, 1995, p.266). Replacing Whitty was technically a decision of the party's National Executive Committee (NEC) but Blair moved to replace him with Tom Sawyer, effectively side-lining normal party procedures. Here, Blair exemplified his ruthless and autonomous leadership style as advanced by the model.

Blair had strong views on his role as leader and believed that he had to demonstrate a firm grip on his party (see, for example, McAnulla, 2012, p.177). By demonstrating clear and efficient leadership of Labour in opposition he hoped to exemplify how he might operate as Prime Minister: 'for Blair party management was not just a matter of establishing efficient internal relations, it was also part of his wider goal of effective public communication' (McAnulla, 2012, p.179). His approach to leadership formed a helpful contrast with the more consensual style of leadership exemplified by his opponent, Major (Foley, 2002). Thus, Labour successfully correlated Major's softer approach with the troubles of his own government. Therefore, Labour successfully framed their argument as the Blair style appeared to provide the appropriate antidote for an electorate tiring of the Major administration.

2.5 Tasks

Major's Conservative administration governed with a tiny majority, which by the end of the parliament had been whittled away to a minority administration (Independent Website, 13th December, 1996). In that context, Labour was able to demonstrate effective parliamentary management. Immediately prior to the 1994-97 era, Labour successfully tabled a number of amendments to the Maastricht bill, which enticed a number of Tory rebels to vote with Labour, undermining the authority of the Prime Minister (Major, 2000, pp.373-75). That parliamentary operation showed Labour to be canny operators in parliament and also highlighted Tory failings to the extent that Major assumed that Labour must have 'chuckled with glee' (Major, 2000, p.373). That kind of parliamentary management became a hallmark of the 1994-97 era.

By way of illustration, during November budget of 1994, the then Tory Chancellor, Ken Clarke, proposed doubling VAT on fuel. Despite proposing energy taxes of their own,

Labour again worked with the Tory rebels to halt the rise and, at the crucial vote in December 1994, 'The government was defeated by 319 votes to 311' (Seldon, 1997, p.514). In parliamentary terms, that defeat was a huge embarrassment to the Tories. According to Major himself, the episode 'cost us dearly' (Major, 2000, p.686). While there were examples of government defeats – indeed, there were a total of 4 in the period under scrutiny – some of those were related to fringe issues, such as a bill (in 1996) to limit MP's pay (Hansard, 10th July, 1996). Therefore, apart from the VAT-related government defeat, New Labour were not as successful as they might have been in defeating the Conservatives in parliament, especially given the context that Major operated without an overall majority for a period during 1994-97.

Holding the government to account is not something that is exclusively undertaken in the confines of parliament, and the model of 'Opposition-Craft' suggests that it is something that should also be undertaken outside of parliament. Labour, under Blair, was highly skilled at holding the government to account in the media and on the doorstep (Wickham-Jones, 2005). Through its communication strategy, it was able to fight the Major administration on a series of issues; for example, it made much political capital by campaigning on the 22 tax rises introduced by the Tory government since the 1992 election (BBC website, 15th March, 2001). That narrative in the media, together with effective parliamentary management, painted the Major government as incompetent and out of touch with the aspirations of the voting public.

By contrast and by opposing the Major government, New Labour presented itself as more able to deal with the issues of the day by using parliamentary and media settings to align itself with more liberal values of the time (Buckler and Dolowitz, 2004). Writing in his autobiography, Blair notes that, 'I wanted us to take the good bits of the Labour Party in the 1970s and 80s – proper progressive attitudes such as equality for women, gays, blacks and Asians – and ally them to normality, bring them into the mainstream' (Blair, 2010, p.90). In accordance with the ideals set out in the 'Opposition-Craft' model, New Labour's stance on such issues was in sharp contrast with the Tory Party that was responsible for policies like Section 28 and, thus, Labour was, perhaps, more in tune with British values in the late 1990s (Wise, 2000).

Blair was a highly effective parliamentary performer and was seen as particularly skilled at PMQs (see, for example, Eaton, 2011). He used PMQs to set out his credentials as an

alternative Prime Minister. He undoubtedly looked the part at the dispatch box, and he was able to use his considerable verbal prowess to appear more capable than Major (Independent Website, 17th July, 2011). He also used PMQs to press a number of key New Labour themes. For example, New Labour wanted to present Blair as a leader with the ability to provide firm leadership, which was most explicitly and ruthlessly exemplified during PMQs on 25th May 1995, when he contrasted his leadership style to John Major's by declaring: 'There is one very big difference - I lead my party, he follows his' (as quoted in, Eaton, 2011).

Aside from Blair as leader, the New Labour shadow cabinet had a number of effective parliamentarians at its disposal (Rawnsley, 2001). Gordon Brown, as Shadow Chancellor, used parliamentary settings to establish further Labour's credentials around fiscal responsibility, and Robin Cook used it to set out Labour's desire to implement an ethical dimension to their foreign policy (see Grainger, 2005, p.17; and Honeyman, 2017). Cook and Brown were effective performers; Cook having made a name for himself by responding to the Scott Report about arms sales to Iraq, in which he was given 30 minutes to respond to a million-word report. His parliamentary response was described by the BBC at the time as 'a bravura performance' (BBC website, 6th August, 2005).

While there were competing wings of the Labour Party during the period 1994-97, the desire to get back into power meant that the party was at least 'quiescent' under Blair, and thus New Labour acted in a manner commensurate with the recommendations set out in the 'Opposition-Craft' model. Blair won the 1994 leadership contest emphatically in all three sections of Labour's Electoral College (Alderman and Carter, 1995). Most significantly, he won 52.3% of the union vote (then made up of levy payers voting on the One Member One Vote basis), which suggested that Blair, despite his position on the right of his party, was the candidate favoured to take it forward (Wickham-Jones, 2012, p.11). On that point, his appeal kept the party quiescent with his direction of travel.

Blair's team proactively sought the union vote in a bid to legitimise his leadership and claim broad support across the party. Quinn (2004) argues that the dire electoral context in which Labour operated in 1994, having lost four general elections, translated into union votes from levy payers: '[i]t is questionable whether a candidate as centrist as Tony Blair could have won majorities in every section of the party at any other point in Labour's history. That he did so in 1994 reflected the desperation at all levels for electoral success'

(Quinn, 2004, p.346). To underscore that view further, Radice comments that ‘even the unions were keen for a Labour victory at that time’ (Radice, 2013, as quoted in Lack, 2014). Whatever the reasons behind his leadership victory, Blair led with support from all wings of the party.

Big poll leads helped to maintain party discipline, but it did not stop some off-message contributions from some in the party, which showed that party management – while tightly controlled – was not without its problems. For example, an extract from Blair’s communication chief Alistair Campbell’s diary showed frustration with Clare Short who had appeared on the *Frost* programme in 1995: ‘she was loose on women-only shortlists, went off on one about Page 3 girls, and then about legalising cannabis’ (Campbell, 2011, p.308). Winning power was the common goal that bound Labour together in the period running up to the 1997 election, but those at the top of New Labour had to work hard to provide a platform which all elements of the party could support. While it was well known that Blair was from the right of the party, the programme proposed by New Labour had some radical policies in it. For example, the windfall tax on privatised utilities was a policy that appealed to some on the left, as did the proposal of a national minimum wage, revealing some of New Labour’s ‘interventionist instincts’ (Hindmoor, 2004, p.110).

Operating with a broad suite of policies which all wings of the party could support was a strategy used by New Labour under Blair, but by extension he was keen that the wide-scoping policy agenda should form part of his big-tent approach to politics (Dorey and Garnett, 2012, p.411). Reflective of that approach, Blair sought to widen party membership to be, as he saw it, more reflective of the wider electorate. Blair placed his Deputy Leader, the left-winger John Prescott, in charge of party membership, and between 1994 and 1997 Labour Party membership increased by around 100,000 members to over 400,000 (Marshall, 2009, p.9). The increase in party membership was much trumpeted in the media as yet more proof that Labour had changed and was being effectively managed (Mirror Website, 9th October, 2015). That large membership base made it easier to fight the 1997 election as the party had more foot soldiers to fight the ground war. Thus, on party management, New Labour operated effectively and in accordance with the model. But what of Blair’s personal ability to lead and manage his party?

Blair certainly looked the part as a potential Prime Minister (see, for example, Bennister, 2012, p.5). In some ways he had the stereotypical background of a British Prime Minister –

public school followed by Oxbridge. Smartly dressed and presentable, he was well suited to conducting official duties like the laying wreathes on Remembrance Sunday. While carrying out such duties is not difficult for an opposition leader to undertake, they are symbolic opportunities to look 'Prime Ministerial'. Blair conducted such tasks with ease and subverted the image of more recent Labour leaders (see, for example, Radice, 2010, pp.3-15). In that regard, he presented well in terms of his personal attributes as described in the model.

Blair surrounded himself with a small team of advisers and focused decisions within this small group rather than outsourcing them to the wider party: 'Tony basically surrounded himself with people he already trusted and whose views he already respected' (Beckett, 2013, as quoted in Lack, 2014). That meant that tightly-focused messaging was possible as it largely came from this small group. As leader, Blair was charged with making appointments to his team. The model suggests that such appointments are symbolic of the kind of government that an opposition may operate if elected to office. Soon after taking office as Leader of the Opposition, Blair appointed Campbell as Head of Communications (Campbell, 2011). He brought Mandelson back into the fold after he had been cast out during the Smith years (Mandelson, 2010), and also brought in Philip Gould, the polling expert (Gould, 2011). Those appointments were to form a tight-knit team around the leader and were indicative of the centrist direction Blair was to take the party (see, for example, Jones, 2000, pp.16-36).

To counterbalance that team, Blair let it be known during the leadership election that he would be happy for Prescott to serve as Deputy (Alderman and Carter, 1995). While not in his gift to determine who would be Deputy Leader, Blair's endorsement of the left-leaning Prescott served to symbolise an intent on his part to keep all wings of the party quiescent with the journey on which he was to take them. Similarly, while membership of the shadow cabinet was an elected post, he had the power to select the position in which shadow cabinet members would serve. In that regard, he placed prominent left-wingers like Michael Meacher in high-profile roles such as a Shadow Secretary of State for Transport (Independent Website, 21st October, 1994). Thus, in conducting his official duties as opposition leader, Blair exploited the opportunities associated with the role to exemplify the kind of party he wanted to lead into government.

As leader, Blair wanted a more supportive media to convey his message. During the 1980s and 1990s, the Tories benefitted from the vociferous support from large parts of the media (see, for example, Golding, Billig, Deacon and Middleton, 1992, p.7), and it should not be forgotten that 'a lot of the press were very antagonistic at the outset' towards Blair's leadership of the Labour Party after they dubbed him as 'Bambi' (Smith, February 2020). This point is emphasised further by Lord Blunkett: 'it wasn't as easy ride as people seem to reflect on now' (Blunkett, March 2020). In that context, Labour sought to improve its relations with the media in order to gain favourable press coverage. Therefore, the party targeted the support of papers owned by Rupert Murdoch (see, for example, Radice, 2010, p.94). Campbell was recruited to achieve those ends. As a former tabloid journalist, Campbell arrived in his job with extensive connections in the media, which he used to win over the Murdoch empire and other Tory-supporting newspapers. By the time of the 1997 election, his work paid off when *The Sun* newspaper declared that, 'The Sun backs Blair' (*The Sun*, March 18th, 1997). According to Jones, 'That four-word headline represented the culmination of three years' unstinting effort on Campbell's part' (Jones, 2000, p.174). It was evident that change of support amongst the press 'was a seismic shift in the party's relationship with the popular press' (Jones, 2000, p.174).

By bringing many of the newspapers into their fold, Labour was able to manage their message more effectively than had previous incarnations of the party (Wring, 2005). As a consequence of its improved relations in the media, the message New Labour communicated was about the catch-all concept of 'modernisation'; a simple core message designed to suggest that Labour was about modernising policy, but it was also about modernising the party itself. Indeed, Labour's management of the media under Blair was also 'modernised' in the sense that Labour had a communications strategy that communicated its message in an effective manner. Its strong organisational approach towards media management came to be seen as a harbinger of its potential to govern if elected to office (see, for example, Rentoul in Clarke and James, 2015, pp.286-88). The positive relations with the printed press enabled New Labour to promote its brand image and to tie that image with a sense of its modernising agenda.

In the modern era, parties have developed online media campaigns designed to target individual voters (Moore, 2016). The use of social media to promote specific targeted adverts at the individual was not something that was available to Labour in the 1990s, however there was the sense that Labour needed to target specific groups of voters.

Target-vote strategies were far cruder in the 1990s than they are today, so consequently they relied heavily on the use of targeting large socio-economic groups. Labour knew it needed to gain votes amongst middle class groups of voters, so part of that initiative was about winning over parts of the printed press read by voters in those groups (Jones, 2000). In that respect, Labour's tasks around media management were conducted in a highly effective manner.

2.6 Skills

Blair set out to change Labour in an explicit manner and provide further distance not only from its era in government, but also from its more recent past as an opposition (Cronin, 2004). In that regard, Blair went a step further than our model suggests is necessary. Firstly, there was the informal change of name to 'New Labour'. Labour did not formally change its name, and in subsequent years the party reverted to its traditional reference as simply 'Labour' (Fielding, 2003). But in the 1990s the term 'New Labour' came into common parlance and was promoted as a symbol of change by party leaders. Labour determined that its new values and new message should appear to coalesce around what might be described as a 'brand', and for Labour that brand was the term 'New Labour'. With reference to that brand, White and De Chernatony suggest that 'New Labour set out to represent functional values of openness, modernity, economic orthodoxy and redistributory social policy' (White and De Chernatony, 2008, p.48). Thus, Labour, with its new policy platform, presented itself as having a thematically linked vision of the country.

With reference to its new informal name, Labour departed from traditional political marketing ploys by not only promoting messages, values and policies, but also by promoting the brand name *New Labour*. The name itself was suggestive of values with which the electorate could identify: 'New Labour as a brand was successful in part because of its ambiguity. It represented values with which large swathes of the population could identify, such as personal opportunity flowing out of strong communities' (White and De Chernatony, 2008, p.49). In connection with that point, the brand name *New Labour* became a byword for modernisation and a whole set of associated values supported by large parts of the electorate (see also, Coates, 2005, p.27).

Secondly, the party set out to communicate a new policy platform more in tune with the aspirations of the electorate. For example, as discussed in earlier sections, Labour reformed its position on the economy and crime (Kavanagh and Dale, 2000). It also started

promoting an ethical foreign policy (Grainger, 2005, p.17; and Honeyman, 2017). Essentially, it offered a whole range of new policies from the introduction of a new national minimum wage, to a windfall tax of privatised utilities. Some of the policy agenda that Labour promoted was liberal, whilst other aspects – like its policies on crime – were deemed to be quite authoritarian (Heath, Jowell and Curtice, 2001), but whatever stable those policies originated from they were popular with the electorate and were thematically linked to Labour’s ideas around ‘modernisation’. Despite the fact that its policies had no coherent ideological home, they interfaced with the electorate under the simple idea that Labour was going to modernise the country (see, for example, Brown, 2017, p.85).

In accordance with the ideas set out in the model of ‘Opposition-Craft’, Blair was keen that Labour keep its political message simple and not detailed. In his memoir, Blair explains that the electorate ‘don’t expect you to know it all. They’re not asking for reams of detail’ (Blair, 2010, p.92). As the model suggests, the electorate simply want to know the general direction in which an opposition party would take the country if elected to govern. For Blair, ‘two things are vital for an Opposition: keep it simple; and keep it coherent. By keeping it simple, I mean not surface only. I mean: clear’ (Blair, 2010, p.92). Blair argues that Labour simply needed to set out a general direction of travel and to keep the detail out of the public arena: ‘I had set out an outline programme of sufficient substance to be credible but lacking in details that would have allowed our opponents to damn it’ (Blair, 2010, p.2). Commenting on Labour’s impressionism approach under Blair, Radice suggests that Blair’s speeches ‘were good at setting out New Labour’s values, agenda and positioning but they were short on policy detail’ (Radice, 2010, p.91).

Under its impressionism approach, Labour set out a rough outline of where it was going and used a simple messaging plan (Blair, 2010, p.92). It used the simple ‘modernisation’ message to link together coherently its policy platform, but that ‘modernisation’ tag also acted as the perfect hook by which to set out its general direction of travel. The ‘modernisation’ message was hard for the Conservative administration to attack as it is difficult to criticise an opposition that simply wants to ‘modernise’ everything – for why would the electorate not want a government to ‘modernise’ things? In practical terms, Lord Blunkett saw first-hand what that coherence around policy making meant. He argues that policy under New Labour was shaped in a coherent manner across all departments, for example, ‘being on the side of the service user and consumer’ was a common theme. In education, the ministry that Blunkett shadowed at the time, that policy direction for Labour

manifested itself as being 'on the side of parents and pupils, not just on the side of teachers' (Blunkett, March 2020).

Impressionism, as a strategy, leaves oppositions open to the charge that they are light on policy detail (Heppell, 2012). If an opposition chooses to communicate in detail what its policies are then it runs the risk of enabling the governing party to pick those policies to pieces. But, on the other hand, if it communicates a set of values and a general policy direction, it runs the risk of being accused of having few or no policies to implement (Lack, 2014). To counter the claim that it was light on policy detail, according to one shadow minister at the time, now Lord Chris Smith, 'New Labour put rebuttal at the heart of its operations. We counter-attacked and rebutted whenever there were criticisms' (Smith, February 2020). Indeed, Labour operated the now-seemingly archaic 'Excalibur' machine, a primitive database of information, to rebut claims made against it, which at the time was seen as cutting-edge technology (Gould, 2011, pp.171-72).

In accordance with the model, Labour put symbolic change at the heart of its operation inviting the electorate to interpret the symbols as representative of the direction in which the party was going (see, for example, Mandelson, 2010, p.183). The highly symbolic 'Clause IV moment' was the ultimate symbol of change (Riddell, 1997). Blair wished to exemplify to the electorate that the changes he was making to his party extended to policy as well as internal party reform. According to Radice, '[Blair] decided that revising Clause IV would provide the ideal opportunity to demonstrate that, under his leadership, Labour really had changed' (Radice, 2010, p.84). In underscoring the importance of the symbolic changes to Clause IV, Farnham claims that '[t]he rewriting of Clause IV was indispensable to [Blair's] agenda' (Farnham, 1996, p.588). Blair attached a great deal of importance to this period of his time in opposition; much of the opening chapters of his autobiography, *A Journey*, are spent detailing the significance of the changes to Clause IV (Blair, 2010). However, Clause IV was merely an iteration of Labour's values rather than a specific policy commitment. Therefore, by reworking the clause, Labour was able to communicate to the electorate that its thinking had changed without a commitment to a detailed policy that would have been wide open to attack by the Major administration (McAnulla, 2012, p.180).

Given the direction of the party under Blair, in accordance with the model, New Labour under Blair could definitely be described as a market-orientated party (Lees-Marshment, 2001a). For example, by 1997, the party had evolved and used market intelligence (e.g.

focus groups) to identify voter demand (Gould, 2011). From that research it designed its 'product' to suit the voter (Lees-Marshment, 2001a, pp.1075-78). Drawing on Lees-Marshment's work, it can be concluded that Labour, under Blair, worked in a manner that was about appealing to a broad section of the electorate by altering its policy platform to suit the aspirations of the voters rather than asking the electorate to travel towards it (Mattinson, 2010).

Our model points to the inherent dangers implicit with operating as a market-orientated party in the sense that parties determined to shift their position towards the electorate might travel to such an extent that they jettison their traditional brand image, and consequently lose the support of core voters. But Labour in the years 1994-97 operated cannily enough to bridge the gap between its appeal to the wider electorate and the desire to keep its core support happy with more left-leaning policies like, for example, the commitment to introduce a national minimum wage. But New Labour also bargained that, as a party out of power for 18 years, and with no viable alternative home for far-left leaning voters to migrate towards, it could stretch the elastic of its policy platform (Sanders and Brynin, 1999, p.226).

The Murdoch press and other titles moved over to support New Labour, which inevitably helped Labour gain positive coverage of its platform for government (Jones, 2000). But Labour augmented its position by 'spinning', or in other words it used a media operation that put the best possible gloss on that which needed to be communicated. Spin was nothing new to politics in the mid-1990s, but New Labour appeared to take this method of political manoeuvring to a new level (see, for example, Jones, 2000). The model suggests that an opposition needs positive media reporting, and in that regard Mandelson and Campbell led Labour's media strategy with each working to present Labour in the most attractive way. That approach worked for Labour in opposition and the party benefitted from more favourable reporting, which ultimately enabled the party to communicate much of its internal party reform and policy renewal agenda (see, for example, Jones, 2000). Some in the shadow cabinet, however, suggested that this press strategy was not as influential as others have claimed: 'We shouldn't over-emphasise the power of the press' (Smith, February 2020). Lord Smith, however, concedes 'the fact there wasn't a ceaseless outpouring of bilious criticism was probably helpful' (Smith, February 2020).

The model indicates that opposition parties need to reassure the electorate that they represent a positive change in terms of governance, but they also need to reassure that they are credible and able to provide governing continuity with the incumbent government. Labour wanted to demonstrate that it was the party of change, but it also needed to reassure voters that it was not a radical departure from that which had gone before, as commented on by White and De Chernatony: 'The brand promise, vague though it seemed to commentators at the time, was aimed to reassure, to allay fears and to convince the electorate that Labour would provide a new kind of government' (White and De Chernatony, 2008, p.51). The reassurance strategy was also borne out of a nervousness in the party about snapping defeat from the jaws of victory. Indeed, in that spirit Roy Jenkins aptly said of Blair, 'Tony is like a man who is carrying a precious vase across a crowded and slippery ballroom. He is desperate above all that the vase should not fall and be smashed' (Jenkins, as quoted in Radice, 2004, p.359).

On that theme, and in accordance with the model, Labour reassured on various fronts, as noted by Gould: '[T]he essential strategy of the election was reassurance, offering the reassurance that we were not old Labour, that we could be trusted, vote for us and we will not scare you' (Gould, quoted in Needham, 2005, p.352). While they described themselves as a new and exciting brand of politicians, New Labour simultaneously acted in a way designed to suggest that they would not administer policies of a radically different variety to those pursued by the Conservative administration. Lord Smith sees this approach in a slightly different light: 'I wouldn't say we created a notion of an "old and failed" Labour Party. More that we were able to give people a sense that this was a forward-looking party, that it was in tune with the times, and that whilst there had been strengths as well as weaknesses in the past, we were able to set the country in a new direction' (Smith, February 2020).

In order to achieve its reassurance approach, Labour's instincts on policy were limited in their ambition. According to Needham, '[Blair's] policies on taxation, welfare to work and asylum seekers were designed to reassure voters they were safe from the perceived excesses of previous Labour governments' (Needham, 2005, p.351). Much like the approach advocated by the model, on economic policy Labour remained committed to a number of the market reforms introduced by the Tories (Tomlinson, 2007). In a clear bid to provide governing continuity with the Conservative administration, Labour committed itself, for the first two years of the next parliament, to the same tax and spending policies

as presided over by the existing Conservative government. By operating in such a manner, McAnulla claims that, '[i]n many ways this involved an acceptance [on the part of the Labour Party] that much of what the Thatcher and Major governments had done in economic terms was correct' (McAnulla, 2012, p.174).

Blair's strategy was overt in the sense that he wanted the voting public to note that Labour had accepted much of the Thatcher hegemony and, by extension, he wanted to suggest that he was the natural successor to Thatcher. This 'involved dissociating New Labour from its past, accepting aspects of the Thatcherite revolution, and projecting Blair as heir to Thatcher' (Heppell, 2008, p.578). By way of contrast with the more consensual approach adopted by Major (Foley, 2002, p.25), Blair wished to convey his credibility as an alternative Prime Minister by linking his decisive leadership with the Thatcher approach. On reassuring voters, Labour adopted all the suggestions as set out in the 'Opposition-Craft' model; indeed, looking back on that period, it is incredible that Labour accepted Blair so overtly posturing in such a Thatcherite manner. It says something about the party's hunger for power that it was prepared to accept that behaviour.

The image of the party and in particular the image of its leaders is a critical component of the 'Opposition-Craft' model. Central to its communications was the image of Blair as leader, as noted by McAnulla: 'a key element of Blair's approach to communication was to emphasise his own role as leader of the party, and to make himself central to the party's campaign imagery' (McAnulla, 2012, p.180). Blair was placed first and foremost in Labour's campaign for office with his personal appeal very much part of that strategy (Finlayson, 2002). New Labour supplied the media with pictures of Blair alongside his young family; those images were all about making Blair appear 'normal' and a typical family man. In order to enhance further his man-of-the-people qualities, Blair broke with tradition and appeared on mainstream television programmes with non-political audiences such as *This Morning* and *The Des O'Connor Show*. Bennister claims that appearances on those mass-appeal television shows enabled Blair to appear 'in a relaxed, apolitical context' (Bennister, 2012, p.6). His personal style, coupled with a strategy that placed him directly in front of mainstream audiences, was designed to enable him to persuade groups of voters whose support he needed.

Blair looked the part as a potential alternative Prime Minister. Unusually, though, he was also adept at using the language of ordinary voters; he therefore presented himself as able

to 'generate an identification of equivalence, rather than of some greater ideal to which we aspire' (Finlayson, 2003, p.54, as quoted in McAnulla, 2012, p.181). Bennister argues that Blair incorporated 'glottal stops and flattened vowels' in a bid to 'downplay his public-school accent' (Bennister, 2012, p.6). The more the public saw of Blair, the more he exploited his personal charm to highlight his popular appeal; he therefore cultivated an image of 'closeness, intimacy and charm' (Grainger, 2005, p.4, as quoted in McAnulla, 2012, p.181). McAnulla, however, argues that Blair's appeal was more complex than a simple promotion of his personal charm, and contends that Blair embodied 'statesman-like appeal with an ability to come across as in touch with the wider public' (McAnulla, 2012, p.181). In this regard, Blair's natural gifts enabled him to fulfil the central principle of Finlayson's notion of 'extraordinary ordinariness' (Finlayson, 2002, p.590) as set out in Chapter 1 of this analysis.

According to Bennister, Blair 'set a new benchmark for the contemporary party leader' (Bennister, 2012, p.1). By the time he came to lead his party into the general election of 1997, Blair had established a 17% lead over Major in polls which asked voters to rate who would make the best Prime Minister (Wybrow and King, 2001). His communicative abilities and his image all supported Labour in their efforts to regain power, as did his middle-class background. In the mid-1990s, Labour needed to attract middle-class voters, so Blair's well-heeled background provided a useful contrast with his immediate predecessors and also served to suggest that he was somehow different from his party (Seldon, 2005). When asked what Blair's key skills were, Lord Blunkett observes that: 'he was articulate, he was a good communicator, and he didn't frighten people' (Blunkett, March 2020).

As Leader of the Opposition, Blair's popularity 'owed much to the way in which he could project himself to the electorate' (McAnulla, 2012, p.181). Asked by the writer what aspect of New Labour's political operation was particularly effective, Lord Adonis squarely concludes that Blair's appeal was everything: 'Tony Blair. Period. Everything else is of little account' (Adonis, February 2020). Blair's relative youth further cemented his 'modern' image and fascinated the print media, who consequently labelled him 'Bambi' (The Economist, 2007). Over time this youthful demeanour turned into an electoral asset and, according to McAnulla, Blair's youthful charisma generated 'an appeal that reached far beyond those groups of voters who might normally seriously consider voting Labour' (McAnulla, 2012, p.181). Blair therefore fulfilled many of the key requirements set out in

the model, as did a number of members of his top team in the shadow cabinet. Many members of that shadow cabinet were relatively young and many were women, which served to provide a stark contrast with the Tory cabinet sitting in government (Independent Website, 20th October, 1995).

In accordance with the ideas set out in the model of 'Opposition-Craft', Labour, organised itself around the latest information and media technologies (see, for example, Gould, 2011, p.43). Blair's party embraced the new technology of the day, such as pagers, mobile phones and the internet. As part of its organisational improvements, Labour moved its party HQ from Walworth Road to a new base on Millbank, which was equipped with all the latest electioneering facilities, including fit-for-purpose press conferencing rooms and the *Excalibur Machine* (Gould, 2011, pp.171-72). As an indicator of its organisational abilities, Labour politicians were issued with pagers, which fed Labour politicians with the latest 'line' to take on party policy, all of which was controlled from Millbank (Gould, 2011, pp.171-72). The new party HQ and its use of new technologies were all suggestive of a party that had moved on from its past, a past in which its communication and electioneering strategies were seen as dated (see Chapter 5). Its organisational abilities led to message discipline across all formats of the media. Labour had simple messages which it wanted repeated at all points of contact; technology, facilities and the ability to organise itself supported that strategy.

Any party hoping to form a government in the UK needs to be able to navigate successfully the first-past-the-post electoral system, therefore it needs to target specific marginal seats and get its vote out on polling day (Denver, Hands and Henig, 1998). All of those skills involve organisational abilities, which New Labour held in abundance as a result of its 'far reaching reform to its internal organisation' (Russell, 2005, p.1). Labour's target-seat strategy for the 1997 election was codenamed 'Operation Victory' and, according to Denver, Hands and Henig, it was 'highly sophisticated and extremely ambitious' (Denver, Hands and Henig, 1998, p.176). Denver et al conclude that Labour's efforts on that front, launched in 1995, were far superior to those of the Conservatives. They conclude that 'its sophistication of conception, through on-going attention to all aspects of the campaign, and sheer professionalism it was on an altogether different level' (Denver, Hands and Henig, 1998, p.176). Again, New Labour fulfilled all the central suggestions of the model on this front.

New Labour's highly effective party management was a signal of a party ready for power. Blair wished to further underscore that impression by conveying the sense that he had a firm grip on his party by operating as a decisive decision-maker, which was to be in direct contrast to his opponent, Major. Blair's style of leadership was also about creating an autonomous power base for the leadership (McAnulla, 2012, p.177). Changing the way in which the party was governed was yet another means by which to demonstrate to voters that Labour had changed: 'Blair believed that the party had to be *seen* to be changing, rather than to merely claim that it had' (McAnulla, 2012, p.177). In that regard, both the party and leader appeared to be explicitly effective. That image, again, enabled the opposition to frame the argument that it was the solution to what they described as a tired Conservative administration.

From the outset of his leadership in 1994, Blair exemplified his effective decision-making skills and the direction in which he wanted the party to travel by demonstrating 'a clear intent to persuade Conservative voters to switch to Labour' (Gould, 2011, p.204). Within a week of becoming leader, Blair abandoned a series of long-held Labour values on the family and education. Speaking in an interview with Brian Walden, Blair boldly claimed that he thought it wrong for women to choose to become mothers before they were in a stable relationship (a comment clearly designed to appeal to the left and delight the right in equal measure). Blair then attacked his own party by claiming that its abandonment of such populist values in the 1970s/80s was 'a million miles away from ordinary people' (Gould, 2011, p.204). Four days later, while speaking on education, Blair then 'smashed more shibboleths' (Gould, 2011, p.204) by suggesting that he would not abolish selection and made it clear that underperforming teachers should be sacked. Gould claims that Blair's decisiveness, direct appeal to Conservative voters, and the use of symbolic statements of intention (rather than detailed policy commitments) was a signal of 'determination to ditch the old party and bring Labour back to the hopes and values of ordinary voters' (Gould, 2011, p.205). Thus, in the manner described in the model of 'Opposition-Craft', Blair was able to signal a new and positive direction of travel.

Blair was also surrounded by other successful and decisive decision-makers (Rawnsley, 2001). For example, Brown operated in a similar virtue-signalling manner to Blair over issues associated with the economy by stressing an 'iron commitment to macroeconomic stability and financial prudence' (Brown, 2017, p.104). At his speech to the party conference in 1996, Brown stressed the importance of financial responsibility: 'Now the

reason the Labour Party also shows iron discipline in our approach to public spending is that every pound that is inefficiently spent is a pound denied to our front-line services to health, to education, to pensions' (Brown, 1996). Labour knew that it had a reputation for overspending, and Brown sought to neutralise that problem by framing the argument in a manner acceptable to Labour supporters. In the same 1996 speech he introduced the notion of financial 'prudence', for which he would become famous: 'Our prudence and our responsibility is not, therefore, an abandonment of socialism, it is the very essence of it' (Brown, 1996). Brown and others at the top of the party were effective decision-makers very much in line with the principles set out in the model.

The model of 'Opposition-Craft' builds on the ideas of Greenstein (2009), who suggests that US Presidents are effective if they are able to combine emotional intelligence with an ability to cope with extraordinary demands of the job. As opposition leader, Blair's calm and easy-going style was suggestive of a politician in control in the sense that his demeanour implied a confidence in his own abilities (Gardner, 1996). His easy-going charm was enhanced further by his decisiveness and firm leadership style. Those character traits suggested to the electorate that he would be good Prime Minister. Blair's image, skill, and authority were a successful cocktail of personality attributes which marked him out as a high-performing Leader of the Opposition when scored against the model of 'Opposition-Craft'.

2.7 Conclusion

Blair inherited his party in good shape and in a position whereby its membership accepted the notion that reform equated to improved electoral performance (Wring, 1995). However, Blair was frustrated at the 'slow pace of change' (Gould, 2011, p.185) under Kinnock and Smith and believed that if Labour was to secure success at the next election, further reform was required (Kogan, 2019). To his advantage, those further reforms provided Blair with an opportunity to demonstrate explicitly Labour's preparedness for government. By acknowledging Labour's failed past, Blair described that era as 'old Labour' and framed the argument that he and his 'New Labour' brand was the antidote (Wickham-Jones, 2005).

The Conservative government that Blair opposed was well-placed for attack (Seldon, 1997). It was divided over the issue of Europe, it had lost its reputation for sound economic management and, by virtue of its day-to-day actions, it had the smell of decay about it

(Aykens, 2002). That context was conducive for a party of opposition to fight a government, but as the model sets out that in itself was insufficient grounds for the electorate to hand power to the opposition. However, using that context, Labour was effective at framing the arguments that it was the solution to the country's problems. For example, the economic situation was made worse for the Conservatives because Brown led Labour to a position where it was more trusted on the economy than the Conservatives (Thompson, 1996). In that regard, the Labour opposition set out an economic policy that improved its credibility to govern and consequently further aggravated the decline of the Conservatives on this issue.

Despite earlier woes over the economy, by 1997 the UK economic state was positive: 'employment was rising, growth stable, and the deficit was well under control' (Telegraph Website, 4th April, 2012). According to the model, that should have limited Labour's potency, but that did not materialise. Contrary to the model, but perhaps because of Labour's effective work on economic policy and framing of the arguments, the favourable economic circumstances did not work to the benefit of the Conservatives (Wybrow and King, 2001). Labour no longer posed a risk to the economic settlement of the mid-1990s, and were consequently electable.

Blair was 'highly popular' (Giddens, 2007, p.106) and was an excellent communicator in the media. He was personally presentable, and above all he appeared 'prime ministerial' (Bennister, 2012). However, he was also inexperienced and, for some, lacked substance in that he was not moored into any discernible political tradition. Whilst the advantages of Blair as leader far outweighed the detractions, New Labour worked hard to turn any of the negative perceptions of their leader into positive attributes. His youth and inexperience were turned into a picture of modernity, and his lack of traditional pedigree became a new type of politics.

Blair exemplified a model of firm leadership style suggestive of someone capable of being Prime Minister. His centre-ground appeal marked him out as leader closer to the aspirations of the electorate than someone more traditionally imbued in party politics. His easy-going charm set him out as someone with emotional intelligence and an ability to cope with the demands of high office (Kenny and Smith, 1997). His leadership qualities were in marked contrast with Major's (Foley, 2002). While Major possessed many of the attributes of a Prime Minister, his more mild-mannered leadership style led to a sense of

him not being entirely in control of his own party. While his qualities may have been the appropriate tonic after the Thatcher years, set against Blair's abilities later in the decade they were not much of a match (Seldon, 1997). The spatial difference between the two leaders in terms of their abilities for the role of Prime Minister was large. Thus, when the electorate were presented with a clear choice at the 1997 general election, they opted for Blair as Prime Minister (Radice, 2010).

The Labour Party under Blair was clear that the party had lost previous elections because it was not placed in the right position on policy in a number of key areas (Kogan, 2019). In the Blair era, Labour shifted further towards the centre ground than in previous incarnations. The party was also successful in presenting its policy platform as a coherent package wrapped up under the heading of 'modernisation' (Smith, 2000). In reality, however, many aspects of the offer did not fit so easily into traditional ideological homes. For example, the promise to implement a windfall tax on privatised utilities was suggestive of quite a left-wing programme, whereas the promise to stick to Conservative spending plans was obviously quite right-wing in nature. What those policies had in common, however, was that they were popular (Kavanagh and Dale, 2000).

On policy, it was not enough for Labour to follow the doctrines of the centre ground – they needed to frame the argument that the Conservative government had vacated that space. By the mid-1990s, the Conservatives governed in a manner at odds with the aspirations of voters. Their credibility on the economy was damaged (Sanders, 1999), their policies appeared socially illiberal in what were more socially liberal times (Wise, 2000), and they appeared obsessed with Europe which did not feature highly on the list of voters' concerns (Holmes, 1998). Again, Labour successfully framed those arguments around policy to ensure their offer was seen as the solution.

There was not a huge difference in terms of policy between Blair's Labour Party and Major's Conservatives; indeed, that marginal difference on policy was part of the New Labour strategy to reassure voters that Labour was not a dangerous proposition (Mandelson, 2010). Where there were differences, Labour adopted an approach that asked voters to view the issue as less about policy and more about valence. But there was enough of a difference on policy to suggest that Labour's programme was more in line with voters than the Conservatives, especially as Labour were so effective at framing the arguments around their offer, or as Lord Blunkett argues: 'the narrative and circumstance

went hand-in-hand' (Blunkett, March 2020). Effectively, Labour took the popular bits of Conservative policy and mitigated its weak spots (particularly on social policy) with an agenda that chimed with the electorate at the time.

The outcome of the 1997 election leaves no doubt that this period of opposition was a success under the terms set out in the model. However, as a result of the favourable context in which Labour conducted its business in the mid-1990s, some in the party have argued that a number of Labour's past leaders would have won the 1997 election. Lord Smith argues that 'John Smith would undoubtedly have won [the 1997 election]', but does concede that 'a Jeremy Corbyn-type figure would have struggled, even in the circumstances of 1997' (Smith, February 2020). Other commentators have suggested that 'Labour would have won in 1997 if it had put up a donkey with a red rosette as leader' (Rentoul, in Clarke and James, 2015, p. 284). The model of 'Opposition-Craft' rejects this thinking as highly complacent as the model contends that a party of opposition has to be fit to govern, if it is to win. Labour had much working in its favour during the period under scrutiny, but as an opposition outfit it did virtually everything (and more) as recommended by the model to drive home its advantage. It consequently won the 1997 election by a huge margin.

Chapter 3

David Cameron, 2005-10: A stunning achievement or a failure to complete the job?

3.1 Introduction

The 2005-10 period will be considered a partially successful era of opposition for David Cameron's Conservative Party when measured against the criterion as set out in the model of 'Opposition-Craft'. Cameron took the party from its third successive defeat at the polls in 2005 and returned it to power in 2010 by gaining an additional 96 seats to the tally secured in 2005 (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2010). However, the Conservatives under Cameron did not achieve an overall majority at the 2010 election, as they had widely been expected to (Seldon, 2015, p.22) and were reduced to governing for the next five years in a formal coalition with the Liberal Democrats (Beech and Lee, 2015).

In terms of the number of MPs returned to parliament in 2010, the Conservatives won 307 constituencies and were short of an overall majority by some 19 seats (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2010, p.192 and p.202). Therefore, the fact that Cameron's Conservatives did not secure an overall majority meant that they did not 'win outright' the 2010 election. Thus, under the terms set out by the model, this period should only be considered a partial success despite the very significant movement forward in terms of seats won in the House of Commons and the fact that the Conservative Party returned to power albeit in coalition with the Liberal Democrats.

During this era, the Conservatives did much to re-position themselves in order to move on from the politically toxic places in which they had located themselves throughout the 1997-2005 years (Bale, 2011a). They took advantage of a favourable context in which to operate, and they were led by someone in David Cameron with considerable leadership skill (Heppell, Seawright and Theakston, 2015). However, when measured against the framework for analysis, the party fell short in some important respects and consequently failed to win an outright majority. In that regard, this section of the analysis will acknowledge some effective practice when measuring Cameron's Conservatives against the 'Opposition-Craft' framework, but it will also note some important deficiencies, which may

account for the ultimate conclusion that this era was merely a partial success in terms of its effectiveness at the politics of opposition.

3.2 Academic Perspectives on the Cameron Era, 2005-10

From the point at which Gordon Brown opted against an early election in the autumn of 2007, and the advent of the financial crash shortly afterwards, an assumption was made on the part of many commentators that Cameron's Conservatives would win the subsequent general election (Seldon, 2015). The fact that they fell short of an overall majority, but at the same time managed to move very significantly forward in terms of the number of seats won at the election, has prompted much discussion. In that regard, the existing academic literature on the Cameron era can be broken down into the following themes or perspectives:

First, there is the academic literature which is leadership focused and assesses Cameron in terms of how he was elected to the leadership of his party (Denham and Dorey, 2006). That literature looks at the coalition of support that gathered around him during the leadership election campaign, and also focuses on his mandate for modernising the party as a result of his campaign promises (Heppell, 2008a). There is also literature that assesses his performance as a political leader and his importance in the recovery of the Conservatives in the years following his election as leader (Norton in Lee and Beech, 2009, and Bale, 2012).

Second, there are perspectives that outline the challenge that Cameron faced on becoming leader in the sense that he inherited a party which had previously selected a succession of unelectable leaders complete with a policy platform that was essentially unreformed following successive electoral defeats (Snowdon, 2010). That literature points to the many restraints placed on Cameron's tenure as Leader of the Opposition and consequently assesses the limited effectiveness of the era (Dommett, 2015).

Third, there is academic literature that is concentrated on policy. That work examines the extent of policy change by the Conservatives in opposition. This is covered in general historical discussions of the Conservatives post-1997 (Dorey, Garnett and Denham, 2011; and Bale, 2011a, 2012, 2016), but is also covered in articles on the Conservatives' economic policy under Cameron (Dorey, 2009). There is also notable literature on social policy change and the environment, which under the Cameron modernisation strategy exemplified a

symbolic difference between the Conservatives' policy platforms under his leadership and their own failed past (Carter, 2009).

Fourth, there is analysis that is ideologically focused (Buckler and Dolowitz, 2009), and explores what 'Cameronism' was in terms of its ideological stable (Beech, in Lee and Beech, 2009). On a similar theme, some of that literature explores the strategic positioning of the Conservative party (Quinn, 2008), and the drive towards the centre ground. On a similar theme, that work also examines the notion of triangulation on policy as borrowed from the New Labour strategy under Blair (McAnulla, 2010 and Lack, 2014).

Fifth, there are alternative perspectives which challenge the prevailing orthodoxy that Cameron's modernisation process was at the heart of the party's recovery post-2005. That literature argues that the uptick in Conservative support, under Cameron, owed more to the unpopularity of the Labour government rather than the various attempts to modernise the party under Cameron's leadership (see, for example, Green, 2010).

What also emerges from the literature are different perspectives on the 'success' of the Cameron opposition era. On the one hand we have the positive interpretation, which notes the huge increase in the number of MPs elected in 2010 (Bale, 2011a), and on the other hand there is the more negative perspective, which opines that it was a missed opportunity to secure a majority, especially in the context of a failing economy, tired Labour administration, and an unpopular Prime Minister (Dorey, 2010).

While much of the existing literature focuses on the modernising strategy and Cameron's leadership credentials, not enough credence has been given to the *volte-face* in strategy as performed by the Conservatives following the financial crash. Much of the existing literature discusses the 2005-10 era as if it were one consistent strategy, but this thesis will argue that the Conservatives switched their approach in the middle of the parliament as a result of a new Prime Minister and a new financial context. This analysis will seek to explore the Conservatives' attempt to emulate Labour's economic policies before the financial crash (Bale, 2008), which was subsequently turned on its head following the crisis. This examination will also set out how that decision formed a factor in the party's inability to secure an overall majority at the 2010 election.

3.3 Context

When analysing the state of the governing party that Cameron faced in opposition 2005-10, it is necessary to view that era in two distinct chunks of time. The period of time between Blair's departure in 2007 and the economic crash in 2008 (Hodson and Mabett, 2009) brought about a unique set of circumstances that utterly transformed the political landscape in which the Conservatives were to operate. The government they faced effectively changed when Brown became Prime Minister (Seldon and Lodge, 2010). When that event was coupled with the global financial crisis the terrain was completely reconstructed. In that respect, we will consider as separate entities the 2005-07 Labour government led by Blair, and the 2007-10 Labour government led by Brown. As we will also note in this section, Cameron's party shifted its strategy to reflect that changed landscape from 2007. Thus, it is notable that not only should the government be considered under two distinct time periods during those years, but also the Conservatives' approach to opposition was observed to be markedly different in the two eras.

By the time Cameron assumed the leadership of his party, the Conservatives had been out of power for eight years (Heppell, 2008a). They had lost three successive general elections and faced a Labour government that was into its third term, led by a Prime Minister who had been at the helm for the duration of its time of office. According to the 'Opposition-Craft' model, this set of circumstances should have provided fertile territory on which to fight from opposition. The framework suggests that governments that have been in power for lengthy spells are susceptible to the erosion of popularity as the long-term effects of their decision taking polarises opinion and hits their approval ratings (Heppell, 2008). However, Cameron found that New Labour, under Blair, was still substantially ahead in the opinion polls – see Figure 12 below – which showed a +8% lead for Labour in the first YouGov poll following Cameron's leadership victory (October 2005). Labour's leads in the polls eventually gave way to some small Tory leads during Blair's remaining years in power, but these were always tenuous, as exemplified in the table below when Labour retook the lead in June 2007 at the point of Blair's departure from Downing Street.

Figure 12: YouGov voting intention polls

Date	Conservative	Labour	Liberal Dem	Con Lead
June 2007	35	38	15	-3
Mar 2007	38	32	16	+6
Nov 2006	37	32	16	+5
June 2006	39	33	18	+6
Jan 2006	39	40	13	-1
Nov 2005	35	37	20	-2
Oct 2005	32	40	19	-8

Source: <http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/voting-intention-2005-2010>

The government that Cameron initially faced remained stubbornly popular amongst the electorate. Whilst Labour had been in office for eight years by this point, it had yet to suffer in the polls; at this time, following its historic third general election victory, YouGov reported Labour leads of around 8% (YouGov (a)). Labour had shed support from disenchanted voters upset over the war in Iraq, and had been damaged by the lack of unity between Blair and Brown at the top of government (Seldon, 2005, pp.331-45), but those difficulties had not become so acute as to rid Labour of its opinion poll leads. It was ahead on core issues such as its ability to manage the economy and deliver strong public services. It also led on the key issue of leadership and who was best to serve as Prime Minister, a contest in which polls put Blair significantly ahead of Cameron throughout the period for which the two leaders faced each other until Blair's departure in 2007 (see Figure 14).

Effectively, the Labour government that Cameron faced, whilst Blair was Prime Minister 2005-07, was very much parked on the centre ground of British politics (Hindmoor, 2004). It led the Conservatives on most key areas of policy, it was seen to be managing the economy effectively, and apart from disquiet over its handling of the war in Iraq remained largely popular with the electorate (UK Polling Report Website, 30th July, 2007). Not only was Labour seen as centrist, but Blair himself was seen to be even more centrist than his party. Therefore, Cameron faced Blair who had positioned his party at the centre of British politics since 1994, as noted by Quinn: 'one of the biggest obstacles in the Tories' way was Tony Blair, who was seen by voters as centrist' (Quinn, 2008, p.195). Blair's only departure from the mainstream centre came with his decision to take the country to war in Iraq (Keegan, 2004). However, even after that decision Labour still won another term in government. So, whilst the Conservatives had built modest opinion poll leads whilst Blair was still PM in 2007, Rawnsley notes that Blair was still an electoral draw for the Labour Party: 'Polling in the first quarter of the year put Labour about ten points behind the Tories.

More ominously, polls often indicated that the Conservative lead would increase when Labour was led by Brown' (Rawnsley, 2010, p.435).

Measured against the key elements of the 'Opposition-Craft' framework for analysis, it would be hard to conclude that the governing party that Cameron faced 2005-07 was anything other than in a strong place and challenging, therefore, to oppose. Whilst Labour's stratospheric poll ratings of its early days in government had long gone, it was essentially still governing competently and was positioned in the centre ground of British politics (UK Polling Report Website, 30th July, 2007). Therefore, the length of time it served was insufficient as a contextual factor to give the Conservatives in opposition an advantage. All of that, however, was about to change with Blair's resignation and departure from Downing Street (The Guardian Website, 10th May, 2007).

When Brown became Prime Minister in 2007 the general consensus was that he began his premiership well. According to The Telegraph, he 'presented a calm, reassuring appearance' at Number 10 (The Telegraph Website, 22nd June, 2008). He dealt with a series of terrorist attacks competently; he was seen to proactively manage the foot-and-mouth crisis that began shortly after his installation as leader; and his leadership style was received well following the Blair years (Theakston, 2011). Such was the initial success of the Brown premiership that talk of a snap election emerged. Some in Labour had been encouraged by lengthening poll leads over the Conservatives and therefore encouraged media speculation about the possibility of an early general election in the autumn of 2007 (The Telegraph Website, 22nd June, 2008).

Brown did not shut down talk of the election with the inevitable result that speculation reached fever pitch when he visited Iraq during the Conservative Party conference that autumn. His visit backfired and was seen to be opportunistic and poorly timed (BBC Website, 2nd October, 2007). Unsettled by the prospect of an early election, the Conservatives fought back with the announcement of a new policy on inheritance tax, which grabbed the headlines and proved popular amongst the electorate. By early October of 2007, spooked by the Tories' conference announcement on tax, and unsettled further by more mixed polling data, Brown decided to pull the plug on an early election. The decision to pull back proved to be a turning point from which Labour in government was never to recover. Brown reflects on that period and, in his own words, comments that, 'I cannot write about the events of 5 and 6 October without regret' (Brown, 2017, p.222). He further

declares that what followed was 'nothing short of a political catastrophe' (Brown, 2017, p.223).

At a stroke, the Labour government that Cameron opposed appeared to lose its reputation for competent governance (Cowley and Stuart, 2014). Brown's reputation was left in tatters (Theakston, 2011), especially as he tried to claim that polling evidence which showed that Labour might not win the election had nothing to do with his decision. That perception of Brown was further exacerbated by Cameron's 'savage attack' on him at PMQs shortly after the PM had decided to opt against an election, when Cameron declared: 'You are the first prime minister in history to flunk an election because you thought you were going to win it' (The Guardian Website, 10th October 2017).

Therefore, the 'election that never was' (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2010, pp.1-19) provided a turning point for the Conservatives in opposition to exploit a more fertile political context in which to conduct their affairs. The government they faced from late 2007 to 2010 then appeared to make one misstep after another. For example, the expenses scandal marked another crisis which appeared to show the government to be in decline, and one in which the Conservatives appeared to profit (Eggers, 2014). In the midst of that scandal, Cameron managed to skilfully exploit the situation by setting the political agenda, all of which left Brown looking out of touch and behind the curve (McBride, 2013, p.194).

The scandal around expenses was initiated when *The Daily Telegraph* published a series of articles exposing MPs' expenses claims. That exposure was damaging to all political parties, but in his response to it Cameron seemed to strike the right tone in his public comment by apologising not just for Conservative MPs' behaviour, but for all parliamentarians. He, therefore, appeared prime ministerial and '[b]y making a blanket apology before the Prime Minister [...] he had seized the initiative' (Snowdon, 2010, p.353). Brown's media advisor at the time, Damian McBride, suggests heavily that Cameron had been tipped off in advance about the Telegraph's story when he claims that Cameron, 'seemed remarkably well prepared for the emergence of the story, and calm and decisive in his response' (McBride, 2013, p.194). Whatever the background to how the story came out, Cameron's deft political manoeuvring was in marked contrast with Brown, who looked slow to react and out of step with the public mood.

The ability for an opposition leader to set the agenda is a key attribute as described in the model. In that regard, Cameron found himself more able to make the political weather by setting the parameters of the political debate. This agenda-setting ability of the Conservatives was further exemplified on the issue of crime. On a number of occasions, the Conservatives described Britain as a 'broken society' (Byrne, Kerr, and Foster, 2011, p.203) and used various media storylines to evidence their concerns. Cameron developed his theme by using the murders of Rhys Jones, a schoolboy from Liverpool who was shot while caught up in a gang-related crime (The Telegraph Website, 21st June 2018), and Garry Newlove, a man who was attacked outside his home tackling youths trying to steal his car (The Telegraph Website, 29th May, 2018) to symbolise a country in decline under Labour. The Tories' approach had similarities with New Labour under Blair when they spoke of the killing of James Bulger in the 1990s, and was equally as effective (Adonis, 2020). In the context of a government that had been in power for a lengthy spell, Cameron appeared to cut through to the public with his rhetoric on crime and thereby demonstrated an ability to lead, set the political agenda, and associated the Conservatives with an alternative political strategy.

The 'Opposition-Craft' model argues that the context in which an opposition operates is more conducive to winning the subsequent general election if the government they oppose is governing away from the centre and, by extension, the government has achieved the central mission on which it was elected. Labour in government from 1997 was elected to power to: a) invest in public services, and b) usher in more socially liberal policies (Kavanagh and Dale, 2000). Labour won power in 1997, 2001 and 2005 on that programme and it formed the central mission of the government (Mattinson, 2010, p.295). By 2005, Cameron faced a Labour government very much still on that agenda and thus it was seen to be still governing at the centre. In that context, Cameron and George Osborne (as Shadow Chancellor) moved to accept much of Labour's economic programme for government on investment in public services and on its socially liberal agenda (Beech, 2009, pp.26-27).

That strategy was to change when the global financial collapse occurred in 2008 (Hodson and Mabett, 2009). In the years leading up to the financial collapse, the Tories positioned themselves as sticking to Labour's spending plans for the next parliament. However, the Tories recognised that the financial crisis was a watershed moment from which they could profit. Therefore, in a series of policy moves following the financial crash, the Tory leadership managed to 'decouple' (Snowdon, 2010, p.333) themselves from Labour's

spending plans for the next parliament and shift the economic argument onto one of debt and the deficit.

The global financial crisis produced a situation where the Brown government responded, in a typically Keynesian manner, by pumping money into the economy in order to stimulate demand. That strategy produced a fiscal deficit (Rawnsley, 2010, pp.601-02), which the Conservatives used to attack Labour to some considerable effect. Cameron and Osborne managed to link the deficit with Labour overspending on the public services; whilst it is questionable whether that charge was factually correct, the political optics worked to the Conservatives' advantage as Labour's approach to public spending was blamed for the mounting financial deficit (Gamble, 2010, p.651).

The Tories were then able to describe the economic situation as 'Britain's broken economy' (The Telegraph Website, 17th October, 2008). That context shifted the economic debate for the first time in a generation and undermined the Labour government's reputation for sound financial management and its central mission in government. For the first time in a number of years, and without public backlash, the Conservatives argued that public spending would need to be cut following the next general election. On the face of it, that strategy was a risk as in both 2001 and 2005 Brown, as Chancellor, had successfully drawn a distinction between 'Labour investments versus Tory cuts' (Snowdon, 2010, p.333). Cameron and Osborne's new position recreated that same political environment from which the Conservatives had gone on to lose in 2001 and 2005. However, this time the Conservatives recognised that the economic context had changed and, with it, the political centre ground had shifted. In that context, the Labour government's 'investment' position appeared profligate and reckless (Snowdon, 2010, p.333).

Throughout the next two years up until the 2010 election, Labour opted to stick with its Keynesian approach to the financial crisis, and also continued with its commitment to invest in the public services which had won it the previous three elections (Baccaro, Boyer, Crouch and Regini, 2010). Brown felt that Labour was best served by sticking with its election-winning strategy and continuing to push the line of Labour investment versus Tory cuts (Mattinson, 2010, p.295). However, Brown had not sensed the shift in public mood during the economic crisis, so in the context of the government they faced the Tories were able successfully to describe Labour's position as left-wing ideology over pragmatic economic management following the global financial meltdown. Under Cameron, the

Conservatives claimed that the government, like all previous Labour governments, had borrowed too much money and that that approach had crashed the economy, as noted by Cameron: 'Why is our economy broken? Not just because Labour wrongly thought they'd abolished boom and bust. But because government got too big, spent too much and doubled the national debt' (Cameron, 2009). Reflecting years later in his memoirs, Brown accepts that the Tories' argument on debt and their line that 'Britain was going to way of Greece' had resonated with voters. He also noted that the British electorate began to have a 'general distaste for debt' (Brown, 2017, p.356).

Thus, Labour's position did not change and was entirely consistent with its approach in the previous three elections; what had once been seen as a centrist position endorsed by the electorate prior to the crash soon became seen as a dogmatic and ideologically driven left-wing approach incompatible in the context of a rising fiscal deficit. The Conservatives' new position, however, came to be seen as a more mainstream position. It is arguable whether the Conservatives' approach was fully endorsed by the electorate. Brown himself argued that the both Labour and the Liberal Democrats went into the 2010 election with an 'anti-austerity manifesto' (Brown, 2017, p.378) and together gained far more votes than the Conservatives. It was only after the Conservatives entered coalition with the Liberal Democrats that their austerity agenda gained full traction with the electorate (Adonis, 2013, p.153).

The model of 'Opposition-Craft' suggests that oppositions can have some agency in moving a government from the mainstream centre, but this analysis has shown that the Conservatives did not displace Labour off the centre ground; the economy changed and, consequently, so did Labour's spatial positioning relative to the centre. On this aspect of their journey in opposition, it appeared then that the Conservatives benefitted from Labour's departure from the centre, but they did not fully capitalise on that helpful context. By adopting a position on the economy of large-scale cuts, which had lost them the previous three general elections, the Conservatives certainly had a radical approach which was full of risk (Hay, 2010). However, it cannot be claimed that the strategy entirely worked with the electorate given their failure to win an outright majority – its full attractiveness as a position came after the 2010 election and is therefore outside the scope of this thesis.

On the economy, voters saw Labour vacate the centre ground from 2007. That perception on the economy was further cemented with their view of Brown who was seen as generally more left-leaning than Blair. Polling evidence at the time suggested that replacing Blair with Brown in 2007 was a shift leftwards (Wells, 2013), which was further compounded in 2008 when the economy turned sour. Voters saw Brown as positioned to the left of centre; according to the polling group YouGov, on the left-right continuum, ‘Brown [...] received scores of between -20 and -27’, whereas ‘Tony Blair [was] perceived as slightly *right* of centre, with scores of +3 to +7’ (Wells, 2013).

Figure 13: Which of these would make the best Prime Minister?

Date	Gordon Brown	David Cameron	Nick Clegg	Don't Know	Cameron Lead
May 2010	25	37	17	21	+12
Jan 2010	23	33	11	33	+10
June 2009	18	35	10	34	+17
Jan 2009	27	35	7	32	+8
June 2008	18	37	6	39	+19
Jan 2008	27	31	5	38	+4

Source: https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/today_uk_import/YG-Archives-Pol-Trackers-Leaders-100518.pdf

Brown’s lack of popularity as a leader was also a problematic feature during the 2007-10 period and should have been an advantage to the Conservatives (see Figure 13 above). On the key question of who would make the most effective PM, Cameron built up leads during that era, in marked contrast to when he faced Blair as PM (see Figure 14 below). This again showed a clear difference in the environment Cameron faced when opposing Blair 2005-07, and Brown 2007-10.

Figure 14: Who would make the best Prime Minister?

Date	Tony Blair	David Cameron	Menzies Campbell	Don't Know	Cameron Lead
Mar 2007	28	27	6	-	-1
Nov 2006	28	23	6	-	-5
Apr 2006	30	21	8	-	-9
Date	Tony Blair	David Cameron	Charles Kennedy	Don't Know	Cameron Lead
Nov 2005	30	24	8	-	-6

Source: <http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/leaders>

Whilst arguably Labour may have departed from the centre ground after 2007, this had little to do with the repositioning of the Conservative Party and had more to do with the change of Labour leader and the economic crash of 2008 - neither of which was engineered by the Tories. The Tories faced an unpopular PM (see Figure 13 above) and managed to neutralise some of Labour's previous appeal by accepting the governing party's hegemony on social policy (Carter, 2009). So, when scored against the criterion set out in the 'Opposition-Craft' model, the Conservatives under Cameron faced a Labour government under Brown that was vulnerable to an effective opposition. Therefore, in relation to the government they opposed, the environmental factors were not insurmountable for the Conservatives, but not everything was in place for victory. The Conservatives were clearly at an advantage, however, they failed fully to drive home that advantage. But what of the economic position at the time? Was this also a conducive contextual factor for the Conservatives?

Under the terms set out in the model, this thesis has established that there had been a 'seismic shock' to economy as a result of the global financial meltdown in 2008. The net result of that crisis was an enormous recession, which saw unemployment climb and house prices crash (Gregg and Wadsworth, 2010). Such was the devastation caused by the crash that most economic commentators described the recession that hit the UK in late 2008/09/10 as the 'largest since the great depression' of the 1930s (The Guardian Website, 10th April 2008). That economic context provided Cameron's party with a setting in which to accuse Brown of a 'complete and utter failure in his management of the economy' (The Telegraph Website, 17th October 2008) and which, according to the model of 'Opposition-Craft', should have been a favourable economic climate in which to work as a party of opposition.

In sharp contrast to the economic chaos of the latter part of the decade, the economic conditions during the Blair years of 2005-07 were relatively positive in that the country was benefitting from substantial economic growth, rising house prices, and low inflation. Voters' perceptions of their likely future wealth at that time were strong (Ipsos-MORI (b.1)). From 2005, the Conservatives set an economic plan based on that positive economic position, but in truth it was not a favourable economic context for an opposition party to flourish, for why would an electorate turn on a government that has provided economic growth and rising prosperity?

In the second half of the 2005-10 Labour government, the economic conditions were in sharp contrast to how they had been during the first half of that parliament, and were far more conducive for an opposition to deal with in terms of setting out an alternative agenda. In that respect, the economic policies that the Conservatives promoted prior to the crash were never going to be as effective (or relevant) after the global financial crisis, but by putting a new set of policies forward, post 2008, the Conservatives took advantage of the changing economic climate (Lee, in Lee and Beech, 2009). Commenting on that shift in economic context and Conservative Party policy, Dorey claims that 'the 2008 banking crisis and consequent global recession had significantly altered many of the economic and political assumptions on which the Party's new policies had been based' (Dorey, 2010, p.405).

As the recession gripped the UK, polling evidence showed that confidence in the government's ability to manage the economy declined during the 2005-10 parliament (see Figure 15 below). Again, it is notable how the popularity of the government's position waned in the second half of the parliament after the financial crisis in contrast with the relatively large leads it enjoyed in the first half of the parliament.

Figure 15: I am going to read out a list of problems facing Britain today. I would like you to tell me whether you think the Conservative party, the Labour party or the Liberal Democrats has the best policies on each problem.

Base: c. 1,000-2,000 GB adults aged 18+: Managing the economy

	April 2005	Sept 2006	Sept 2007	June 2008	Aug 2008	Jan 2009	April 2009	Sept 2009	Mar 2010
Labour	44	31	38	27	23	29	25	25	26
Conservative	18	18	13	36	38	30	30	30	29
Lib Dem	5	4	4	5	7	9	10	12	12
'Don't Know'	32	46	43	30	27	25	19	29	30
% Labour Lead	+24	+13	+25	-9	-15	-1	-5	-5	-3

Source: <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/best-party-key-issues-managing-economy>

It is evident that the Conservatives built a lead on economic competence during this period, but it is also notable that, as the 2010 election approached, that lead shrank. The model of 'Opposition-Craft' questions whether it is the government or the opposition that has the lead on economic competence as a key determinant of the likely winner of the subsequent general election. The fact that the Tory opposition's lead on this issue shrank in the months leading up to the 2010 election is another indicator that the Conservatives were not entirely trusted to take the levers of power.

In relation to the context around financial management, the model also questions whether the economy is working for everyone. This question points to thinking about economic wealth that runs deeper than short-term perceptions around whether there is growth or a recession. Despite the severe economic crisis of 2008, questions around effectiveness of the capitalist economic system were still muted. Indeed, there was a debate about deregulation of the financial sector as a key determinant of the financial crash, but ironically the Conservatives successfully campaigned to pin the blame for the crash on Labour overspending and consequently managed to divert attention from wider questions about the economic system (The Guardian Website, 18th May, 2015). Therefore, it cannot be argued that the opposition under Cameron benefitted from a revolt on the part of voters about the economic system, especially as the Conservatives were, if anything, more associated with capitalism than the Labour Party. Indeed, questions of those kind did not become full-throated until the 2017 election, by which point the economic debate was still centred on questions around how the country was to come to terms with the fallout from

the crash that had happened nearly ten years earlier (The Guardian Website, 6th September, 2018).

Therefore, on the economics, we can conclude that the Conservatives worked in an environment that was conducive for effective opposition. The difficult financial position occurred towards the end of the parliament, and was therefore located near to the general election in 2010. That circumstance benefitted Cameron's Conservatives, but polling evidence suggests that the Labour government started to regain some support in its handling of the economy as the worst of the recession had passed by 2010 and growth had returned (see Figure 15). However, its reputation for good governance around the economy had been severely tarnished, all of which was of benefit to the opposition at the time.

By 2005, the Conservatives had established considerable political distance from their eighteen years in power from 1979 until 1997 (Seldon, 1997; and Seldon and Collings, 1999). Indeed, the Conservatives were into their fourth iteration as an opposition outfit by the time Cameron came to lead his party, having previously been led for lengthy periods during this era by Hague, Duncan-Smith and Howard (Fowler, 2010). Thus, the political space between the time when they left office in 1997 and 2005 was considerable, not just in terms of years out of power, but also in respect of the various different strategies that the party had employed during the intervening years in opposition – all of which, again, should have provided the Conservatives, under Cameron, with a useful context in which to manage his party. Therefore, on the first principle of the 'Opposition-Craft' model, the Cameron era of opposition passes one of the critical tests: it was not a first-time opposition, and it was, therefore, distanced from power at its inception.

Inevitably, many of the faces of the 1979-97 Conservative governments had departed by the time Cameron became leader in 2005. Big players like Heseltine and Portillo had moved on and been replaced with politicians without the political baggage arising from their time in power. The association of personnel with that long-serving administration was a factor in their defeats in 2001 and 2005. For example, Hague and Howard had been prominent cabinet ministers in the Thatcher/Major governments, and Duncan-Smith had been a high-profile backbench rebel in the early 1990s and had sealed his reputation in a different way (Hayton and Heppell, 2010). When assessed against the model, Cameron

was advantaged by the lack of association with the past as he was able to bring in rising talent untinged by the legacy of the last Conservative administration.

In terms of a process of internal party reform as advocated by the model, the party that Cameron inherited was largely unreformed from the time it had been ousted from power until his election as leader in 2005 (Dorey, 2007, p.156). Despite three general election defeats, the party was essentially in the same political space that had led to its defeat in 1997; Cameron's only advantage was the longevity of the government's term in office and the natural erosion of its support during that time (Dorey, 2007, p.156). He arrived on the back of the Conservatives' third general election defeat – albeit one at which Labour's majority had been significantly reduced, but it was still a general election that administered a crushing outcome on the Conservatives.

On the back of that defeat, Cameron came to the leadership of his party after his immediate predecessors had attempted, and then also abandoned, plans to 'modernise' their party (Dorey, 2007, p.139). Following initial attempts to modernise their party, Hague, Duncan-Smith and Howard all decided that shoring up core support was the best strategy for winning to next general election (Evans, 2008, p.303). Each leader appeared to pay lip service to what might be described as modernisation in the initial stages of their time as leader, but all subsequently retreated to a core-value approach in the latter stages of their tenure at the top of their party (Byrne, Foster and Kerr, 2012, p.20) – as noted by Dorey: 'While Cameron's three predecessors had also espoused greater social tolerance and inclusiveness during the early parts of their respective leaderships, none had appeared particularly comfortable or convincing in their advocacy of such an approach, and as such it was perhaps not too surprising that each had readily tracked back to the Right when the opinion polls failed to indicate any increase in the Conservative Party's popularity' (Dorey, 2007, p.139).

Each of Cameron's predecessors appeared to become obsessed with issues around Europe and immigration (Fowler, 2010, pp.190-200), despite the fact that these policy matters were nowhere near the top of voters' concerns. These seemingly remote policy positions simply served to demonstrate how removed the aspirations of the Conservative Party had become from those of the electorate (Snowden, 2010, p.162), and consequently the party was punished at the polls. The devastating result of the 1997 election left the Conservatives on 31% of the popular vote, by 2005 their position had only improved by two

percentage points to 33% (Ipsos-MORI (c)). It is hard to conclude that that marginal gain was down to anything but growing disenchantment with the Labour government following the Iraq war, rather than an enthusiasm for the Conservatives' core-vote strategy, fixation with the issue of Europe, and all the associated policies around immigration.

The Conservatives' narrow improvement in terms of vote share at the general election in 2005 was not impressive, especially given that they lost the election to a relatively large Labour majority of 66 seats (Butler and Kavanagh, 2005). The model asks whether oppositions have narrowly lost the previous election, as a determining factor as to whether they might be able to win power at the subsequent general election. On the face of it the Conservatives still looked far from power in 2005 given Labour's majority. There was little or no scope for the Conservatives to embarrass the Labour government given the parliamentary majority Labour had in the House of Commons. On that facet of the 'Opposition-Craft' model, the Conservatives in opposition were at a disadvantage. But on closer inspection of the result of that general election, there was perhaps more cheer for the Conservative Party.

In 2005, the first-past-the-post voting system very much favoured the Labour Party and their majority in that election flattered their electoral position as they only won 35.2% of the popular vote. Thus, the gap in terms of the popular vote had narrowed from 12.5% in 1997 to 2.8% in 2005 (Butler and Kavanagh, 2005). So, by the time Cameron came to lead his party, the model of 'Opposition-Craft' suggests that there were reasons for optimism given its performance at the previous general election. However, it should be noted that in terms of the number of seats that needed to be won in order to secure victory at the next election, the Conservatives had a long distance to travel.

Each of Cameron's three predecessors were Thatcherites and each had won the leadership of the Conservative Party on the basis of being Thatcherites (Heppell and Hill, 2009, p.399). Heppell and Hill claim that, in the leadership elections of 1997 and 2001, and the leadership coup of 2003 in which Howard became leader, ideology was central to Conservative Party members' voting intentions. As leadership candidates, their appeal inside the party was that they were Thatcherites, and their ultimate success in winning their leadership ballot was inherently tied up with the fact that they were seen as successors to the Thatcherite ideology. But, in 2005, Cameron became the first non-Thatcherite to win the party leadership in the post-Thatcher era. His victory was all the

more impressive given the make-up of the parliamentary party in 2005. Heppell and Hill observed that Thatcherites formed the majority of Conservative MPs in the parliamentary party at the time. Using the previous three leadership contests as a guide, then normally a Thatcherite candidate would have had an electoral advantage in any leadership contest. However, despite lacking a Thatcherite pedigree, Cameron was able to draw support from the Thatcherite MPs. Seemingly, his electoral appeal 'transcended ideological categorisation' (Heppell and Hill, 2009, p.398).

However, the view that Cameron was not a Thatcherite was not shared by all Conservative MPs. Commenting on the suggestion that the Conservatives had actively elected a non-Thatcherite to lead their party, Widdecombe asks, '[w]as that a conscious reaction on the part of the party? [...] I don't think so'. In underscoring her view that Cameron was indeed a Thatcherite, she goes on to posit that 'his pedigree within the party was pretty impeccable' (Widdecombe, 2013; as quoted in Lack, 2014). Whatever his background, Thatcherite or not, it is hard to escape the fact that Cameron appeared to possess widespread electoral appeal. The failed core-vote approaches from 1997 until 2005 left the Conservatives with a hunger for power and a clear sense that any continuation of that approach would end only in further defeat (Bale, 2011a, p.253). By 2005, the party accepted that a new approach was essential.

The model of 'Opposition-Craft' asks whether opposition parties have journeyed towards the political centre and whether they have internally reformed as a condition of whether they are suited to winning power. By the time Cameron became leader, the party had not made any substantial progress in the direction suggested by the model (Dorey, 2007, p.156). Indeed, Cameron became leader of his party following others whose ideological position was at odds with his own. In that regard, Cameron inherited a party in a position far from the place advanced by this thesis; it was therefore for him to forge an entirely new strategy under a new ideological banner. When assessed against the model, Cameron's position at the outset of his leadership was not strong, although there was plenty of scope to demonstrate explicitly to the electorate that the party was changing under his stewardship. In choosing the more centrist Cameron, the Conservatives went some way towards electing a leader around whom the electorate could more comfortably coalesce in the manner described by Finlayson (2002) at the outset of this thesis. That direction of travel will be explored in more detail in later sections of this analysis.

3.4 Strategy

The model of 'Opposition-Craft' suggests that it is necessary for parties of opposition to fight general elections from the centre ground of politics. In that spirit, and from the outset of his leadership of the Conservative Party, Cameron recognised that it was necessary to move his party to the centre (Bale, 2011a, p.151). In his first speech to the Conservative Party conference as leader, he declared that, '[o]ur Party's history tells us the ground on which political success is built. It is the centre ground' (Cameron, 2006a). Writing in the early stages of Cameron's leadership, Dorey comments that, 'Cameron has constantly reiterated the need to reposition the Conservative Party on the centre ground of British Politics' (Dorey, 2007, p.143). Therefore, from 2005, Cameron began to move the party leftwards and towards the centre. However, he was to fail to get there in the manner described by the 'Opposition-Craft' model.

As an initial move on that journey towards the centre, the party produced a pamphlet called *Built to Last*, a framework of values which declared, in first-draft form: 'We are a modern, compassionate Conservative party' (Cameron, 2006d). By the time that document reached Conservative Party members for consultation, that description of the party had been removed, which with the benefit of hindsight epitomised the struggle Cameron was to face in his battle to move the party onto the centre ground. The document did, however, foreshadow what was to come from Cameron's team in terms of social policy announcements; under new leadership, the party wanted to develop a new brand of conservatism with centrist social policy at its heart (Cameron, 2006d).

The battle to move to the centre was complex but stemmed largely from the inheritance Cameron received from his predecessors (Fowler, 2010). After 1975, following Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party leadership victory, two identifiable wings of the party emerged: firstly, the more centrist (or One-Nation) approach to conservatism, which came to dominate the party during the post-war consensus years (Hickson, 2004) and, secondly, the new right/Thatcherite-wing of the Conservative Party, which emerged after 1975 and superseded One Nationism from the 1980s onwards (Campbell, 2015, p.323), as commented on by Anne Widdecombe: 'The party had become quite Thatcherite' (Widdecombe, 2013; as quoted in Lack, 2014). Following Cameron's victory in 2005, Beech identifies, in addition to those two stables of thinking inside the party, a third classification of conservative ideology: 'liberal conservatism' (Beech, 2009, p.19). Beech draws this distinction in order to illustrate the new sense of social policy which came to fruition under

Cameron's leadership. That brand of conservatism aimed to chart a course between One Nationism and Thatcherism.

An example of the move to make the party more liberal on social policy was on the environment (O'Hara, 2007, p.203). This was an area of policy on which the Conservatives lacked association and had not been strong. To that end, Cameron committed the party to the environmental cause and promised to enact policies, if elected to government, which would protect it (Carter, 2009, pp.233-42). By 2008, the extent of that shift in policy was stark when the party invited the electorate to 'Vote Blue, Go Green'. Throughout their time in opposition the Conservative Party focused a lot of attention on the environment in order to symbolise their movement towards the centre on social policy; that movement was further exemplified by announcements in support of gay marriage (Clements, 2013), as noted directly to the writer by Caroline Spelman: 'Addressing changing social norms such as attitudes to homosexuality were examples of modernisation which moved the party forwards' (Spelman, March 2020).

But Cameron's battle with his own party was to be even more complicated than a simple bid to keep the two (or three) wings of his party on board with his agenda. The party was also riven with entrenched factions over the issue of Europe (Heppell, 2002, pp.320-21). Heppell argues that divisions in the Tory Party were more complex than a simple One-Nation Conservatism versus Thatcherism dynamic. He argues that the Thatcherite position inside the party was dominant and that the debate was more about where the Conservatives should position themselves on the Eurosceptic continuum (Heppell, 2002, pp.320-21). Cameron recognised this complexity and wished for the party to 'stop banging on about Europe' (BBC Website, 1st October 2006). Recognising that the issue of Europe was a fringe matter for the electorate, Cameron set about tutoring his party into accepting that it was not a central concern of voters. He also sensed that the party's obsession with Europe added to the impression that the party would not govern in the mainstream centre if elected to office. Therefore, for Cameron, marginalising the debate around the EU inside the party was about setting an impression that the party was on the centre ground of British politics (BBC Website, 1st October, 2006).

While it is true that the Conservative Party moved policy towards the more liberal centre under Cameron's leadership, many in the party were reluctant to make that journey because of the ideological loyalties inside the party. A number of commentators suggested

that the Conservative Party became prisoners of the Thatcherite wing - obsessed with free-market thinking, low taxation, and isolation from Europe, all of which meant that Cameron's job in opposition was exceptionally problematic (Fowler, 2010, pp.190-200). It is notable, however, that Thatcher's immediate successors grappled with the same political dynamic but miscalculated some of the more centrist positions that Thatcher herself had taken during her premiership (Moore, 2013, p.392). Indeed, Cameron's battle to secure a debate within the party free from its obsession over Europe and the EU was to be an uphill one.

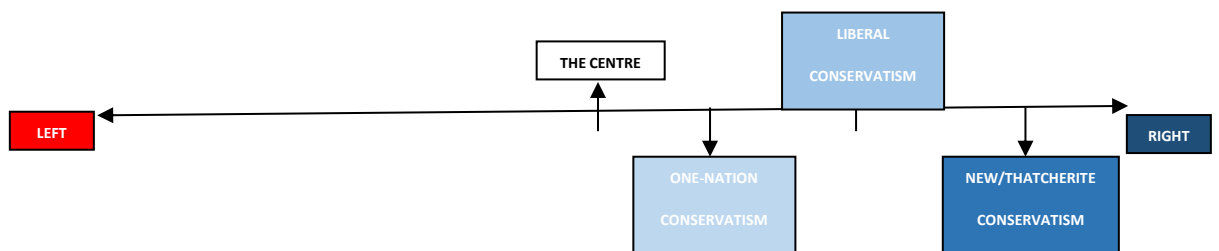
In order to address the miscalculation of his predecessors, Cameron marked a departure from the Thatcherite agenda, commenting in *The Independent* in 2006: 'At the next election, a whole generation of people will be voting who were born after Margaret Thatcher left office. So, when it comes to tackling the big challenges our society faces, I won't be a prisoner of an ideological past' (quoted in Dorey, 2007, p.143). He went further when he claimed (on numerous occasions) that 'there is such a thing as society, we just don't think it is the same thing as the state' (Cameron, 2007). By using this subversion of a famous Thatcher quotation, Cameron underscored his determination to chart a new direction for the party that was closer to the centre ground of British politics than the positions his party had adopted in the previous few elections.

On social policy then, it is safe to conclude that the Conservative Party, under Cameron, did move some distance towards the political centre (O'Hara, 2007). But on economic policy it is a more complex picture. As noted earlier in this analysis, in the first two years of the Cameron opposition, the party committed itself to the Labour government's spending plans (Snowdon, 2010, p.333). That move was a direct bid to move the party to the centre ground as it consequently shed the Tories of their traditional tax-cutting policies, which had so damaged them in previous elections. But after the financial crash that position was to change once again as the Conservatives promoted policies that were about limiting government spending. In the changed climate following the crash, that new position was more in tune with where the electorate was located than the approach undertaken by the Labour government (Snowdon, 2010, p.333). It also kept the various wings of the party quiescent with the direction of travel in which Cameron was steering the party.

By developing a new brand of liberal conservatism (Beech, 2009, p.19) inside the party, Cameron successfully straddled both wings of the organisation by being both socially liberal

and economically Thatcherite from 2008 onwards. In working towards that end, he developed new social policies designed to bring the Conservatives towards the centre ground of politics and thus created a more moderate impression of the Conservatives in the minds of the electorate (O’Hara, 2007, pp.293-329). He was also partially successful in quietening the debate on the EU inside the party (although, ironically, later in government, that issue was to undo his premiership spectacularly). So, in effect, Cameron pioneered a definition of a new ‘centrist’ position inside the Conservative Party. But that was not the same thing as a central position in British politics. The ‘liberal conservative’ political position was still to the right of the centre ground of British politics, albeit to the left of where Hague, Duncan-Smith and Howard had led the party (see Figure 16 below). The position Cameron arrived at was not a Downsian definition of the centre, as advanced by our model of ‘Opposition-Craft’ (Downs, 1957).

Figure 16: Conservative Party ideological positions



(Source: Lack, 2014, p. 70)

Whilst Cameron may have shifted his party from entrenched Thatcherite positions, some commentators have argued that the position he eventually ended up in was largely Thatcherite with some minor modifications on social policy, or, as Byrne, Foster and Kerr describe it, ‘Thatcherism with a human face’ (Byrne, Foster, and Kerr, 2011, p.193). Conversely, other commentators have claimed that he went further and that his position was actually more akin to a ‘kind of One Nation Conservatism’ (Evans, 2008, p.299). All appear to coalesce around the idea that Cameron led the party leftwards, but the extent of that movement was debateable. The reason he was unable to get the Conservatives firmly onto the centre ground was that Thatcherite ideology was too big as an obstacle for the Cameronites to overcome. That task became all the more troublesome once the global financial crash occurred and party members returned to their more traditional stance on

tax and spending. Therefore, on the parameters set out in the model of 'Opposition-Craft', the Conservative Party under David Cameron failed to arrive at the centre ground of British politics, but made up some political distance towards it, which improved its electoral prospects.

The model indicates that opposition parties should craft a narrative around their posturing on the centre ground of politics. Effectively, the model suggests that it is not enough to be on the centre ground, in terms of policy, but goes further to advance the notion that parties need to make their journey onto the centre an explicit aspect of their communication strategy. To that end, this analysis has established that Cameron accepted the need to combine Thatcherite economic positions with more socially liberal rhetoric in order to suggest explicitly that his party was moving towards the centre. So, how effective were the Conservatives in conveying the narrative around the centre?

In order to achieve centre-ground and mainstream credentials in British politics and to maintain that position, political parties have to position and reposition themselves in order to adjust to the prevailing context. Their stance on the full range of issues may well have to remain fluid as the climate in which they operate evolves (Buckler and Dolowitz, 2009, p.11). What might be considered a centrist position may quickly become seen as outdated or extreme. For example, the Conservative Party's position on Section 28 was accepted as mainstream in the 1980s, but by the more liberal 2000s the same policy became evidence that the Conservatives were out of touch with the electorate (Hayton, 2010, pp.492-500).

Buckler and Dolowitz argue that long-term oppositions, like the Conservatives in 2005-10, are especially vulnerable to the need to change policy positions in order to court popularity. They suggest, however, that altering policy stance is fraught with issues: 'A party leadership undertaking renewal will risk facing charges not just of heterodoxy but of betrayal' (Buckler and Dolowitz, 2009, p.13). On this analysis, their suggestion for Cameron was that reform of the Conservatives should be anchored in the party's ideological identity (Buckler and Dolowitz, 2009, pp.11-14).

The narrative that Cameron fostered appeared to draw on Buckler and Dolowitz's lesson around ideological identity. He often imbued his rhetoric with traditional Conservative language, but also added a hint of his own modernising agenda. His *Scarman Lecture* speech in 2006 provided an example of this type of language: 'For years, we Conservatives

talked about rolling back the state. But that is not an end in itself. Our fundamental aim is to roll forward the frontiers of society' (Cameron, 2006c). And, in the 2009 *Spring Forum* speech: 'Yes, we are the party of strong borders, law and order and low taxes – and we always will be. But today we are also the party of the NHS, environment and social justice too' (Cameron, 2009a). Cameron's opening statements rooted his position in conservative traditions, but he built out from it in order to reposition the party.

Such was Cameron's verbal skill that, according to Gamble, 'flexibility and adroitness and nimble positioning were something the Conservatives had lost, but they rediscovered it under Cameron' (Gamble, 2010, p.645). However, the danger of such an approach for the Conservatives under Cameron was that it could alienate their core vote. Indeed, Gamble suggests further that Cameron was accused by critics in his party of 'abandoning core principles and beliefs' (Gamble, 2010, p.645). In addition, he was criticized, by those on the right, of 'planting the poisonous tree of Blairism in his shadow cabinet' (Tebbit, 2007) at just the time when the Blair star was starting to fade (Fowler, 2010, p.199).

Despite those criticisms, Cameron spoke in 2007 and described the Conservative Party as a party that was, 'Liberal and Conservative'. He went on to make claim that his party should be about 'Individual freedom and social responsibility' (as quoted in Beech, 2009, p.26). Beech argues that Cameron adopted this narrative about his party for a number of reasons: a) to distance himself from 'what he perceives as unsavoury elements of his party's past', b) to demonstrate that he is 'not a Tory right-winger', and c) to suggest that he is a conservative 'who wants to restore freedoms to the British people that have been lost under New Labour' (Beech, 2009, pp.26-27). It is notable in Beech's argument that Cameron's rhetoric was very much about positioning him personally, as leader, away from both his own party's past and also the perceived failures of the Labour administration that he opposed. Thus, part of the Conservative Party's narrative around the centre was about putting the leader's position to the fore.

As suggested by the model, Cameron used a language associated with the centre in order to craft a narrative around which the Conservatives could hang their pitch for government. They used adjectives such as 'compassionate' and 'liberal' to outline their prospectus for government, for which the electorate could also read 'centrist' and 'mainstream' (Evans, 2008, p.297). As we have noted, however, not all inside the party were comfortable with the new rhetoric. Bale argues that it was Cameron's ability as a leader that meant that a

sceptical Tory Party was convinced enough by him personally to make the journey towards the centre ground and buy into his narrative. His assured leadership style enabled Cameron to reposition the Conservative Party onto the centre on social policy; those positions, on issues like gay marriage, were in many ways counterintuitive to those he led (Clements, 2013). The fact that Cameron displayed strong leadership credentials meant that he was able to chronicle a renewed Conservative policy platform that was more centrist in nature than those advanced by his immediate predecessors (Bale, 2011a, p.151).

Bale argues that it was a hard-fought battle for Cameron to move his party towards the centre, as not all of the party that Cameron led were convinced by the virtues of his approach. In that regard, it was Cameron's strength of leadership and electoral expediency which led the party in that direction, and not any ideological conviction that the centre was the place to be (D'Ancona, in Clarke, James, Bale and Diamond, 2015, p.403). However, striking a more liberal tone in its communications enabled the Conservative Party to suggest that it would not undo the socially liberal agenda as enacted by the Labour government. Indeed, by proposing gay marriage, it could be argued that the Conservatives were extending that liberal agenda on social policy (Clements, 2013). On that narrow front then, the Conservatives presented themselves as a natural progression from the governing party's hegemony over policy; and, as such, the Conservatives successfully fulfilled this aspect of the model of 'Opposition-Craft'.

However, it was only on a limited number of policy areas that the Conservatives ended up at the centre. Indeed, Bale argues that the language of the centre and the narrative around it was about as far as Cameron was prepared (or able) to go outside of social policy. In this regard, writing about Cameron and the Conservative project in 2006, Bale questioned whether the Conservatives' claim to have returned the political centre was 'as good as actually being there?' (Bale, 2006, p.28). The Conservatives continued to project the notion that they were at the centre through their use of language and by triangulation on various issues, but in reality, this strategy betrayed a policy platform that was far from centrist. Nevertheless, that did not stop the Tories from operating as though they were at the centre through their rhetoric.

Dorey and Garnett argue that Cameron wanted an overarching policy story as a means by which to string his programme for government together. That desire led the Tories to offer the electorate the concept of the 'Big Society' which, according to Spelman, 'marked an

important shift in addressing the benefit of social action and move the party back onto the centre ground' (Spelman, March 2020). Dorey and Garnett contend that the big-society narrative was a 'kind of "triangulation" between Thatcherite "laissez-faire" and New Labour alleged "statism"' (Dorey and Garnett, 2012, p.414). The language around the 'Big Society' had echoes of the strategy adopted by the New Labour government; their brand terminology had included phrases like the 'Big Tent' and the 'Third Way', as a way of encapsulating a position that straddled two distinctive political stables (Dorey and Garnett, 2012, p.411). Cameron wanted an equivalent banner to the one used by New Labour that conveyed a softer image of the Conservative Party, but one that also implied that the Conservatives were, in part, the natural inheritors of the New Labour project – a key component of the 'Opposition-Craft' model – but, by extension, one that implied that they would govern in a manner that would give voters more freedom. Here then, the Conservative strategy was very much in line with the ideas set out in the model in the sense that they staked out a line around the centre that suggested the government they opposed had moved out from governing in the mainstream. They also cleverly used language associated with the winning electoral strategy of their opponents in order to suggest governing continuity (Dorey and Garnett, 2012, pp.411-14).

However, Dorey and Garnett also suggest that the Conservatives' 'Big Society' strategy was unnecessary in the context of the 2010 general election. Given the global financial meltdown of 2008 (Hodson and Mabett, 2009), they argue that the political environment had been so utterly transformed as to render the need for such an account as obsolete. The 'Big Society' was a strategy in political thinking that may well have fared better had the Conservatives gone into the 2010 election with the same conditions that they had faced in the period 2005-07. Therefore, on Dorey and Garnett's analysis, the Conservatives appeared to find an overarching narrative on the wrong issue and at the wrong time, and therefore 'Cameron's "Big Society" failed to emulate Blair's "Third Way"' (Dorey and Garnett, 2012, p.411).

The Conservatives appeared to have more success when narrating Labour's woes over the economy during this era rather than promoting the 'Big Society'. The economic story that the Conservatives told before the crash was all about signing up to Labour's spending plans (Bale, 2008, p.278), but in the latter years became about advocating austerity when it came to public spending. The narrative towards the end of the 2005-10 parliament was about painting the Labour government as profligate over-spenders whose approach would land

the country with more debt and higher taxes (The Guardian Website, 28th May 2010) – a view endorsed by Spelman: ‘It was accepted that [the] economy needed to [be] rebalanced after the profligacy of Labour’ (Spelman, March 2020). Therefore, the narrative was at least partially successful, under the terms set out in the model, when implying that Labour had departed governing from the centre and had moved to the left. Whilst the Conservatives undoubtedly set out to suggest Labour was on the far left, it is doubtful that this aspect of their posturing had much purchase given where Labour had been positioned since 1994.

The contrast between the story told around the ‘Big Society’ and the harsh tone of the austerity programme the Conservatives advocated led some to suggest that Cameron’s message was confused (Green, 2010, p.673). He started that centre-ground journey from scratch given the state of the party that he inherited in 2005 and, therefore, found that time was against his project. Things were made more complicated by the fact that he set out on a strategy in 2005, but then performed a *volte-face* in 2008 following the economic crash. In that respect, Jane Green’s criticism that Cameron’s electoral strategy was mired in ‘confusion’ (Green, 2010, p.673) is, in some respects, hardly surprising and is perhaps a product of the shifting context in which he led his party in opposition.

The Conservatives recognised that their strategy for election was very much to foreground Cameron as leader (Heppell, 2008, p.593). His personal attributes, leadership quality, and political position were central to their campaigning efforts. Thus, there was a clear approach taken by the party to differentiate the leader’s position from the rest of the party in a manner endorsed by the criteria for assessment in this thesis. According to McAnulla, the decision to distance Cameron from the party was something the Tories appeared to learn from New Labour whilst they were in opposition in the 1990s: ‘Cameron has also emulated Blair’s style of creating rows within his own party for political gain. Part of the strategy has been to antagonise the right of the party, hoping to provoke them into publicly admonishing Cameron, thereby establishing his “centrist” credentials’ (McAnulla, 2010, p.292). McAnulla argues that Cameron, for example, deliberately upset the grassroots of the Conservative Party by intimating that members were ‘obsessed’ with creating new grammar schools. Public spats with his own party were about forming the impression that Cameron was more centrist than his party.

Cameron appeared to antagonise his party on a number of fronts. For some his posturing on socially liberal policy marked him out as a very different Tory leader than those who had gone before (Bale, 2011a). For others, his efforts on the environment were counter to the traditional Conservative leader (Carter, 2009). Indeed, such was the need to show Cameron to be apart from his party that, on the environment, he personally became indelibly linked to the party's new stance: 'It became part of his public image, a matter of personal identity and identification' (Connelly, in Lee and Beech, 2009, p.134). Further still, those around Cameron let it be known that he considered himself to be the 'heir to Blair' in a move that was certain to upset those on the right of his party (Heppell, 2008, p.593). This strategy was successful, however, in crafting the leader's image as more centrist than his party and, therefore, different from it, also in the manner articulated by the model 'Opposition-Craft'.

Cameron appeared to adopt a self-consciously strong style of leadership. He was drawn to firm leadership where decisions were made obvious and explicit to the electorate so as to exemplify how he might act if elevated to the role of Prime Minister. For example, Cameron possessed a ruthless streak; in 2007, he sacked Patrick Mercer from his front-bench team for using racist language in a speech (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2010, pp.73-74). And, in 2008, he controversially removed the whip from the influential MP Derek Conway, who had paid his own son £40,000 to work as a parliamentary researcher, for which it was subsequently discovered no work had been done. In this instance Cameron assessed the risks and opted to use the ultimate sanction against Conway. According to Snowden, 'Cameron knew he had to use his ruthless side: the alternative would have made him look weak' (Snowden, 2010, p.193). Under the terms set out in the model, these examples show that Cameron was prepared to take firm and decisive action with this own party, and thus he certainly possessed a firm leadership style in the manner set out by the model.

3.5 Tasks

Like a number of effective opposition parties before them, Cameron's Conservatives used parliament to oppose the government's agenda selectively. In his last budget as Chancellor, Brown proposed scrapping the 10p tax band, which the Tories claimed would hit a narrow group of the poorest hardest. The changes were set to come into play after Brown was elevated to the role of Prime Minister. Shortly after he arrived at Number 10, 'enemies from the Left and Right united to attack him for squeezing more money from low-paid workers. David Cameron, the Conservative leader, and Ken Livingstone, the Labour

mayor of London, both condemned the Prime Minister's tax package as unjust' (The Telegraph Website, 8th April, 2008). That two-pronged attack from both left and right served to make life extremely difficult for Brown, but it also enabled the Conservatives to indulge in some virtue-signalling as to how they might behave if elected to office.

The fact that the Tories were seen as protecting the poor from the Labour government that Brown led was an ideal tool for the Conservatives in opposition, as it presented the electorate with a counterintuitive image of the Conservative Party. Cameron set out to 'detoxify' the Conservative brand (see, for example, Hayton, 2010), so what better way than to signal to Labour's traditional base that they, the Conservatives, would fight on their behalf. In furthering their virtue-signalling strategy, the Conservatives in opposition also supported the Labour government on occasions when it served their electoral prospects. In an effort to further detoxify their brand image in the imagination of the electorate, the Conservatives gave qualified support to Labour's Equalities Act (BBC Website, 3rd July, 2010), which granted a raft of new rights to minority groups. It was a way of showing the party had moved on from its 'nasty party' days (The Guardian Website, 8th October, 2002) and to demonstrate that it was now very much a socially liberal incarnation of a previously socially illiberal party.

The strategy of lending and then withdrawing support from the Labour government was nothing new in terms of an electoral strategy for a party in opposition seeking to build a narrative on how it would act in office. To an extent, though, it was a blunted tool for Cameron's Conservatives as Labour still enjoyed a large majority in parliament (Butler and Kavanagh, 2005). In that respect, inflicting the embarrassment of parliamentary defeat on this government was a challenge. But over a series of other issues such as the introduction of identity cards and civil-rights policies (BBC Website, 17th January, 2006), the Conservatives moved nimbly to oppose the government in order to describe them as out-of-touch with the electorate that they served. At the same time, they gave an impressionistic sense of how they might govern in office.

On a number of policy issues, the Conservatives were effective in outlining an alternative strategy. For example, they criticised the Labour government's obsession with targets and argued successfully that the target culture led to some perverse outcomes in government (Dorey, 2010, p.406). Their attacks on the government had purchase in the media and led to the growing sense that Labour were outdated and losing touch with the aspirations of

the voters. Speaking in 2006 following the budget of that year, and knowing that Brown was likely to become Prime Minister, that narrative of a government in decay was neatly summed up by Cameron when he attacked Brown as a 'roadblock to reform', describing him as 'old-fashioned' and concluding that Brown was an 'analogue politician in a digital age' (BBC Website, 22nd March, 2006). That line of attack was to persist through to 2010 and was effective in painting Brown as 'the past' (BBC Website, 22nd March, 2006), and by implication suggesting that Cameron was the future. Thus, on the terms set out in the model of 'Opposition-Craft', the Conservatives were effective in holding the government to account.

A number of media commentators have concluded that Cameron was a highly effective performer at the dispatch box during PMQs (see, for example, Eaton, 2011). From the outset of his time as Leader of the Opposition, Cameron set a high standard in parliament, perhaps most notably during his first outing at PMQs as Conservative leader when he took on the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, at his most powerful. Cameron used this opportunity well and struck an authoritative tone with Blair. As explained by D'Ancona, '[w]hen Cameron said to Blair that "you were the future once", he was turning New Labour's guns on itself – exploiting the core Blairite idea that novelty and success are closely related, perhaps even co-terminus' (D'Ancona in Clarke, James, Bale and Diamond, 2015, p.401). At a stroke, Cameron proved himself to be effective, prime ministerial, and a natural successor to Blair – and thus scored highly on these aspects of the 'Opposition-Craft' framework for analysis.

Aside from his own parliamentary skills, Cameron was supported by a number of capable shadow ministers. In his top team he had two former leaders, Hague and Duncan-Smith, as well as other big hitters who had been in and around the leadership for many years – notably Theresa May and George Osborne. In that regard, Cameron had a team with gravitas, all of whom were capable of taking on their Labour opposites in the House of Commons. Hague particularly stood out and was described as 'indispensable' by Don Porter, chairman of the umbrella group of Tory associations. However, Porter was less complimentary about the rest of the shadow cabinet and questioned whether it had 'an appropriate balance of skills and talents' (Porter, in Ashcroft and Oakeshott, 2015, p.318). So, while the shadow cabinet certainly contained heavy-weight talent, not all were convinced that it was an election-winning team as proposed by the model.

The model calls for parliamentary defeat to be inflicted on the sitting government, however that was to be a challenge for the Conservatives given Labour's large majority in the years 2005-10. Despite the parliamentary arithmetic, defeats were inflicted over the course of the parliament, and thus damage to the government's reputation was incurred. Perhaps most notably, three votes were lost by the government in 2009, all of which came in close proximity to the forthcoming general election. The Labour government lost a vote on a Liberal Democrat amendment calling for the withdrawal of eligibility guidelines which allowed Gurkhas to live in the UK (BBC Website, 29th April, 2009). In addition, clause 10 of the Parliamentary Standards Bill, which had been introduced following the parliamentary expenses scandal, was also voted down. That bill would have meant that parliamentary privilege could not be used by members to stop the Parliamentary Standards Authority from conducting an investigation into their affairs (BBC Website, 1st July, 2009). Those two parliamentary defeats, particularly, were high profile and added to the sense of a government in decay, made all the more acute as they occurred in the final stretch towards the general election.

In terms of their operations in select committees, it is hard to assess this aspect of the Conservative Party in operation during 2005-10, as rule changes to select committees only came into effect from 2009. Those changes meant that committees would have more power to hold investigations that were perceived to be in the public interest. According to some commentators, that change instigated a 'more aggressive and hard-hitting criticism of government departments and particularly, industry' (Headland Consultancy Website). So, while select committees have 'become an integrated part of the policy-making process' (Benton and Russell, 2013, p.793), in 2005-10 there were not the same opportunities available for rising members of the opposition to make a name for themselves from committee membership.

On the terms set out in the model, the effectiveness of parliamentary management of the Conservatives in opposition was reasonably strong given the tough parliamentary context in which they worked. In the most high-profile aspect of parliamentary management, PMQs, the party was gifted with a strong leader who was able to present the Conservative case in a highly effective manner. However, they were stifled by a large Labour majority, which made their operations a challenge.

In terms of party management, Cameron led a party largely quiescent with the direction of travel in which he took it (D'Ancona, in Clarke, James, Bale and Diamond, 2015, p.404). He had various wings of the party to contend with, but he also led a party that had been electorally hammered in the previous three general elections, and in that regard many in the party were open to a change of approach if it meant winning an election. His natural gift for leadership inspired confidence in those he led to move towards his modernising agenda. Cameron saw party management as a useful tool that would demonstrate to a sceptical electorate that he had a firm grip on the Conservatives in opposition. Bale indicates that Cameron had a 'near total grip on CCHQ (formerly Central Office)' (Bale, 2011a, p.152). In that regard, Cameron was able to press the levers of power within his own party and move it in a direction of his choosing.

However, his skill in managing his party was, in part, one of the reasons that he was not able to manoeuvre it fully to a place where he would have been more confident in winning the 2010 election. He recognised that the party contained Thatcherites and One Nation Conservatives, and thus he managed it in such a manner as to keep both sides happy. Essentially that meant not moving the party too far in one direction or another as a means by which to keep the various factions satisfied with his leadership. As noted earlier, however, that decision meant that while his party was content, the electorate were still suspicious of some of his party's policy positions as they appeared hard to define (Green, 2010, p.673).

In accordance with the ideals set out in the model, Cameron drew decision making into 'a tightly drawn circle' (Heffernan, 2013, p.2) known as 'Team Cameron' (Snowden, 2010, pp.217-18). Despite misgivings from many of his party over this small-clique style of management, Cameron was able to show clear and decisive leadership by simply relying on those elevated to the inner-circle for advice. That style of leadership ensured that the party was coherently managed. To an extent, the Conservative Party has an expectation that it will be managed in such a manner. According to Bale, the Conservatives have always placed their leader in a position of real strength and authority: 'It is a top-down organisation, whose leader is personally rather than collectively responsible for its strategic direction and ultimately for its success or failure' (Bale, 2012, pp.233-34). Thus, Cameron's decisive leadership was very much in line with successful Tory leaders of earlier eras.

In order to steer the management of the party, the position of the leader in the Conservative Party has often been viewed as an all-powerful figure with an ability to take autonomous decisions and assume the support of their members (Bale, 2012, pp.233-34). Unlike Labour, the Conservatives rarely feel the need to trouble their party membership to gain democratic endorsements of their programme for leadership. In implementing his liberal-conservative agenda, Cameron was not concerned by widening the party membership base or seeking to circumvent his MPs by appealing to card-carrying Tories; indeed, party membership was estimated to have fallen by 50,000 during the first few years of Cameron's leadership in opposition (Marshall, 2009, p.9).

Despite his strong hand, Cameron still had to be sensitive to the will of his party; under his leadership, constituency associations were pressured to select candidates from the 'Priority List' – a list of candidates drawn up by CCHQ and deemed as suitable and useful to the Cameron agenda. Inevitably, this strategy of party management was not popular amongst some of the Conservative associations, as Widdecombe comments: 'He [Cameron] began to micro-manage the selection system to try and get the sort of party he wanted' (Widdecombe, 2013; as quoted in Lack, 2014). Recognising that this policy was ruffling feathers amongst the grassroots of the party, Cameron let the architect of the policy, Francis Maude, take a lot of the flak for it. By the summer of 2007 the strategy had proven controversial, so Cameron elected to move Maude into another role; Bale contends that this move was a 'sop to activist opinion' and a means by which to quell unrest in the party (Bale, 2012, p.232).

When it came to the campaign itself in 2010, the Conservatives recognised that the ground war, to be fought by the grassroots activists, was going to be 'crucial to the success of their campaign' (Kavanagh and Cowley, 2010, p.234). The party managed its affairs well and drew up a target-seat strategy whereby they put in additional resources into those seats that they most needed to win. That strategy manifested itself in large numbers of activists on the ground in those seats, supported by a targeted advertisement campaign on national issues that were designed for voters in that particular constituency. The Conservatives also ensured that they had local candidates to fight the target seats across the country and avoided parachuting in outsiders to the locality. According to Cowley and Kavanagh, 'the Conservatives won the ground war operation in 2010' (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2010, p.243) in the sense that they won a large proportion of the seats on which they had set their sights.

Very much like his management of policy in opposition, Cameron's management of his party also stopped short of seriously upsetting entrenched factions inside the party. Thus, his actions appeared to suggest that he was willing to turn the dial towards his modernising instincts when it came to the management of the party, but he was never willing to fracture the party, so stopped short of some of the more radical ideas that some in the party flirted with, for example, a change of name as posited by Andrew Lansley (Lansley, 2005). In that respect, on some aspects of the model of 'Opposition-Craft', Cameron was effective in the sense that he kept his party quiescent with his agenda, but he was never able to enthuse all sides of his party towards one common goal, and on that front fell short of the expectations of an electorate still sceptical of his party.

Cameron was never troubled by the execution of official duties while working as Leader of the Opposition. Indeed, his background and upbringing were the stuff of a more traditional Tory leader than those who had more recently held the post, and therefore he exuded a confident persona and one that appeared to slip easily from formal public appearances to carrying out duties in parliament (Bale, 2011, p.283). On that theme, Lee comments that 'the emergence of Cameron as Tory leader and future prime minister represents the re-emergence of the former British governing elite into mainstream public life' (Lee, in Lee and Beech, 2009, p.viii). Many had thought the days of an Eton-educated 'toff' in the role of Tory leader were numbered, so Cameron's arrival on the scene as leader ticked the box of someone the public could envisage as Prime Minister.

On the other hand, Cameron was still relatively young when he was elevated to lead his party, and some in the party were concerned that his youth was a disadvantage that needed to be countered. In what became known as the 'flags and fireplaces' strategy, Cameron's communications chief, Andy Coulson, set about a strategy to place Cameron as a mature and statesmanlike figure. According to Ashcroft and Oakeshott: 'Andy had this thing about flags and fireplaces – it was taking pictures of David shaking hands with world leaders in front of fireplaces with flags. For those pictures, David would adopt a "Prime Minister in waiting" look' (Ashcroft and Oakeshott, 2015, p.291). In that respect, Cameron fulfilled this aspect of the model of 'Opposition-Craft' extremely well.

In order to enhance his modernising agenda, Cameron used his powers of patronage to present a more open and tolerant Conservative Party. For example, Cameron had Sayeeda Warsi elevated to the House of Lords in September 2007 (House of Lords, Library Note

Website). On becoming a peer, Warsi served as Shadow Minister for Community Cohesion and Social Action and was the first Muslim to attend Conservative shadow cabinet meetings. In accordance with the principles set out in the model, Warsi's appointment was a clear signal to the electorate of the kind of open and tolerant Conservative Party that Cameron wished to lead.

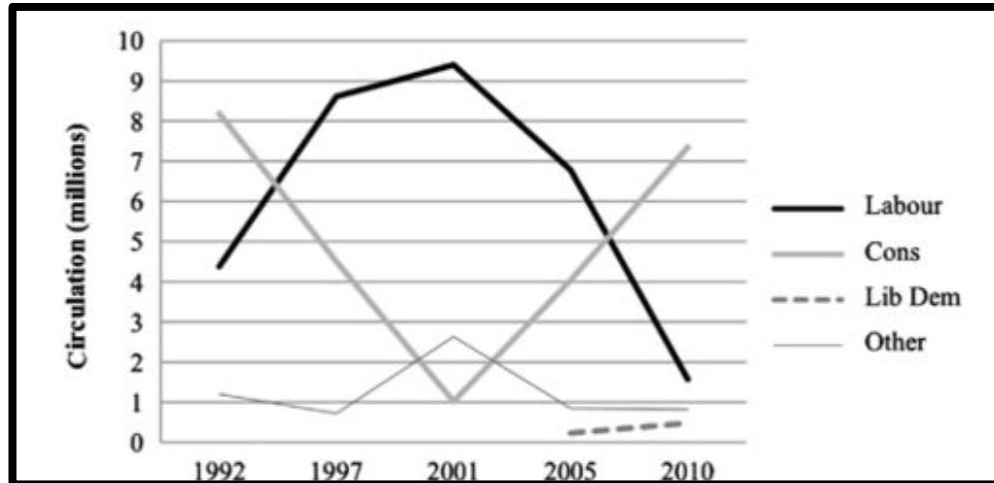
Advantaged as it was by an extremely partisan print media, the Conservative Party under Cameron nevertheless operated an effective campaign in the media. Its relations with the media were strong, and those connections were further invested in during the time in opposition (Wring and Deacon, 2010, p.438). Such was the desire in the party to sew-up the support of as many newspapers as possible that, at the outset of his time as opposition leader, Cameron set out to win back the support of the remaining newspapers that still supported the Labour government. Essentially, Cameron knew that he needed to win the backing of the Murdoch press that had abandoned the Conservatives during the Blair years and had continued to support Gordon Brown when he became Prime Minister.

Cameron felt that he needed someone with strong media connections to head up his media campaign. To that end, he appointed Andy Coulson, the former editor of the *News of the World*, for the 'media offensive that lay ahead' (Ashcroft and Oakeshott, 2015, p.289). Coulson set to work immediately and 'began actively cultivating powerful media figures including Paul Dacre, Editor of the *Daily Mail*, and Rupert Murdoch' (Ashcroft and Oakeshott, 2015, p.290). As a result of Coulson's efforts, in the autumn of 2009, the Murdoch titles fell back into the Tory fold (Wring and Deacon, 2010, p.438). Indeed, *The Sun* announced that it was ditching support for Labour during the party's conference that autumn; the announcement was timed for maximum impact in order to destabilise the Labour administration. There would have been no coincidence around the timing, and it must have had something to do with the strategy employed by Coulson and the Conservative media operation.

Such was the impact of Coulson's strategy that Ashcroft and Oakeshott described him as 'brilliant' and 'incredibly effective' (Ashcroft and Oakeshott, 2015, p.289). There is no doubt that his media strategy around the printed press was highly effective and, by the time of the 2010 election, out of the mainstream national newspapers, Labour retained only the support of the *Daily Mirror*. As can be seen in Figure 17 below, Labour saw a dramatic drop-off in support from the daily papers, so that by the time of the 2010

election, Labour enjoyed, in terms of readership, only around 1.5 million average daily readers reading a paper that supported the party; whereas the Conservatives enjoyed approximately 7.5 million daily readers.

Figure 17: Dailies' Endorsements by Circulation 1992-2010



Source: (Wring and Deacon, 2010, p. 443)

According to Wring and Deacon, the *Daily Telegraph* remained the Conservatives' biggest supporter in the build-up to the 2010 election. It was undoubtedly true that the Conservatives benefitted from that paper's unstinting support, but they were also able to communicate their transition to a new kind of party through the paper. Wring and Deacon comment that '[t]he daily paper's endorsement of Cameron applauded his efforts to make the party "more electable" and his "vision of the Big Society"' (Wring and Deacon, 2010, p.441). Thus, in the terms set out in the model of 'Opposition-Craft', large parts of the Conservative Party's programme for government, its internal party modernisation programme, and its favoured brand image were being peddled through the medium of the now highly Tory-supporting press.

By 2010, aside from the printed press, parties started to need to garner support from other forms of media as well. The internet and the rise of social media began to play a role in electioneering by this point, although according to Cowley and Kavanagh the 2010 election could not be described as 'an internet one' (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2010, p.332).

Nevertheless, the Conservatives honed their media operation to account for these new formats. The 2010 election also saw the inception of the televised leaders' debates. Those debates were most memorable for the rise of 'Clegg-mania' following the much-lauded

performance of the Liberal Democrat leader, Nick Clegg, in the first TV debate. However, Cameron also came across well in the debates and the consensus was that they were a success for him. No doubt, however, that perception of his skills in the TV debates was enhanced significantly by a compliant and Conservative-supporting press, and the fact that they 'denigrated Clegg mercilessly' (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2010, p.280) after his initial rise in popularity following the first TV debate.

The model of 'Opposition-Craft' asks whether core messages are delivered effectively through skilful media management. With much of the media on their side, the Conservatives undoubtedly had the means by which to deliver their message (Wring and Deacon, 2010, p.438). Earlier in this analysis we looked at whether the Conservatives were effective at communicating a coherent message to the electorate in terms of policy; the conclusion of the analysis was that there was a conflict in what the Conservatives were trying to project. On the one hand, they had a message about austerity and the cuts to public spending that were to come down the line should they be elected to power, and on the other hand they had a message under the banner about the 'Big Society' (Dorey and Garnett, 2012). On some level there was a coherence to the two messages. For example, there was less money to go on public services, therefore volunteering and private individuals would have to take more responsibility for civic life. But to many, the message was confused (see, for example, Green, 2010, p.673). Indeed, the fact that the Conservatives had such support amongst the media may well have amplified that confusion over their message. Therefore, despite a heavy advantage in terms of the press support the Conservatives enjoyed, the party was not always effective in its media operations.

3.6 Skills

Finlayson (2003) argues that political parties on a journey back to power have to demonstrate that they have modernised by referencing concrete reforms to their own internal party structures. Cameron's Conservatives demonstrated such reform by pointing to their modernised parliamentary-candidate-screening systems, which were designed to leave the party with more diverse candidates at the 2010 election (Bale, 2011, pp.301-02). Portillo, writing in the *Sunday Times* in 2006, claimed that '[m]uch of the parliamentary party is reactionary and unattractive to voters' (Portillo, 2006). In that respect, he supported Cameron in selecting parliamentary candidates through the so-called *A-List* as a means by which to end up with a parliamentary party that was more representative of

modern Britain, and more in tune with Cameron's vision for the country (Bale, 2011, pp.301-02).

Thus, a list of nominees was drawn up to promote more women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds to become candidates in winnable seats (O'Hara, 2007, p.47; and McIlveen, 2009, p.147ff). According to Campbell, Childs, and Lovenduski, 'selecting a greater number of women parliamentary candidates, or at least the rhetoric of seeking to do so, [...] can symbolize party modernization and make the Conservative party more electorally attractive' (Campbell, Childs, Lovenduski, 2007, p.3). Therefore, in the manner described by Finlayson (2003), Campbell, Childs and Lovenduski point to this aspect of Conservative Party reform under Cameron and label it as 'modernisation'. While the task of altering the make-up of the parliamentary party was 'modernisation' in the terms set out in the model of 'Opposition-Craft', the net result of that process would not be felt until after the 2010 election. In the period under consideration, the electorate were still invited to look at a Conservative Party largely made up of middle-aged men from a narrow socio-economic background. So, on the question of internal party reform, the Conservatives could not be described as having 'modernised', but could perhaps be considered to be in the process of 'modernisation'.

According to the model, modernisation is also about what opposition parties do to their policy offer as well. Bale argues that the Conservative Party set out on a journey of 'modernisation' with regard to their policy programme (Bale, in Fletcher, 2011, p.151). To exemplify his notion of Conservative Party modernisation of policy, Bale points to various 'counter-intuitive initiatives and announcements (on the environment, on big business, and on the NHS)' (Bale, in Fletcher, 2011, p.151). Bale argues that the Tories set out new policies that were at odds with traditional Tory stances on a range of issues. The electorate were invited to look at the party from a new perspective. In saying little about their more traditionally right-wing positions on Europe, crime, tax and immigration, they underscored their new approach by downplaying a number of their less-popular policies. Bale describes that strategy as 'the dumping of particularly toxic policies [until] the Tory "brand" had been "decontaminated"' (Bale, in Fletcher, 2011, p.151). For Bale, the dual strategy of promoting new and counter-culture Conservative Party policy initiatives with the simultaneous approach of downplaying unpopular policies, was Cameron's version of 'modernisation'.

Was this Conservative strategy consistent with a coherent programme for government as advanced by the model? Seemingly, the Conservatives' approach to 'modernisation' was nothing like as far reaching as perhaps it needed to be to form a coherent policy platform which could be translated into a governing mandate; it transpired to be an approach designed to surprise the electorate with a set of priorities for government that perhaps the average voter was not expecting from the party (Bale, in Fletcher, 2011, p.151). The Conservatives appeared to believe that it was enough to window-dress their policy platform with sops to a modernised policy agenda, and then communicate it with merely the rhetoric of modernisation.

However, according to Evans, Cameron was skilled at using the language of 'modernisation'. In support of his argument, Evans points to a piece in *The Spectator*, penned by Cameron, in which he articulated the desire to create 'a completely new party' (Cameron, in Evans, 2008, p.297). As Evans notes, '[t]he words "change", "modern", and "new" now dominated Cameron's vocabulary' (Evans, 2008, p.297). For Evans, Cameron was set apart from other previous Conservative leaders in the sense that his rhetoric 'made him sound remarkably like a post-1983 leader of the Labour Party rather than a traditional leader of the Conservative Party' (Evans, 2008, p.297).

By the time of the 2010 election, there was no doubt that the Conservative Party had begun a programme of modernisation, especially around their attitudes to social policy. But on economic policy, the party was pretty much on the same Thatcherite agenda that they had been on for many years (Beech, 2009, p.19). The party Cameron led never seemed to recognise the need to formulate a modernised policy offer as a thematic programme of reform across all policy areas. For the electorate, doubts about the Conservatives still remained. Therefore, modernisation in the Conservative Party during the period 2005-10 was all fairly superficial; or as Tony Blair noted, 'the seed didn't take root' (Blair, 2010, p.95).

The model asks whether opposition parties have adopted an impressionistic approach to their programme [for government]. In this respect, Cameron's party certainly set out to infer what they would do if elected to office, rather than put forward detailed policy proposals. Norton argues that Cameron followed a 'policy-lite' approach to opposition (Norton, in Lee and Beech, 2009, p.40), in that he projected a sense of conservative values and general policy direction rather than announcing specific policy pledges. In supporting

this view, Evans also indicates that Cameron's Conservatives deliberately opted for vague policy announcements. For example, speaking at the 2006 conference, Cameron announced that any future government that he led would focus on the 'people's priorities' (Cameron, in Evans, 2008, p.294). Evans claims that pledges like this merely hinted at specific policy proposals and were deliberately crafted to avoid specifics. In this regard, the Tory leader was able to hint and nudge to the electorate at what he would do in power without the tying himself down to promises that could be attacked by the Labour government. It was also a helpful approach to keep his party happy as members could read what they liked into his announcements.

In furthering the impressionistic model, Cameron gave guarantees about what his party would not do if elected to govern the country rather than set out what they would do (Norton, in Lee and Beech, 2009, pp.31-44). As a result of some unfavourable polling on voters' perception of the Conservative's likely management of the NHS (Ipsos-MORI (d)), Cameron made a pledge not to have any 'top-down reorganisation of the NHS' (General Election campaign 2010). Evans claims that the Conservatives subsequently 'declared opposition to the philosophy of "permanent revolution" in the National Health Service' (Evans, 2008, p.295) as a means by which to suggest a manner of governance and neutralise negative polling evidence. The Conservatives in opposition also declared that they would 'not make tax cuts a priority' (Evans, 2008, p.295), again reiterating what they would not do rather than outlining what they would do.

The impressionistic approach operated by the Conservatives in opposition was effective to the extent that it associated their brand with some key policy approaches: foregrounding deficit repayment, protecting the environment and operating socially liberal policies (Snowdon, 2010). Much of this programme chimed well with the electorate, but there were inconsistencies in it as well. For example, how could a party committed to reducing public sector spending protect the poorest in society? As exemplified earlier, the *volte face* on economic policy conjured in the aftermath of the crash left some voters confused about Cameron's new approach (Green, 2010). Values need to be fermented over time, and time was a commodity the Conservatives did not have in 2005-10.

According to the model, opposition parties rely heavily on symbols to signal their readiness for office to the electorate. Signifying internal party reform is one method by which an opposition can show that it is ready to govern. In order to communicate their message, the

Conservatives used modern technology both during and in the lead up to the 2010 election (Black, in Fletcher, 2011, p.192). Traditionally well-funded, the Tory Party has used its resources to lead the way with electioneering. The Conservatives employed modern communication technologies like blogging, *YouTube* and webcasts, to advance their position (Black, in Fletcher, 2011, p.192). The very fact that their party was so openly engaged in new technologies smacked of a modern party willing to use technology to advance its cause. In itself, that would never be enough to satisfy the electorate that the party was ready to pull the levers of power again, but the technology symbolically set the tone of a party ready for government.

Finding a symbol of party change was a tough challenge for Cameron in opposition. In exemplifying the need for a symbol of change, Jo-Anne Nadler, a former Tory press officer commented on the state of the party in the early days of Cameron's leadership, she said that, '[w]e are like a major brand which has lost the confidence of its customers' (Nadler, in O'Hara, 2007, p.296). Such was the desire amongst the modernising wing of Cameron's Conservatives to find a symbol of their readiness for power that some even toyed with changing the name of the party. Writing in 2005, Lansley blogged on the *conservativehome.com* website that the party should go further in its quest to find symbols of its modernisation process and should alter its name to the *Reform Conservatives*. Lansley directly compared the Conservatives' plight to the New Labour project under Blair in opposition in the mid-90s: 'They called themselves New Labour to indicate to the public that they had changed themselves and therefore were going to change the country. The public needs to be aware that the Conservative Party has reformed itself and is going to reform the country' (Lansley, 2005). Evidence that Cameron himself had considered the change of name came in an interview on *Newsnight* in 2005; when questioned about the possibility of a name change Cameron notably refused to rule it out (Evans, 2008, p.297). However, Cameron opted not to change the name of the party; instead he decided to promote a number of key policy initiatives as a symbol of change.

Thus, on policy, the Conservatives strove to find a badge of change in order to indicate to the public that they were a different party to the one that had last been in government. One such example of symbolic pronouncements by the Tories was on the environment (Carter, 2009). Connelly argues that the Conservatives' green agenda, under Cameron, was underpinned by a policy platform. Connelly suggests that the policy platform demonstrated real intent that the Conservatives would operate in a manner that was

different from the present government and perhaps different from previous Tory governments as well. Writing ahead of the 2010 election, Connelly asserted that ‘we can reasonably infer that the next Conservative government will address the problem of the environment in a manner unprecedented in any of its predecessors’ (Connelly, in Lee and Beech, 2009, p.149).

However, evidence at the time suggested that the Tories’ efforts on the environment as a symbol of party change had had little traction with the electorate. Polling data from March 2010 suggested that the Labour government was perceived to have the best policies on the environment rather than Cameron’s ‘Green’ Conservatives (Ipsos-MORI (e)). Therefore, the party failed to find an effective emblem of their modernisation process, and what they did place in front of the electorate in terms of new policy failed to find purchase amongst voters. On this aspect of the model the Conservatives did not score well.

Focusing on Lees-Marshment’s thesis (2001a) on political marketing, the Conservatives under Cameron in opposition roughly fitted the definition of a ‘Market-Orientated’ party’, although there were some notable shortcomings. Throughout the 2005-10 period the party underwent significant change in order to appeal to a wider part of the franchise; in that respect, it attempted to change itself in order to bring its offer closer to the aspirations of the voters (O’Hara, 2007, pp.293-329). According to Widdecombe, the Tories in opposition were prepared to go out to the tools of marketers, ‘that is focus groups [and] image’ (Widdecombe, 2013; as quoted in Lack, 2014), in order to widen their appeal. On that basis, it is logical to conclude that the Conservatives certainly attempted to formulate their party into a ‘Market-Orientated’ party. But did they fully achieve that aspiration?

Much of the discussion of this section of the analysis has focused on the reform programme, both in terms of internal party reform and policy reform that Cameron attempted to push through with his party. What has become evident is that Cameron stopped short on a number of fronts, for example, the change of name to the party that he considered, the halting of the *A-List* candidate structures before they came to full fruition, the *volte face* on public spending following the financial crash, and the timid approach to his ‘Big-Society’ agenda, which never gained traction with the electorate (or his party). Cameron was never prepared to risk a fracture in his party and, in doing so, he was never prepared to meet the electorate where they were located on the political spectrum in the manner articulated by Lees-Marshment. Thus, in the parameters set out in the model, at

best Cameron's Conservatives can be described as attempting to become a fully-fledged 'Market-Orientated' party, but they did not quite get there in terms of substance.

Cameron's failure to fully satisfy the criteria set out in the model in terms of its marketing description was, ironically, the reason that it did not jettison its traditional brand appeal, highlighted as a risk in the model. So, the party held onto much of its Thatcherite pedigree under Cameron. However, in seeking to appeal to a wider cohort of voters, Cameron attempted to marginalise the debate on Europe as he saw this issue as a distraction that had befallen a number of his predecessors (Campbell, 2015, p.328). Since the 1980s, the Conservative Party had been the traditional home for those sceptical of the UK's membership of the EU; this facet of its make-up had become part of the party's core brand image. By marginalising that voice in a bid to become a party better able to market its wares to the electorate, Cameron tarnished the Tory brand in the eyes of some of its core supporters and inadvertently precipitated the rise of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), which was to be his ultimate undoing as leader (The Guardian Website, 24th June, 2016).

We have already established that the Conservatives benefitted from a compliant media during this era, but were they able to communicate internal party reforms through the media? As a starting point, Cameron's image was placed at the forefront of Steve Hilton's 'shock and awe' campaign. Hilton, one of Cameron's influential advisers, guided the new leader to use the media to communicate change in the party. Hilton recognised that Cameron himself embodied that change: 'Cameron's strategy depended on conveying (indeed on him personally incarnating) change [and] modernisation' (Bale, 2011a, p.151).

Part of 'shock and awe' involved a webcast named *WebCameron*. A camera was installed at his home and captured the new Leader of the Opposition washing up whilst surrounded by his family. Voters were also treated to pictures of Cameron mountain biking, shopping and, perhaps most famously, hugging a husky (Bale, 2012, p.224). The point of the webcast and images was to use the media to promote party change. Equally, the webcast showed the Conservatives as able to use the modern media as a means of communication in order to show them as "'of the moment'", as promoted by Finlayson (Finlayson, 2003, p.41).

Aside from the leader's image in the media, the party was also effective in promoting policy. Coulson was charged with defining the Conservative's message on policy and had been specifically appointed as it was felt that he gave a working-class perspective to the

direction of the party, which was thought to be useful for advancing the cause in the tabloid papers in particular. Such was the emphasis on Coulson's media role that he had the power to send policy back if he felt that it would not fly in the media (Ashcroft and Oakeshott, 2015, p.291). On this evidence, it appeared that the Conservatives, under Cameron, were effective in using the media to advance their cause; indeed, it seems that they held the influence of the media in such high esteem that they were prepared to formulate policy with one eye on how it would be perceived in the press.

In accordance with the principles laid out in the model, the Conservatives set out to reassure the electorate of their governing capability. They achieved this on a number of levels: on policy and on leadership. On policy, in the early stages of the 2005-10 parliament, the Conservative opposition committed itself to Labour's spending plans (Bale, 2008, p.278). This approach was taken to align the Conservatives with the governing hegemony of the times. It was also done to reassure the public that the Conservatives would resist the temptation to enforce large-scale cuts to public services. Had the financial crash not occurred, it is almost certain that the Conservatives would have gone into the next election with this reassurance strategy intact.

After the crash, however, the Tories opted to promote economic austerity as a response to the changed climate. Hodson and Mabbett argue that, '[a]lthough the Conservative Party [was] promising a bold new approach to economic management, its economic policies [were] cut from the same ideational cloth as those of the Labour Party' (Hodson and Mabbett, 2009, p.1058). Thus, on this line of argument, it could be argued that the Tories rejected the need to reassure voters that their economic strategy would be a continuation of the approach followed by the Brown Government, despite the fact that their policies were, in essence, of a similar nature, and opted instead to stress an image of positive change, as very much stressed by the model of 'Opposition-Craft'. In that respect, the Tories tried to straddle two components of the model in the sense that the policy they adopted was very much in line with what Labour was offering, but the rhetoric around it was about claiming it as a new approach.

On leadership, and in a further attempt to reassure the electorate of the Tories' governing capability, Cameron sought to draw a personal parallel with Blair. Just as Blair established the impression that he was the natural successor to Thatcher, Cameron promoted the idea that he was the natural heir to Blair. As Heppell argues, during Cameron's spell as

opposition leader, he 'deliberately sought to associate himself with the political imagery and leadership style of Blair' (Heppell, 2008, p.593). That parallel was drawn in order to develop the sense that Cameron was a credible alternative Prime Minister. It is interesting that Cameron sought to continue those parallels with Blair even after Brown became Prime Minister. The only plausible explanation for that strategy is that Cameron wanted to be seen as the real successor to Blair and to associate himself with Blair's firm and stable leadership style, which the public might be reassured by.

In terms of the image of the party, as leader Cameron evidently appeared 'prime ministerial' (Heffernan, 2013, p.4) and also came to embody the new credibility that the Tories had gained under his leadership. In associating himself with Blair, Elliot and Hanning claim of Cameron's leadership that 'the "project" he commands is every bit as much about David Cameron as New Labour was about Tony Blair' (Elliot and Hanning, 2007, p.291). In that regard, the images of him washing up (as outlined above) were part of a strategy to imbue his statesman-like appeal with a sense of the 'ordinary', as proposed by Finlayson (2003) and reflected in the model. It also projected the idea that Cameron was a modern kind of leader in that he was taking a leading role with domestic tasks. Bale argues 'that Cameron, like Blair, not only understood but embraced the cliché that a picture is worth a thousand words – especially when it conveys an image that is counter-intuitive or purports to prove that the politician concerned is living in the real world' (Bale, 2012, p.224).

In cultivating his image amongst the voting population, Cameron established the sense that he was somehow slightly removed from his party. According to Quinn, Cameron inherited a party that was seen as right-wing (Quinn, 2008, p.180), but his personal position was somewhere to the left of where his party was located. Images of him cycling to work, and of a wind turbine attached to his house, were placed in the press in order to depict Cameron as something other than the 'typical Tory'. He also used his speeches to mark out territory for himself that placed him at odds with his party by using terms such as 'Compassionate Conservatism' and 'Liberal Conservatism' (see, for example, Cameron, 2005, 2006a and 2006b). By charting a new path, Smith and French suggest that Cameron was 'youthful and fresh' (Smith and French, 2009, p.213); thus, his 'modern' outlook was, again, another dimension that set him out as different from his party.

Cameron had to work especially hard with his image, as in some ways his background was exactly that of a 'typical Tory' leader; aside from the fact that he was white, male, middle-

aged, and middle-class, he was also Eton and Oxford educated. That did not provide him with a useful back story as suggested by the 'Opposition-Craft' model. His background might potentially have been a concern for voters, after all it tapped into suspicions that the Conservative Party is led by the privileged for the benefit of the rich (Mattinson, 2010, p.239). But, the Conservatives were successful in crafting an image counter to what might have been expected. At the same time, however, Cameron's image of a more traditional Conservative may also have helped him. Some have argued that Cameron was very much in the mould of former Tory leaders like MacMillan; in terms of setting out centre-ground appeal, that association may well have been useful (Lee, in Lee and Beech, 2009, p.viii).

Prior to the 2010 election the Conservative Party sent out approximately 17 million pieces of direct mail to voters in its target seats (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2010). It successfully identified swing voters in target seats and tailored its messaging towards voters to such an extent that it sent them specific pieces of literature on issues likely to swing their votes in the Conservatives' direction. Thus, the party was able to marshal its message discipline perhaps more effectively than any opposition party before it. While Labour were clearly having purchase in the national campaign about the Tories' likely effect on the public sector given their rhetoric around austerity, much of its direct-messaging campaign was effective in negating some of the charges made against it (Bale, 2011a, p.397).

The Conservatives were also effective in their ability to use the first-past-the-post electoral system to their advantage. The Tories had a list of target seats that they hoped to win. They operated this system as they had recognised from previous elections that they had built up large majorities in some seats to no electoral advantage. In the constituencies in which the Conservatives already enjoyed a substantial majority, the party adopted a strategy whereby that seat would be paired with a target seat, so that activists from the safe Tory seat would move to the target seat in order to campaign. According to Cowley and Kavanagh, 'party members were becoming more willing to move to where they were needed rather than where they happened to live' (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2010, p.241). This was done so that the Tories could concentrate their resources where they were most needed.

Further evidence of the Tories' organisation abilities is to be found in their polling efforts, where the party commissioned polls in target seats rather than conduct swathes of national polling. The British Election Study (2010) also confirmed that 10% more voters

claimed to have received some kind of election literature from the Conservatives than the other main parties in the battleground seats. On the basis of this evidence, it is suggestive that the Conservatives certainly managed their election organisation well, and in the manner as ascribed by the 'Opposition-Craft' model. However, clearly the Conservatives did not win enough seats to form an overall majority, so their efforts were somewhat stunted, but this probably had little to do with what was generally perceived as an effective campaign on the ground (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2010, p.241).

There is no doubt that Cameron's leadership quality was put centre stage in the Tories' bid to win power. Norton claims that he was the key to 'resuscitating the Conservative Party' (Norton, 2009, p.42), and Dorey argues that Cameron 'was "the face" of a new, modern, progressive, Conservatism' (Dorey, 2010, p.410). In that regard, his decision-making abilities were very much part of that leadership quality that the model of 'Opposition-Craft' demands. We have seen already that he was willing to wield the knife when it came to getting rid of colleagues, in the same way that he was willing to make appointments to the top tier of his party in order to signal new priorities. In his creation of the new strand of liberal conservatism, we have also observed that he was motivated to take the party in new directions.

Clearly Cameron and those around him at the helm of the party were effective decision takers. They proved time and again that they could pivot according to the context in which they operated. They set the party onto a new footing following the 2005 defeat, which they then altered following the financial crash. Their decision making enabled them to set the agenda on a number of key issues, such as MPs' expenses and crime (Snowdon, 2010). Thus, set against the model, decision making was an aspect of 'Opposition-Craft' that the Conservatives fulfilled well. However, no matter how many good decisions had been made over internal party management, and over policy, the party had to contend with a shifting context in which to operate, albeit one that became more favourable to their cause as the parliament progressed, and a party that was unwilling to be fully reformed on a number of ingrained policy positions.

Elliot and Hanning describe Cameron as 'an affable, emollient, and easy-going character'. Reflecting on his earlier life at university they also claim that he was 'abounding in self-confidence' (Elliot and Hanning, 2009, p.41). That confidence was certainly the impression that public had of Cameron, but it was tempered by a number of facets to Cameron's life,

all of which gave rise to the sense that he was an emotionally-rounded individual suited to the demands of high office.

The illness and subsequent death of Cameron's son, Ivan, was clearly an incredibly difficult time for Cameron, but his public response to his own personal tragedy showed Cameron to be emotionally stable. The public had an awareness that Cameron had a disabled child as he referenced his son's illnesses and his resultant knowledge and appreciation of the NHS in many of his speeches and media appearances. Tragic as the case was, according to Ashcroft and Oakeshott, 'had it not been for Ivan, it is quite possible Cameron would never have risen to the top in politics. His life had simply been too straightforward, too charmed, to enable him to connect with many voters... Thanks to Ivan, Cameron could credibly claim to understand and care about the NHS' (Ashcroft and Oakeshott, 2015, pp.192-03). Cameron's narrative around his son's illness had shown him to be emotionally intelligent.

When Ivan died suddenly, Cameron initially took time off work, but he went back two weeks later and showed the same 'steely determination' (Elliot and Hanning, 2009, p.41) that he had shown in earlier life. While obviously not related to the core demands of his role in politics, in his handling of his emotions, the public learnt a lot about his suitability for high office from this tragic event in Cameron's life. On that aspect of the model, Cameron undoubtedly scored highly.

3.7 Conclusion

There is little doubt that, as the 2005-10 parliament progressed, Cameron's Conservatives benefitted increasingly from a favourable context in which to work (Snowdon, 2010, p.viii). By 2010, Cameron faced a less talented Prime Minister in Brown, whose reputation had been severely tarnished by his three years in office (Dorey, 2010, p.416). At the same time, the economy experienced a seismic shock and a severe recession, which left many voters doubting Labour's ability to manage the nation's finances (The Telegraph Website, 17th October 2008). Given that more advantageous environment, the Conservatives took some advantage of that context. They showed themselves able to change the economic debate for the first time in a generation, and Cameron was preferred to Brown as an alternative Prime Minister (Dorey, 2010, p.416). However, doubts remained on policy, especially the Tories' instincts on welfare and public services, which came under particular scrutiny following their decision to *volte face* their economic strategy after the financial crash (Byrne, Foster, and Kerr, 2011, p.193).

On the question of leadership, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the Conservatives were blessed with a strong and popular leader in Cameron. Luntz notes that 'Cameron was exactly what swing voters are looking for in a Conservative Party Leader' (Luntz, in Ashcroft and Oakeshott, 2015, p.230). Having been stymied by unpopular leaders in the past (Snowdon, 2010, p.viii), in Cameron the Conservatives found themselves led by a man who was an 'outstanding communicator' (Fowler, 2010, p.201). The contrast with other recent leaders of the party was marked, as commented on by Green: 'He was undoubtedly more popular than recent Conservative opposition leaders before him' (Green, 2010, p.685). Cameron's personal image was also shaped by the leaders he opposed. When faced with Blair, his qualities did not shine as effectively as they did when faced with Brown, as noted by Bale: 'The improvement in Tory fortunes under David Cameron doubtless had a lot to do with the eventual implosion of New Labour under Gordon Brown, a man who, while clearly suited to his job as Chancellor of the Exchequer, should never have been allowed by his colleagues to become Prime Minister' (Bale in Fletcher, 2011, p.150). Thus, on the question of leadership, the contrast with Brown was sharp and, when faced with a binary choice over who should be Prime Minister, the voters opted for Cameron.

Green also notes that '[Cameron's] strategy of modernisation [...] must be attributed with some of this success' (Green, 2010, p.685). The fact that he went on a modernising mission was part of his appeal in that it associated Cameron personally with all things modern. Those inside his party agreed: 'He was sure footed as an opposition [leader] and helped to bring the Conservative Party back to the position where it had a reasonable prospect of winning a general election' (Spelman, March 2020). However, some have argued that Cameron was not the arch-moderniser that others have claimed him to be: '[T]he idea that Cameron always wanted to overhaul the party is a popular misconception. For years, he lagged behind some in his own social circle in terms of conviction that the party needed fundamental reform' (Ashcroft and Oakeshott, 2015, p.237). Indeed, there were a number of occasions on which Cameron was to stop short on his modernising journey in order to keep his party on side, which was ultimately to undermine his party's performance at the 2010 election.

It is on policy that the Conservatives failed to convince the electorate. There was a willingness on the part of the leader and those around him to take the Conservative Party on to the centre ground. However, on a number of key issues the party failed to arrive there (Buckler and Dolowitz, 2012, p.586). The failure to adapt the policy platform

sufficiently was, for some, the reason the Tories failed to win. According to Behr: 'Cameron had his chance in opposition to persuade people that he was at the vanguard of a new breed of Conservative and not enough voters bought it to deliver him a majority in parliament' (Behr, 2013). The liberal-conservative position that Cameron arrived at was not sufficiently radical or centrist enough to convince voters. The Conservatives' attitude towards public spending changed following their *volte face* on economic policy after the financial crash – that inevitably tarnished their reputation for prioritising public services, and put some voters off the Conservative offer.

Despite not arriving at the centre, as espoused by the model, it was evident the Cameron team learnt a lot from New Labour (Lack, 2014). It is interesting, in that regard, to note the views on the Cameron reforms from a number of New Labour figures. Beckett comments that: 'They knew they had to look as if they had changed. What they didn't do, though, was really change' (Beckett, 2013; as quoted in Lack, 2014), and Gould suggests that: '[T]he Tories failed to win because they did not change profoundly enough' (Gould, 2011, p.518). Thus, from the Labour perspective, many could see that the Tories had not done the heavy lifting on policy to shift fundamentally the electoral dial. Or, as Bale puts it: 'They failed fully to appreciate the extent to which New Labour was more than just a political conjuring trick by a master magician but also a profound, genuine, and sometimes agonizing move away from long-held positions' (Bale, 2011a, p.368).

It is somewhat ironic that Cameron's real opportunity to occupy the centre ground came in the advent of the 2010 election. In failing to secure an overall majority, Cameron moved quickly to form a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats. That move appeared to underscore Cameron's notional new brand of 'liberal conservatism' (McAnulla, 2010, p.311). Thus, Cameron, through the nature of the 2010 hung parliament, managed to establish a stake in the centre of British politics, which he had failed to achieve while in opposition. He governed there for the five years leading up to the 2015 election where, to the surprise of many commentators, he secured an overall majority for the Conservatives, which exemplified perfectly the power of the centre ground in British politics (Beech and Lee, 2015).

However, the Conservatives' failure to win in 2010 election has origins other than simply in a failure of policy. In terms of their parliamentary representation, the Conservatives were coming from a low base and needed to gain well over 100 seats in order to form a majority

(Snowdon, 2010, p.viii). In that respect, the electoral arithmetic was highly challenging for the Conservatives in 2010. On a historical analysis, in gaining 96 seats, the Conservatives did tremendously well, but it was not enough. According to Spelman: 'It was a success given the scale of the victory that was needed for an outright win. The swing required for an overall majority would have been unprecedented' (Spelman, March 2020). Also, the electoral system did not favour the party; the Conservatives won more votes in 2010 than Labour did in 2005, yet they failed to win an overall majority (Denver, 2010, p.604). Thus, we can conclude that it was always going to be a tough ask for the party to win in 2010; the fact that it came so close is an indicator that it was steered closely to the model as described in this thesis.

However, Cameron's party failed on a number of key tests as set out by the model of 'Opposition-Craft'. While it benefitted from a decent context in which to operate and was led by someone of the highest calibre, it failed to convince the electorate on policy, as noted most succinctly by Bale: '[T]he party did not fail to win outright because it modernized and moved into the centre. It failed because, for some voters at least, that process had not gone far enough' (Bale, 2011a, p.396). In that regard, the Conservatives under Cameron from 2005-10 should only be considered a partial success when assessed against the model of 'Opposition-Craft'.

Chapter 4

Neil Kinnock, 1987-92: On the right track, but outsmarted in the end

4.1 Introduction

The model of 'Opposition-Craft' considers the period 1987-92 to be an unsuccessful age of opposition. It resulted in a fourth consecutive Conservative victory at the 1992 election. The Conservatives won that election with a 21-seat majority on 42.8% of the vote. Despite opinion polls that pointed to a Labour victory (see, for example, Crewe, 1992, pp.493-94), Labour only managed to poll 35.2% of the popular vote (Westlake, 2001, p.572) and returned only 272 MPs to Westminster. Thus, the outcome of that election resulted in an 'unexpected Conservative victory' (Wickham-Jones, 1995, p.486). Analysis since the election has suggested that the seeds of that defeat for the Labour opposition were sown in the years leading up to the poll.

As we will conclude in this chapter, the era of 1987-92 was a missed opportunity for the Labour opposition to win power. Many of the contextual factors, as pointed to by the model of 'Opposition-Craft', were in place and conducive for an opposition victory. Labour, however, did not do enough to convince the electorate that it was ready for power (see, for example, Smith, 1994, p.711); or, in the words of Adonis, '1992 was supposed to be an unlosable election and it was lost' (Adonis, February 2020). Issues remained around policy, especially on the issue of taxation, and also on the question of Neil Kinnock's leadership and suitability for the role of Prime Minister (Westlake, 2001).

Kinnock himself laid responsibility for the defeat on policy and the frustration he encountered in leading his party towards the centre ground (Griffiths, 2012). He claimed that, throughout his leadership of the party from 1983, Labour was dominated by people who did not understand what needed to be done in order to win elections and, indeed, he suggested further that there were some who did not really care about winning elections either. Reflecting on his time as leader of the Labour Party, Kinnock suggested that the left of his party was critical of those who wanted to win elections: '[they] dismissed you as someone who was suffering from "electionitis" – an unhealthy preoccupation with getting votes' (Kinnock, 2011, p.121). It was this attitude to winning power that Kinnock claimed prevented the party from taking the necessary steps on policy to get the party over the winning line at the 1992 election. Many academics and political commentators agree with

Kinnock's analysis (see, for example, Wickham-Jones, 1995, p.470). Others, however, feel the problem lay closer to Kinnock's own door than he was willing to concede (see, for example, Murghan, 1993, p.193).

Given the concerns around policy and leadership, voters ultimately decided to stick with the Conservative government under John Major. In concluding thoughts on the electorate and the result of the 1992 election, Sanders argues that the 1992 election owed much to a 'vote for the devil it knew than the devil it didn't' (Sanders, 1993, p.213). So, while voters decided to stick with the Conservatives, their majority was much reduced: down from 102 at the 1987 election to 21 in 1992. Labour, too, moved forward in terms of its parliamentary representation: up from 229 seats in 1987 to 271 in 1992 (Butler and Kavanagh, 1992). Thus, Labour in opposition certainly had strengths when measured against the framework, but not enough to bring it power. In that regard, under the terms of the model, this period of opposition should be described as a 'failure' but not a 'total failure'.

4.2 Academic Perspectives on the Kinnock Era, 1987-92

Set against the expectation that Labour would win the 1992 election, the nature of its defeat generated much analysis. Academics and biographers have sought to find reasons for why Labour lost in 1992, and it is notable how each found a new angle which largely centred on Labour's failings in opposition. In that respect, the existing academic literature on the Kinnock era, 1987-1992, can be broken down into a number of themes or perspectives:

Firstly, there is the academic literature that focuses on Labour's modernisation strategy, which occurred under Kinnock's leadership (Wring, 1995). That academic literature appears to be split into two categories: a) that which focuses on the modernisation process as simply emulating Thatcherism for electoral expediency purposes (Hay, 1994), and b) that which perceives Labour modernisation to be a response to the globalised nature of the world economy in the late 1980s/early 1990s, and Britain's membership of the EU; the latter literature concluded that Labour's modernisation was simply a pragmatic exercise (Smith, 1994; and Seyd, 1993).

Secondly, there is academic literature that concentrates on the machinations of Labour's policy review, which was instigated in the aftermath of the 1987 defeat (Shaw, 1993).

Again, the academic literature, here, accounts for a number of viewpoints: a) some see the policy review as a major ideological shift, which saw the Labour Party embrace the market economy (Jones, 1996, and Wickham-Jones, 1995, for example), and b) others see the outcome of the policy review as a missed opportunity to provide a radical overhaul of the policy offer. Instead, the outcome of the review was perceived as a return to Labour's revisionist social democratic positions of earlier incarnations, which in particular did not do enough to Labour's offer around taxation (Westlake, 2001; and Gould, 2011).

Thirdly, there is a body of literature that is concerned with the leadership abilities of Neil Kinnock (Griffiths, 2012); here, most academic opinion coalesces around the notion that Kinnock was a more successful party manager than a potential Prime Minister (Jeffreys, 1993, and Murghan, 1993, for example). That same academic literature notes the 1992 election as a valence-style campaign as there were only minor policy discrepancies between the two main parties. That dynamic placed a special emphasis onto the notion of leadership, which was to Kinnock's disadvantage (Newton, 1993).

Finally, some academics argue that the polls inaccurately reported Labour/Conservative support and consequently note a number of strategic errors made by the Labour Party during this period, which were based on that inaccurate information. That literature looks into the ramifications for the campaign given the media reporting of the election, which, based on the polling, assumed a hung parliament or a Labour victory (see Crewe, 1992, for example).

Much of the literature concludes with the notion that Labour's period in opposition was 'unsuccessful', but acknowledges that some progress had been made from the position in 1987 (see Wring, 1995, for example). The Conservatives were reduced to a 21-seat majority, which made the task easier for the next phase of Labour's time in opposition, and the party was certainly credited in the sense that it had completed some of the heavy lifting around policy renewal. However, many conclude that Labour did not have the right leader (see Westlake, 2001, for example), and missed an opportunity in not using the policy review to overhaul radically Labour's policy offer (see Elliot, 1993, for example).

While much of the existing literature points to deficiencies on the part of the Labour Party, not enough emphasis is given to the series of highly effective strategic decisions made on the part of the Conservative government to renew itself in office. With that in mind, this

analysis will seek to explore some of the gaps left by the existing literature. The model of 'Opposition-Craft' suggests that long-serving governments provide fertile territory for oppositions. Whilst that is true, this Conservative administration did much to mitigate the inevitable erosion of its support after thirteen years in power. It found a new leader, ditched unpopular policies and successfully undermined Labour's economic policies at a time of economic uncertainty. The Conservative administration under Major presented itself as a new government, and effectively fought the 1992 campaign as if it were the opposition. In that regard, while this analysis will cite much of the literature critical of Labour's operation in opposition, this thesis will also note the highly effective manner in which the Conservatives operated in government from November 1990 through to the election in April 1992.

4.3 Context

Unlike other periods of opposition assessed in this analysis, the 1987-92 period came on the back of another period of opposition in which the Labour Party was led by Kinnock. In that respect, Kinnock did not inherit the party in 1987 – he had been its leader since 1983 (Jones, 1996, p.113). Thus, it is necessary for this analysis to consider the 1983-87 period as an era that was inevitably shaped by Kinnock, unlike other periods of opposition considered in this analysis in which the party was inherited from different leader. With that context in mind, the analysis from 1987-92 is perhaps more heavily influenced by the immediate inheritance from 1983-87 than in other periods under consideration in this thesis (Griffiths, 2012).

We also need to consider the influence of the SDP on the Labour opposition (Bochel and Denver, 1984). At the outset of this thesis, the terms of the 'Opposition-Craft' model were set out to suit the era of two-party politics. In essence, two-party politics is what happened in the UK for the large part of the post-war era. However, in the early 1980s Labour split and the SDP were formed (Hughes and Wintour, 1990, p.6). That split will be considered in detail in Chapter 5 of this analysis, however the formation of the SDP was a factor that not only affected the 1983 election (as discussed in Chapter 5), it also influenced the 1987 poll, and to an extent was still factor in the 1987-92 period. In that regard, due consideration will also be given to the SDP in this chapter.

Kinnock came to lead his party in the aftermath of the 1983 general election in which the party had been annihilated at the polls (Morgan, 2008, p.434). Thus, it would be fair to

conclude that Kinnock arrived at the helm of a party in considerable disarray (Jones, 1996, p.113). As leader, he began a process of modernisation and movement on policy towards the centre ground from 1983, but that process was to be slow and frustrated by a number of issues (Hughes and Wintour, 1990, p.10). One of those issues was the make-up of party membership. Jones suggests that Labour in 1983 required considerable change in terms of the mind-set of its members: 'Part of that elaborate, long-term process of change would involve overcoming that element within the Party which had in Kinnock's words, "treated realism as treachery...and scorned any emphasis on the importance of winning elections as contaminating bacillus called 'electorism'"' (Jones, 1996, p.114). Thus, it was not simply a case of moving policy towards the centre, it was about shifting the mentality of entrenched factions inside the party.

Kinnock took on that challenge, in what 'has since been recognised as a symbolic turning point in the history of the Labour Party' (British Political Speech Website). At the 1985 party conference in Bournemouth, Kinnock turned on more extreme left-wingers in his party and declared:

'I'll tell you what happens with impossible promises. You start with far-fetched resolutions. They are the pickled into a rigid dogma, a code, and you go through the years sticking to that, out-dated, misplaced, irrelevant to the real needs, and you end in the grotesque chaos of a Labour council – a Labour council – hiring taxis to scuttle around a city handing out redundancy notices to its own workers' (Kinnock, 1985)

The speech at Bournemouth was greeted by walkouts from more militant elements in the party, but it was a signal to the electorate that the party was changing under Kinnock's leadership (Smith, 1994) and was seen as a pivotal moment in the defeat of the far left inside the party (Kogan, 2019). In the terms set out in the model of 'Opposition-Craft', this was evidence of internal party reform, but it was coming from a low base, and perhaps signalled only the start of what needed to be achieved to convince the electorate of Labour's suitability for office. Thus, by the era under scrutiny, 1987-92, the party was only partially reformed at the outset of that period in opposition.

Commenting on Kinnock's own views of 1983-87, Jones claims that: 'More broadly, he considered that during his "first innings" as party leader – from 1983 to 1987 – "some progress had been made in securing new policies and increasingly, some changes were taking place in the 'mind set' of the party"', (Jones, 1996, p.119). However, Seyd indicates

that, for much of the 1983-87 era, the party had been on the defensive and responding to events such as the miners' strike – all of which had slowed down change on policy. Seyd claims that context meant that 'the major reforms in the party were thus not initiated until after Labour's third successive defeat at the polls in 1987' (Seyd, 1993, p.75). So, defeat in 1987 did not come as a surprise to the leadership of the party; it accepted that not enough distance had been travelled – especially on policy.

In terms of its offer to the electorate, the party did not move a great distance from 1983 to 1987. Indeed, in concrete terms, it merely 'tempered its outright antagonism to the European Community' (Seyd, 1993, p.73), softened its stance on public ownership, and got rid of its opposition to the sale of council houses. Gould claims the party gave up on issues like the economy and taxation and ultimately ceded all of this ground to the Conservative government (Gould, 2011, p.80). In that regard, changes to policy were limited in large part because Kinnock did not have full control on the levers of power inside the party. It was not until 1986 that he enjoyed a steady working majority on the party's governing body, the NEC (Jones, 1996, p.119). Kinnock himself was frustrated at the lack of change towards policy and noted that his lack of power inside the party meant that he could not change policy 'fast enough' (Kinnock, 2011, p.120). Therefore, in the terms set out in the model, the party had moved some distance towards the centre, but had not gone near the distance it needed to win power. On the substantial issues around the economy, taxation and national security, the party had not moved close enough to the political centre ground.

However, more substantial change and improvements to the party's operations did occur in terms of its political communications in the lead-up to the 1987 election. According to Wring, 'up to, and during, the 1987 campaign, sophisticated advertising and opinion research methods were reintroduced to the organisation' (Wring, 1995, p.115). Labour's political communications were therefore much improved by 1987 (Westlake, 2001, p.500), but marketing in itself was never going to be enough to win power. Gould indicates that the 1987 defeat occurred because the party had 'not changed far enough, fast enough' (Gould, 2011, p.79) on its policy platform. He argues that work would have had to be done on core issues of policy if the party were to win the next election, and that it needed to 'reach out to the new middle classes' (Gould, 2011, p.80).

According to Shaw, despite the 'much-acclaimed professionalism of Labour's [1987] campaign' the party had not been spared 'another crushing defeat'. Thus, for Shaw,

nothing short of a 'sweeping reappraisal of its programme was required' (Shaw, 1993, p.112) if the party was to regain power. Jones claims the changes to Labour's policy platform had been 'tentative and piecemeal' (Jones, 1996, pp.119-20), which had resulted in defeat at the general election. And, of the period 1983-87, Kinnock claims that 'most of our wounds and woes were self-inflicted.' (Kinnock, 2011, p.123). Indeed, some believe that Kinnock was a self-inflicted wound on the party and that he 'should have been replaced after losing one election. Leaders who lose a first election very rarely win a second' (Adonis, February 2020). Whatever the reasons, the party lost the 1987 election and the Conservatives were returned to government with a large 102-seat majority (Butler and Kavanagh, 1988). Therefore, in the terms set out in the 'Opposition-Craft' model, Labour's inheritance in 1987 was not good in terms of parliamentary representation for the 1987-92 period.

Despite this criticism of the party in opposition 1983-87, Wring claims that it 'served to enhance the leadership [of Kinnock]' (Wring, 1995, p.115) on the grounds that the party moved forward electorally from the 1983 nadir. It was in a slightly better parliamentary position in the sense that it had advanced from 209 seats in 1983 to 229 MPs in 1987 (Butler and Kavanagh, 1988). The party also saw off, for a second time, the challenge from the SDP. A number of commentators also praised Labour, under Kinnock, for its efforts around presentation and the struggle to modernise the party (see, for example, Harrop, 1990, p.289). In that respect, on the back of the 1987 defeat, Kinnock did not step down from the leadership of the party and instead elected to press on with further reform. As a result of the improved parliamentary position, many Labour MPs owed a great deal to Kinnock – thus his position as leader was secure for the next phase of his leadership.

That challenge, to further reform itself, was still to prove difficult in the period 1987-1992. By 1987, according to Westlake, the party 'had a highly competent Front Bench team unsullied by Labour's failures of the 1970s' (Westlake, 2001, p.500). So, on a key question of the 'Opposition-Craft' framework, the party was in a better place than it had been in earlier incarnations as an opposition, as it was in no way a first-time opposition, and most of its leaders were not associated with its last period in government. However, and unusually, because Kinnock had remained as leader despite the 1987 defeat, many of the top team were associated with electoral defeat – including Kinnock himself. According to Young, writing at the time: 'It is hard for a party to believe that it must radically examine all its assumptions and change some of its policies, if the same leaders, with the same

colleagues, supported by the same union leaders, in the same structures, making the same promises' are presented to the electorate again (Young in Westlake, 2001, p.425). On that evidence, Labour was to have an uphill struggle from 1987 as an immediate consequence of its inheritance from 1983-87.

While challenges remained ahead for Labour after 1987, the fact that it had seen off the SDP for the second time meant that a realignment was to occur in 1987-92, as a direct result of the changes to Labour that Kinnock had made: 'By reoccupying the political centre ground which Labour had voluntarily relinquished in the early 1980s, Kinnock had marginalised the SDP and rendered it effectively redundant' (Westlake, 2001, p.490). After the 1987 general election, Labour were once again seen as the only contender for power with the Conservatives. Consequently, in part because of the changed circumstances in which it was to operate, the SDP/Liberal Alliance was to merge by 1989 and was fully rebranded into the Liberal Democrats by 1990 (Taylor, 2007, p.28). For a time, at least, that third party influence was to have less traction on Labour than it had in the earlier part of its time in opposition. Much of the credit for that improved position was down to Kinnock's stewardship of the party. But what of the government they faced in the 1987-92 parliament?

In the period under analysis in this section, the Conservative government was into its third term in office – an environment that our model suggests should be fertile ground for a party of opposition to succeed. Coupled with their longevity in power, the Conservatives had been led by Thatcher since 1975 (Hennessy, 2000, p.398), and she had been Prime Minister for eight of those years by this point. As Figure 18 below shows, Thatcher's popularity was on the wane from 1987 until 1990 which, taken in isolation, was helpful to the Labour cause.

Figure 18: Who would make the best Prime Minister?

	Thatcher	Kinnock	Don't Know
June 1987	42%	28%	7%
April 1988	34%	21%	20%
July 1989	39%	32%	12%
June 1990	28%	39%	16%
Oct 1990	33%	38%	14%

Source: (Wybrow and King, 2001, pp.200-01). SDP/Liberal Alliance/Liberal Democrat leaders removed from data

Between 1987 and 1989 the government Labour opposed appeared to be governing effectively and with the support of the electorate (see, for example, Wybrow and King, 2001, pp.15-16). But, at this point, the Conservatives under Thatcher made a number of missteps that created space for the Labour opposition to thrive. Most prominent of those mistakes was the introduction of the poll tax (as discussed in Chapter 3). The Community Charge, as it was more formally known, appeared unpopular with the electorate and served as evidence that the Conservatives were finally out of step with governance on the centre ground of British politics (see, for example, Westlake, 2001, p.491) – notably part of the criteria set out in the model of ‘Opposition-Craft’ as conducive for an opposition win.

Concerns about Thatcher’s leadership of the party and her pursuit of the Community Charge policy started to spill over inside the Conservative Party. Initially, Thatcher was unsuccessfully challenged for the leadership of the party by Sir Anthony Meyer in 1989 (Bale, 2011, p.24). But, by 1990, dissatisfaction with her leadership reached boiling point. Her unpopularity in the party and in the country was to serve Labour, under Kinnock, well. According to Westlake: ‘By 1990 Thatcher’s increasingly isolated leadership had undoubtedly come to be a major electoral asset for Labour’ (Westlake, 2001, p.535). In addition, the country appeared to be moving towards recession in the early 1990s, all of which provided further grounds for opposition popularity, as commented on by Seyd: ‘Labour’s support among the voters at the beginning of the 1990s seemed to be the product initially of the unpopularity of Mrs Thatcher and her community charge and then the recession into which the country was quickly plunged’ (Seyd, 1993, p.98).

By the beginning of the 1990s, Labour was the beneficiary of government unpopularity. So, when the Conservatives elected to oust Thatcher in November 1990, it ‘represented something of a setback’ for Labour (Westlake, 2001, p.535). Indeed, Gould claims that ‘Thatcher’s toppling’ was the ‘killer blow of the parliament’ (Gould, 2011, p.95). He goes on

to suggest that her replacement, Major, was almost certain to win the next election on the grounds that he was free from any of the political baggage of the past that had so beset the Thatcher government. However, according to Mandelson, 'Neil [Kinnock] was ecstatic' at Thatcher's removal from power, but like Gould, Mandelson was less confident that the change in Prime Minister was a good thing for Labour (Mandelson, 2010, p.127). He indicated that all Labour's strategy in opposition was set up to fight Thatcher. Mandelson also recognised that Major neutralised many of the voters' concerns with the now former Prime Minister, Thatcher.

Contrasting Major's leadership style with that of Thatcher, Mughan argues that Major was not the dominant leader that Thatcher had been: 'Major's leadership style in government was also more collegial and conciliatory' (Mughan, 1993, p.193). In that regard, Major came to power with a leadership style quite different from that of his predecessor, who many felt had become too powerful and overbearing (Hennessy, 2000, pp.497-501). Therefore, some of the negative aspects of the Thatcher premiership had been wiped out overnight with the election of Major. It was not, however, just on the question of leadership style that Major appeared to solve the problems of the Thatcher era.

Major came to power on the promise to abandon the Tories' policy on the poll tax. He explicitly made this part of his leadership pitch to his party and sought immediately to rid the government he led of this unpopular measure (Bale, 2011, pp.34-35). On the government's part, this was good politics and once again brought the Conservatives back to the mainstream centre, but for the Labour opposition this made the context in which they operating all the more difficult, as noted in the model of 'Opposition-Craft'. Early in his premiership, evidence mounted that the electorate had warmed to their new Prime Minister, indeed 'a Gallup poll of March 1991 showed that 60 percent were satisfied with him as PM, and only 20 percent dissatisfied' (Newton, 1993, p.136).

While the Conservative government abandoned its unpopular poll tax policy, it remained largely trusted on the core issues that are of most concern to voters. Harrop, writing at the time, argued that: 'The electorate has consistently preferred the Conservatives on law and order and defence and the Conservatives also retain a substantial lead on economic management, particularly in a crisis. Labour's lead is confined to softer, caring issues such as health, pensions and welfare. As a result, competence forms part of the Conservative brand but is more peripheral to Labour's identity' (Harrop, 1990, p.281). At the time,

Labour clearly had an image problem around the central issues facing voters, all of which showed that the Conservative government was still trusted on the fundamental matters of good governance. When tested against this aspect of the model of 'Opposition-Craft', the Labour opposition was still distrusted on voters' priority issues.

Others argue, however, that Major faced mounting problems as Prime Minister, especially as the economy was in recession in the early 1990s. However, most commentators agree that Major benefitted from his handling of the first Gulf War in 1991 (Campbell, 1993). Underscoring that view, Newton comments that: 'The Gulf War was a stroke of luck for Major, who, in spite of reducing the government's unpopularity by virtue of the fact that he was not Thatcher, was still faced with trouble on almost every front. The war gave him the chance to avoid difficult issues of domestic politics and to play the role of a national and world leader' (Newton, 1993, p.136). Major's stance was enhanced by the war in Iraq, and even those leading the Labour Party at the time noted that 'he had a good war' (Mandelson, 2010, p.127).

Evidence mounted to suggest that the government Labour were facing in the early 1990s was actually strengthening in the months leading to the next general election. As Figure 19 below indicates, on the question of leadership Major was favoured by voters as the politician who would make the best Prime Minister by some considerable distance.

Figure 19: Who would make the best Prime Minister?

	Major	Kinnock	Ashdown	Don't Know
Jan 1991	48%	28%	11%	14%
May 1991	46%	26%	18%	10%
Nov 1991	42%	25%	21%	12%
Feb 1992	48%	22%	18%	12%
Mar 1992	42%	24%	17%	17%

Source: (Wybrow and King, 2001, pp.201-02)

This table of polls is in direct contrast with the earlier table in this chapter, which suggested concerns existed over Thatcher's ability to be Prime Minister. Thus, the Gulf War and the evidence of Major's popularity as Prime Minister created an environment after Thatcher's departure from Downing Street in 1990 that was considerably more difficult for an opposition to operate in. By extension, questions around Kinnock's suitability for the position of Prime Minister would remain a factor up to and including the 1992 election.

Those questions around Kinnock's leadership became especially acute because there was a perception that Labour would win the next election despite the strengthening position of the Conservatives. Mandelson claims that many expected Labour to win in 1992 as a result of the recession and the longevity of the Conservatives in office: 'The Tories had been in power for thirteen years. The economy was in the deepest recession for decades' (Mandelson, 2010, p.132). In that respect, voters and the media took it as a realistic possibility that Kinnock would become Prime Minister.

There was also a renewed focus on Labour's policy commitments as the possibility of its elevation to power increased. Focus on Labour's policies around the economy and taxation will be explored in detail later in this chapter, but in essence question marks remained around its stance in those areas. That position was in sharp contrast to a Conservative government that, since 1979, had been trusted to run the economy (Wybrow and King, 2001, pp.58-59). That trust in economic policy should, according to the model, have come into question during the recession of the early 1990s, but polling data seemed to indicate that despite the economic gloom the Conservatives were still more trusted with the country's finances (see Figure 20 below).

The recession meant that there was economic turmoil in the early 1990s. According to the model, that context should have been a good set of circumstances for the Labour opposition, but voters appeared to be wary of Labour around the economy. So, while there had been a seismic economic shock to the economy this did not seem to benefit the Labour opposition in the manner suggested by the model (Wybrow and King, 2001, pp. 62 and 309). Why not?

In Labour's long years in opposition the entire economic consensus in the UK had changed. The Thatcher government altered the economic conditions of the country (Hennessy, 2000, p.425). Hay argues that Labour, under Kinnock, accepted much of the Thatcherite economic programme, but not because it was specifically a UK and Thatcherite phenomenon, but more because the globalised economy had changed. The UK was now operating in a much more global and interconnected economic market, therefore the policy platform on which Labour had stood in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s would simply not work in the 1990s. Thus, Labour accepted the economic reforms not just to acquiesce in the Thatcherite dominance, but to adapt to a changed world (Hay, 1994, p.702).

However, legacy economic policies remained in Labour’s platform up to and including the 1992 election, which left some voters suspicious of Labour’s plans for the economy and taxation. In support of that view, Newton cites polling evidence: ‘In February 1992, 44 percent said the Conservatives would handle Britain’s economic difficulties best. Only 30 percent believed Labour would be better’ (Newton, 1993, p.141). Newton argues that the economic situation was grim up to and including the 1992 election. But, he argues, that situation was actually to the advantage of the Conservative government as they were more trusted to run the economy. Reflecting on voters’ perceptions, Newton states that: ‘[N]o matter how bad the economy might be, it would be much worse under Labour’ (Newton, 1993, p.140).

Newton argues that, despite the economic recession of the early 1990s, the Tories were quite simply more trusted to run the economy than Labour even though they were considered to be at least partially responsible for the economic problems in the first place. He suggests that it was almost because of the recession of the 1990s that voters turned to the Conservatives to sort it out, as shown in Figure 20 below.

Figure 20: With Britain in economic difficulties, which party do you think could handle the problem best? The Conservatives under Mr Major or Labour under Mr Kinnock?

	Conservative	Labour	Neither	Don’t Know
March 1991	53%	29%	9%	8%
June 1991	42%	38%	13%	7%
Sept 1991	45%	29%	17%	10%
December 1991	45%	31%	15%	9%
January 1992	44%	29%	17%	9%
February 1992	44%	30%	17%	9%
March 1992	43%	31%	17%	9%
April 1992	45%	38%	10%	6%

Source: Gallup Political Index (quoted in Newton, 1993, p.142)

Because ‘Labour’s economic reputation was poor’ (Newton, 1993, p.134), the evidence above shows that the Conservatives were the party voters were going to turn to when the economy had soured.

By 1992, voters were also more positive about their likely future wealth. According to one poll in February 1992, 67.9% of voters felt their economic expectations would improve or stay the same for their household over the next twelve months. This was in sharp contrast

to the 26.3% who thought that their economic situation would deteriorate in the same period (Wybrow and King, 2001, p.309). That polling evidence appeared to suggest that, as the election neared, voters had confidence in the Conservative government's ability to rectify the recession and were largely positive about their own future wealth, which according to the model of 'Opposition-Craft' would prove to be a difficult position for the Labour opposition.

4.4 Strategy

The model of 'Opposition-Craft' is clear that parties of opposition need to be located in the political centre ground if they are to win the subsequent general election. Kinnock, and those in the leadership of the Labour party, were cognisant of this political reality. Despite coming from the left of the party (Jones, 1996, pp.117-18), Kinnock took the party on a journey towards the centre ground from his accession to the leadership. Even before the 1987 election, evidence emerged of Kinnock's own personal journey in terms of his thinking, particularly on economics. Kinnock published a book in 1986 which was to form much of his platform from 1987; that text was called *Making Our Way* and, according to Jones, 'signalled an important shift in Kinnock's thinking towards qualified support for a managed, reformed capitalism' (Jones, 1996, pp.118-19).

An acceptance of capitalism and the market was not new to Labour in the 1980s. Since 1945, Labour has often looked to the market to produce the economic growth necessary to increase public expenditure and to expand welfare provision. The Labour Party, under Kinnock, simply reaffirmed that principle and explicitly abandoned nationalisation as a tool or goal of economic policy; in terms of Labour's ideological traditions this was not exceptional (Smith, 1994, p.710). According to Smith, 'Kinnock saw the market as a mechanism for distributing goods but recognised that it often failed' (Smith, 1994, p.710); and, in that regard, the leader continued to believe that there was a significant role for the state in regulating the market and to 'rectify inherent inequalities' in the capitalist model (Smith, 1994, p.710).

Smith suggests that much of Labour's move to the centre and acceptance of the Thatcherite hegemony was about an acceptance of the context in which it would govern if elected to office. It was also about acknowledging that the UK existed in an increasingly interdependent economic model (e.g. the EU, or EC, as it was known at the time). Thus, offering up some kind of alternative economic model would have had 'little credibility in a

world of increasing interdependence. It could only work if Labour withdrew from the EU, no longer a realistic option' (Smith, 1994, p.713). Therefore, Labour's policy offer in the 1980s moved right and towards the centre because of the economic constraints and not because of electoral expediency, or, according to Smith, 'as purely responses to Thatcherism' (Smith, 1994, p.714)

So, while the 1987 election showed some evidence of movement towards the centre, Labour's defeat at that election suggested that there was some distance to travel before the party could claim serious centre-ground appeal. In relation to that point, Westlake characterises the dilemma faced by the party post 1987: 'Labour faced a choice between change and extinction as a major electoral force' (Westlake, 2001, p.425). In that context, Kinnock elected to set in motion the most significant initiative of his leadership – the policy review: 'The Policy Review was, above all, a response to Labour's conspicuous electoral failure since 1979 and formed a central part of the attempt to widen the Party's appeal by abandoning electorally unpopular policies such as nationalization, high taxation and nuclear unilateralism' (Jones, 1996, p.120). Thus, a two-year review of the party's policy platform was set in motion 'in autumn 1987' (Shaw, 1993, p.112).

The review was initiated with seven policy review groups (known as PRGs) with each having somewhere between seven and nine members. Membership was drawn from MPs, the NEC, members of the shadow cabinet, and senior trade unionists. The review was coordinated by a group called the Campaign Management Team, which was composed of senior party officials and politicians (Shaw, 1993, p.113). Another mechanism by which to garner opinion from the public and support the policy review was an initiative called 'Labour Listens'. This was about engaging with the public to get some kind of sense of electorally appealing policies. Most academic commentary suggests that this was a flawed part of the policy-review project and, according to Shaw, it 'was allowed, quietly and unobtrusively, to wither away.' (Shaw, 1993, p.114). The review was also formulated by testing public opinion: 'They frequently looked at poll data to analyse the popularity of their proposals' (Wickham-Jones, 1995, p.471).

Wickham-Jones claims that it was a 'far-reaching review' of policy (Wickham-Jones, 1995, p.468) and that its main objective 'was to develop in the United Kingdom the kind of organized capitalism that some have perceived West Germany to enjoy' (Wickham-Jones, 1995, p.468). In concrete terms, Wickham-Jones also explained that 'Labour was at pains

to jettison its image as a high-spending and fiscally irresponsible party' (Wickham-Jones, 1995, p.469); the review, as he saw it, was to form the vehicle by which the party could be rid of that profligate image.

Other academics have taken a different, but not necessarily contradictory, perspective on the review. Hay suggests that: 'Labour's Policy Review should be seen, somewhat ironically, as the product of the Party's years in the electoral wilderness during the 1980s' (Hay, 1994, p.702). Hay claims that the policy review was about winning back some of the working class vote that deserted the party in the 1980s and voted Conservative: 'the Review should not therefore be seen as a concession to Thatcherism, but rather as a long overdue modernization that had previously been prevented by the cloying influence of the trade unions and the inertial pull of the extreme left' (Hay, 1994, p.702). Whatever the perspective on the review, it seemed designed to lead Labour to more electorally popular ground, as promoted by the model of 'Opposition-Craft'.

By 1989 the policy review was complete and its package of reformed policies was wrapped up in a document called *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change*. A number of different opinions formed on the outcome of the review, which are worth exploring on the grounds that the roots of the 1992 defeat lay to some degree in the final results of the review. Kinnock's own view of the review was that it got rid of some policy negatives for the party, but did not have enough in it that would give voters a positive reason to vote Labour. He claimed that any kind of positive vision in the review got 'squeezed out' (Kinnock, 2011, p.124), a view endorsed by Westlake, who suggests that: 'The policy review was an essentially defensive document, removing electorally damaging commitments more readily than it developed constructive reasons for voting Labour' (Westlake, 2001, p.493).

Shaw acknowledges that some in the leadership of the party felt that it was 'unduly circumspect' in its ambition. However, Shaw disagrees and claims that its end product 'was a far-reaching change in Labour's programme and ideology' (Shaw, 1993, p.115), a view seemingly underscored by Hay, who suggests the review marked a 'symbolic return to consensus politics' (Hay, 1994, p.701). Seyd advances the view that the policy review was 'the most comprehensive attempt to reconsider the nature of the party's political commitments since the writing of the party's original constitution in 1918' (Seyd, 1993, p.76). The magnitude and scope of the review did not seem in doubt, but the results were questionable.

But what did the review actually achieve? Seyd characterises its achievements in three key elements:

- 'First, *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change* stressed the supply side of economic management' (Seyd, 1993, p.79);
- 'Second, Labour's hostility to the European Community in 1983 had been consistent with its nationalist approach to economic issues. Its new attachment to the world economy made a pro-EC stance logical' (Seyd, 1993, p.79);
- 'Third, *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change* affirmed a commitment to redistribution, albeit a very tentative one' (Seyd, 1993, p.80).

Evident in those elements was a determined effort to accept the economic consensus as enacted by the Thatcher government; but there was also a recognition that the UK operated in a globalised economy with an economic settlement of its own. In that context, Crewe describes the policy review as 'the least socialist policy statement ever to be published by the party' (Crewe, 1990, p.5).

The review appeared to end Labour's commitment to full employment 'on the grounds that it was no longer viable' (Shaw, 1993, p.121). This was highly symbolic as it was a party shibboleth and perhaps underscored Shaw's view, articulated earlier, that the policy review was actually highly significant and moved the party some considerable distance. Seyd also points to aspects of *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change* that seem to bust other aspects of longstanding party dogma; the document asserted that: 'the extent of public services should be improved by putting the needs of the user before those of the producer' (Seyd, 1993, p.76). Seyd also notes that 'the document made clear that public ownership was not a fundamental priority' (Seyd, 1993, p.77). Both statements set out a very significant movement away from the platforms on which the party had stood in earlier elections.

On *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change*, Kellner comments that, 'on the use of market mechanisms, the report comes within an inch of celebrating their use' (Kellner, *The Independent*, 8 May 1989). *Looking to the Future* was another document produced in the wake of the policy review, which also appeared to shift the party's position on the capitalist economy. It claimed: 'The difference between ourselves and the Conservatives is not that they accept the market and we do not, but that we recognise the limits of the market and they do not. The market can be a good servant, but it is often a bad master' (as quoted in

Shaw, 1993, p.119). Jones describes the shift to endorsing the market economy as described in *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change* as a 'historical ideological shift' (Jones, 1996, p.125), but at the same time suggests that 'it did not amount to a radical departure from the actual performance of previous Labour governments' (Jones, 1996, p.126).

For some at the top of the party at the time, however, the movement on policy towards the centre was not far enough. Gould claims that the content of the policy review 'wasn't deep enough to win the General Election' (Gould, 2011, p.94). According to Westlake, the policy review group was in some ways stunted in its achievements: 'the group failed to break, once and for all, the party's link with the idea of nationalisation' (Westlake, 2001, p.493). As Kinnock's biographer, Westlake reflects the leader's disappointment with the policy review process in the sense that it was not audacious in its ambition, as Kinnock had hoped it would be.

Despite concerns over the radicalism of the review, it did point to more positive relations with Europe. In that sense, Labour's move to the centre was signified by its growing warmth towards relations with the European Community (Tindale, 1992). Labour had initially been hostile towards Europe; indeed, in 1983, the manifesto committed the party to withdrawal from the EC, but 'by the end of the 1980s, the bulk of Labour's economic policy makers were convinced that participation in a steadily more integrated EC was vital to deliver the stable economic environment that was seen as the prerequisite of sustained economic growth' (Shaw, 1993, p.125). Cooperation with the European project was another indicator of Labour's more relaxed attitude towards the market economy and recognition of the globalised environment in which it would operate if elevated to power.

Part of the party's move towards the centre ground and developing more positive relations with the European project was wrapped up in supporting entry into the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) (Rose and Svenson, 1994). In order to bring about that change in stance, Kinnock reshuffled his shadow cabinet in order to move factions hostile to the EC onto the margins. He shifted Michael Meacher and Bryan Gould to 'less important portfolios' (Wickham-Jones, 1995, p.472), and replaced them with Blair and Brown in economic roles within the shadow cabinet. Wickham-Jones observes that: 'The reshuffle marked a move towards the right within the PLP' (Wickham-Jones, 1995, p.472) and unblocked a key area of policy that was identified in the policy review. Therefore, entry into the ERM was central to Labour's repositioning strategy after 1987.

Further evidence of progress towards the centre lay in its new policies on defence. Of the seven policy committees in the review, the one led by Gerald Kaufman was widely perceived to do an effective job on defence (Hughes and Wintour, 1990, p.110). That committee, under Kaufman’s leadership, managed to ditch unilateral disarmament as party policy; a policy which had been widely acknowledged as a millstone round the party’s neck in earlier elections (Hughes and Wintour, 1990, pp.104-07). According to Mandelson, ‘[Kaufman] knew what he wanted, knew what Labour needed, and showed every sign of being determined to get it’ (Mandelson, 2010, p.106). Thus, Kaufman successfully ridded the party of a key negative on policy so that Labour could enter the next election without being seen as weak on defence.

It was clear that some inside the party felt the review had real tangible accomplishments; ‘on the face of it the policy review was a success’ and ‘by autumn of 1989, Labour leaders were confident of success at the next election’ (Wickham-Jones, 1995, p.472). However, whatever good work may have been achieved on policy according to those inside the party, polling evidence suggested that it had little impact on voters. Despite all the changes to its platform, the party still did not find itself trusted with the key areas of policy.

Figure 21: Voters’ Assessment of parties’ governing abilities

Date	Defence		Europe		Industrial Relations	
	Cons	Lab	Cons	Lab	Cons	Lab
April 1989	51%	22%	39%	21%	45%	34%
February 1992	57%	20%	53%	23%	49%	32%

Source: Gallup Poll Index (as quoted in Seyd, 1993, p.97)

According to Seyd, from the evidence articulated in Figure 21 above, ‘the changes in [Labour’s] defence and European policies appeared to have made little impact on the voters’ (Seyd, 1993, p.97).

Mandelson paints a further depressing picture of the results stemming from the policy review. He claims the rest of the policy-review committees only ‘tinkered’ with Labour’s prospectus and did not take the party in the direction required to enhance its prospects of electoral victory (Mandelson, 2010, p.106). He goes further and claims that John Smith’s group on the economy actually managed to commit Labour to ‘higher taxes’ – with an emphasis on the ‘higher’ (Mandelson, 2010, p.106). In that regard, Mandelson views the

committee led by Smith as having taken Labour backwards in its quest to locate the policy platform on the centre ground.

The roots of its reticence on policy reform stemmed from Labour's cynicism about the results of polling data which showed 'most voters were willing to pay more in taxes in return for better public services' (Shaw, 1993, p.122). Shaw claims that Labour were right to think the polling was wrong and explained that it was this assumption that drove the party to be circumspect in its offer following the policy review. Exacerbating that conservatism on policy, Mandelson argues that there was no pressure coming from the leadership for the committees to be radical (Mandelson, 2010, p.106). The caution on policy described here led Labour to offer tax proposals designed to raise taxes for only those on the highest salaries in order to pay for improved pensions and child benefit. That move was designed to allay fears about tax, but in fact only stoked the issue as a concern for voters.

Westlake argues that it was the issue of tax that was the 'biggest factor' in the Labour election defeat in 1992 (Westlake, 2001, p.541). According to Westlake, 'in a 24 April 1991 opinion poll, 54 per cent of respondents gave tax as their primary reason for not voting Labour' (Westlake, 2001, p.546). In an effort to negate tax as an issue for the party, in its early manifesto of 1990, *Looking to the Future*, Labour indicated that it would raise £2 billion in its first year in office by raising the top rate of tax to 50% and by removing the National Insurance ceiling in order to pay for increases to pensions and child benefit. Labour's plans were worked out on the assumption that the Chancellor would cut the basic rate of tax from 25p in the pound at the budget immediately prior to the expected election date. What actually happened wrong-footed Labour; instead of cutting the basic rate, the government opted to introduce a new 20p band, which was designed to support those on low incomes. If Labour supported the government's new policy then it would not pay for their spending commitments on pensions and child benefit, but if they failed to support it then it would hit the poor. That put Labour into a bind from which they did not recover. According to the Labour strategist Gould, 'no one had any idea how to respond' (Gould, 2011, p.114).

Alongside the tax dilemma came a problem in Labour's spending promises. A number of members of the shadow cabinet had made informal spending commitments over the duration of the 1987-92 parliament, which had been researched and subsequently costed

by Conservative Central Office (CCO). Researchers at CCO came up with a figure of £35 billion in extra spending, which would need to be paid for by taxation (according to the Tories). At least £25 billion of this figure had not been costed by Labour as part of its published plans (Sanders, 1993, p.206). Like Mandelson, Gould also claims that the policy review failed to reform Labour on tax and spend policies and created a black hole in its financial projections (Gould, 2011, p.86), which was to be exposed ruthlessly by the Conservatives.

The double-pronged dilemma on tax proposals and spending commitments led to the 'killer blow' (Westlake, 2001, p.552) when the Tories launched their 'the Price of Labour - £1,250 a Year for Every Family' campaign and the 'Labour's Double Whammy – More Taxes, Higher Prices' poster campaign (see Figure 23). According to Gould, Smith's pledges on pensions and child benefit 'would trap us on tax for the next election', and concluded that the party paid a 'heavy price in 1992' as a result of its stance on tax (Gould, 2011, p.86).

In summarising the policy review, despite its aims, Wickham-Jones contended that there was still much in the document that would 'give concern to capitalists' (Wickham-Jones, 1995, p.470). While the review 'watered down' the party's commitments to public ownership, it was also 'resolutely and repeatedly critical of both the City and the CBI' (Wickham-Jones, 1995, pp. 470-71), which undermined some of its attempt at being business friendly. Thus, although the review brought Labour closer to the centre, and reengaged it with political ground on which it had successfully won previous elections, it did not go the full distance required to win the 1992 election. In that respect, how did the party go about selling its new appeal?

Whatever the shortcomings of the policy review, the party needed to promote its centre-ground appeal through its general narrative, as advanced by the model of 'Opposition-Craft'. But that task was to be a challenge on a number of fronts. Initially, Labour needed to talk to itself about the centre of British politics before it could persuade a sceptical electorate. At the 1988 conference Kinnock confronted the hard left and proclaimed: 'the day may come when this conference, this movement, is faced with a choice of socialist economies [...] But until that day comes [...] the fact is that the kind of economy that we will be faced with when we win the election will be a market economy' (Jones, 1996, p.123). In such statements to conference, the leader was taking the party on a journey

towards acceptance of terms such as the 'market economy'; no easy task given the party had been in the grip of the hard-left only a matter of years earlier.

Aside from talking to his party, Hay argues that Kinnock needed to find a new narrative when communicating with voters on the grounds that, as Hay put it: 'The Keynesian welfare state is gone. The Post-War Settlement cannot be resurrected. An alternative vision is required' (Hay, 1994, p.707). In this statement, Hay articulates the sense that the Thatcherite project had utterly changed the economic landscape, and that Labour needed to adapt to that position rather than find policy solutions for an age that had passed. Whether it was the limitations of the review, or the fact that Kinnock simply did not have the words, Hay argues that Kinnock struggled to find the vision to articulate a convincing centre-ground appeal. Kinnock himself acknowledged the policy review was insufficient in its ambition, but also struggled to develop a narrative around it because 'there was no central philosophical theme to the exercise' (Kinnock, as quoted in Jones, 1996, p.128). In that respect, the policy review was flawed on the grounds that it was limited in its policy ambition and had no central thread, rendering its effective promotion to the public a challenge.

Mandelson (2010) claims that it was his job to promote the policy review in the press. He was charged with spinning its achievements, which he duly did. In undertaking that task, Mandelson stressed the new stance on defence because on that area of policy he felt that the party had made real progress around unilateral nuclear disarmament. Elsewhere, Mandelson claims that he did his best with communicating the achievements of the review, but felt that the party had not got much of substance from it and, thus, he found it problematic to develop a coherent set of words to place Labour at the centre, as promoted by our model of 'Opposition-Craft'. The review was officially titled *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change*, but such was Mandelson's frustration with it that he acerbically referred to it as: 'Skirt the Challenge, Hint at Change' (Mandelson, 2010, p.118). So, the development of a narrative around the review was problematic on the grounds that there was not much there in terms of substance, despite its glossy presentation, as noted by Mandelson: 'Our party and its policies may not yet have been modern in any real sense, but our communications were' (Mandelson, 2010, p.120).

The party also concluded that it needed to present itself as a party of government in order to suggest that: a) it would be more effective than the Conservatives in office, and b) it

would be the natural inheritor of the levers of power – both aspects of the model.

Contrary to the views set out by Mandelson and Gould, Newton argues that, on policy, the two parties were quite close together by the time of the 1992 election and comments that: ‘in this sense the 1992 election was a “valence-issue,” not a “position-issue” election’ (Newton, 1993, p.135). In that respect, Labour wished to demonstrate that it was trusted with the power, and therefore it attempted to show itself as a government-in-waiting. In order to demonstrate that it was a responsible party of power, Labour elected to hold a shadow budget shortly before the 1992 election. Newton argues that the shadow budget fitted into the Labour narrative that it was capable of taking on the mantle of government, and claims that it was designed to ‘show Labour as prudent and responsible’ (Newton, 1993, p.144). Accordingly, this initiative was presented by the Shadow Chancellor, John Smith, on the 16th March, 1992, in what was described by Westlake as a ‘convincing performance’ (Westlake, 2001, p.551).

Having initially been received well, the shadow budget began to fall apart (Gould, 2011, p.120). Several days after it was launched, the Tories began to pick apart the figures offered up by Labour in its presentation. The Conservatives postulated that Labour would have to put up taxes in order to pay for spending commitments outlined in the shadow budget. Later it emerged that some at the top of the party had entertained doubts about the concept of a shadow budget from its inception; according to Gould, Brown thought the idea of a shadow budget was ‘insane’ and would give the Tories ‘all the weapons they needed to attack us’ (Gould, 2011, p.120). Asked whether the shadow budget was a mistake, Lord Blunkett replied: ‘Yes’ (Blunkett, March 2020). The shadow budget was an example of a ‘pointillism’ approach to policy - a notion rejected by ‘Opposition-Craft’ model as it hands opponents too much detail which can be dissected and attacked. The assault on the shadow budget gave the impression that Labour was still located too far to the left, and that in fact the Conservative government was better positioned on the centre ground. On that front, Labour failed on important ‘Opposition-Craft’ tests.

A further strand of its narrative to suggest that Labour was fit for office was its ‘City offensive’, which ran between 1990 and 1992 and was designed to improve the party’s pro-business credentials. This strategy was also known more commonly as the ‘prawn cocktail offensive’ (Wickham-Jones, 1995, pp.468-76) as a result of the more than 150 lunches that Labour had with business leaders in a bid to win them over to the cause. Wickham-Jones argues that the prawn-cocktail offensive was all about providing the City with confidence

that it would 'not devalue' the pound 'after a Labour victory' (Wickham-Jones, 1995, p.476). It is unclear how successful these promotional events were, but Newton argues that 'the Conservative Party has always been the party of business', and therefore suggests that voters still went into the 1992 election with the Tories as the party with business on its side (Newton, 1993, p.134).

However, Labour's strategy of acting like a government-in-waiting was seen by many as a success in the sense that it made the electorate see the party's prospects of winning the 1992 general election as very real (Wickham-Jones, 1995, p.484). But, for some, that success was ultimately to prove counter-productive (see, for example, Westlake, 2001, p.573). During the campaign, Labour were often ahead in the polls; indeed, on the night before the now-infamous Sheffield rally, Labour were leading by between 4 and 7 points, according to some surveys. However, Crewe argues that the polls were misleading and overstated Labour support (Crewe, 1992, pp.493-94). At the time, Crewe's analysis was not available, so voters and the media focused on the real expectation that Labour would win. Taken together with the triumphalism of the Sheffield rally, the strategy of Labour behaving like a government-in-waiting in order to make Kinnock seem prime ministerial, and the Tories acting like the opposition, all conspired to make the electorate really focus in on a Labour victory and the prospect of Kinnock as Prime Minister. Various sources (see, for example, Westlake, 2001; Mandelson, 2010; Blunkett, March 2020; and Gould, 2011) indicate that that perfect storm of circumstances motivated people to come out and vote Conservative in order to stop a Labour/Kinnock victory. On that analysis, Labour's strategy worked to such an extent that it prevented its own victory.

Had Kinnock been a convincing leader of the Labour Party and potential Prime Minister then perhaps the doubts the electorate had about Labour might not have stifled their achievements in 1992. But, there *were* doubts about Kinnock, and according to Murghan: 'The polls had consistently shown that voters doubted his qualifications for the premiership' (Murghan, 1993, p.193). Murghan goes on to argue that '1992 was one of the most presidential elections in the post-1945 period' (Murghan, 1993, pp.201-02). In that respect, there was an exceptional focus on the leader in the campaign and that was to disadvantage Labour further as there were serious doubts about Kinnock, formulated over many years, and his ability to be PM.

Kinnock's leadership is a curious one as far as the model of 'Opposition-Craft' is concerned in that he displayed many of the attributes advanced by the model, yet ultimately went on to lose and was also cited a major factor in Labour's defeat. Seyd claims Kinnock was increasingly seen as 'autocratic and unaccountable' (Seyd, 1993, p.92). While not meant as a compliment, that style of leadership is actually what the model asks for, in the sense that Kinnock exemplified that he was a strong and capable decision-taker. Kinnock was also praised by a number of commentators for the leadership he showed by modernising the party, as noted by Jones: 'There is no question that under Neil Kinnock's leadership major changes were accomplished not just in the organisational structure of the Labour Party but also in its policy and doctrine' (Jones, 1996, p.129). So, why were his leadership credentials called into questions?

The literature around Kinnock's leadership ability is divided about his merits, but it all seems to acknowledge that there were various stages to his nine-year tenure in the job – some more successful than others. Kinnock came to the leadership from the left of his party, but took it on a journey towards the centre. In that regard, he provided 'the drive, determination, and direction' to move the party away from its 'unsuccessful past' (Seyd, 1993, p.74), but throughout that period he still struggled with 'the Bennite left' (Jones, 1996, p.129), which complicated things. As a party manager then, he could be considered successful. Without his leadership Labour may well have not transitioned to become a serious contender for power. But that is not the same thing as being a credible Prime Minister (Heffernan and Marqusee, 1992).

The 'Opposition-Craft' model asks whether the leader's policy position is closer to the centre than the party s/he leads, but in Kinnock's case the electorate could not be criticised for not knowing quite where Kinnock stood on policy. He had formerly been to the left of his party (Jeffreys, 1993, p.128), but on becoming leader he seemed to jettison that position on the grounds of electoral expediency. Thus, questions about his real intentions with power were quite legitimate when taking his past positions into account (Fielding, 1994). On two questions from the model around leadership then, there were indefinable answers, which was not exactly ideal for Labour at the time.

Gould claims that there were issues around Kinnock's personality that concerned the electorate. Those concerns stemmed back before the 1987 defeat and still dogged him during the era under analysis. For example, he had been caught dancing in the final week

of the 1987 campaign and this, according to Gould, had 'undermined his stature' (Gould, 2011, p.80). During the later days of the Thatcher premiership, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Kinnock appeared to experience a revival as leader. Westlake suggests that 'Kinnock was probably the most dominant Labour leader in the Party's history, he even had something of the Thatcher authoritarianism about him' (Westlake, 2001, p.496).

Having argued that Kinnock provided 'strong leadership' at times (Westlake, 2001, p.424), Westlake argues that in the latter stages of the parliament Kinnock's leadership faltered when compared to the strong team he had assembled around himself (Westlake, 2001, p.457). Westlake argues that, by the time he got to the 1992 election, Kinnock had lost his ability to be a 'fiery and passionate politician' and that this was because his leadership events were 'stage-managed' in a bid to make him appear prime ministerial. In other words, the professionalism of Labour's campaigning actually served to stunt Kinnock's natural ability. Others have claimed that Kinnock's natural 'spontaneity', as Westlake calls it, was part of Labour's problem and was consequently why Labour campaigned in such a controlled manner: 'Kinnock *had* to play it safe. The result was caution and unwillingness to take any risks' (Westlake, 2001, p.538).

Towards the end of Kinnock's leadership, and in the build-up to the 1992 election, Gould claimed that Kinnock 'was exhausted, by constantly attempting to hold together a party threatening to fracture' (Gould, 2011, p.99). Both Gould and Westlake describe various rumours of unhappiness about Kinnock's leadership stemming from the shadow cabinet, which arose towards the end of the parliament, and which undermined his position and raised further questions about his suitability for the role of Prime Minister. The model asks whether the leader has a firm grip over his/her party; at times Kinnock certainly did have the party in check, but towards the end of his tenure it was evident that all was not well inside the party and Kinnock's leadership was central to those concerns.

Perhaps the most symbolic event of Kinnock's leadership came in the 1992 campaign itself at the Sheffield rally. This enormous event was designed to make Kinnock and the party look like they were about to form a government, but according to Gould, Kinnock 'made one mistake when at the Sheffield Rally, overwhelmed by the occasion, he was over-enthusiastic in greeting the crowd' (Gould, 2011, p.143). Some claim that his 'we're, all right' shout at the rally was delivered in an American accent, which made it all the more bizarre and not in the least bit 'prime ministerial' (NewStatesman Website, 5th March,

2010). Others have suggested the event was not that important and has been over-egged in terms of its significance (Crewe, 1992, p.478), but Gould claims that Kinnock himself 'bitterly regrets that mistake' (Gould, 2011, p.144). According to Lord Blunkett, who welcomed Labour supporters to his home city that night: 'That didn't lose us the election [...] but it was indicative of a failure to read the public mood. They [the electorate] didn't want a rally like that – they preferred John Major on his soap box' (Blunkett, March 2020). Whatever the significance, it succinctly symbolised the party's strategy to appear like a government-in-waiting, but also threw an uncomfortable spotlight onto a leader who did not quite fit the mould as a Prime Minister.

4.5 Tasks

Of the many tasks associated with the role of Her Majesty's official opposition, a party in that position must hold the government of the day to account. In altering its policy stance on a range of issues as a result of the work undertaken by the policy review, Labour was better positioned to criticise the government. Its work in opposition was commented on by Hay, who argued that: '[Labour's] new programme accepts the basic parameters of the Thatcherite Settlement in much the same way that the Conservative governments of the fifties accepted the parameters of the Attlee Settlement' (Hay, 1994, p.700). In that position, the party was better able selectively to oppose the Conservative government by holding it to account on areas of weakness and by supporting it on aspects of strength. On the basis of Hay's account, Labour accepted the core components of the Thatcherite economic model, which was the central component of the party's platform for government, and which had so hamstrung the party in the 1980s.

In largely accepting the governing party's hegemony over the economy, Labour's narrative was more plausible, but there was always the risk that the party would be seen as second-best on managing the country's finances; for why would the electorate turn to the Labour party when they could have the real thing with the Conservatives (Newton, 1993, p.134)? In addition to that concern, there was little evidence that voters were turning to Labour for positive reasons and, moreover, that any poll leads the party amassed at the time were seen as largely about government unpopularity than Labour's ability to present itself as better stewards of government (Seyd, 1993, p.98). In that respect, Labour's apparent strength, as shown in the polls, was actually probably quite soft for periods between the late 1980s and the 1992 general election (Crewe, 1992). On that analysis, and on the aspects of the model of 'Opposition-Craft' which call into question the opposition party's

ability to communicate government deficiencies and to present themselves as more in tune with the electorate, Labour was still found wanting.

In terms of its parliamentary tasks in opposing the government, the focal point is Prime Minister's Questions. When opposing the Prime Minister, Kinnock was often 'seen as coming off second best to Thatcher' (Westlake, 2001, p.457). A number of commentators argue that his performances at the dispatch box were often long-winded and rarely hit the mark when it came to exposing the Conservatives' weaknesses (see, for example, Hughes and Wintour, 1990, p.177). Kinnock's ability in parliament was questionable from the outset of his leadership in 1983. During the 'Westland Affair' in 1986 (see Overbeek, 1986), Kinnock had an opportunity in parliament to bring about Thatcher's downfall, but his contribution fell short of the mark, which ultimately gifted Thatcher a number of further years in power, as noted by Alan Clark in his diaries: 'For a few seconds Kinnock had her cornered ... But then he had an attack of wind, gave her time to recover' (Clark, 2003, p.135). Indeed, Thatcher herself, commented on Kinnock's parliamentary abilities: 'His Commons performances were marred by verbosity, a failure to master facts and technical arguments and, above all, a lack of intellectual clarity' (Thatcher, 1993, p.360). For some, the Westland performance cast the die as far as Kinnock's ability in parliamentary settings was concerned. On that front, Kinnock did not score well when measured against the 'Opposition-Craft' framework.

In terms of wider parliamentary management, Kinnock himself acknowledged that the party's move towards electability happened in various forums, including in parliamentary committees. He suggested that parliament was not all about 'set-piece performances', but went on to suggest that it was also about 'the hard slog in committees, and the fastidiousness of the specialist MP who becomes recognised as an authority in the land, simply by their hard work and insight' (Kinnock, 2011, p.128). His comments appeared to acknowledge some of his own shortcomings in the House. However, what he was more effective at doing was appointing the right people around him. By the years 1989-90, when Kinnock was starting to reap the benefits of his reforms, he promoted key players to the top team: 'Kinnock was making the final adjustments to what was widely considered a highly competent Front Bench team, promoting [Tony] Blair to Employment, and elevating Gordon Brown to Trade and Industry' (Westlake, 2001, p.490). In that regard, set against the model, Labour had a wider team of effective parliamentary performers.

Indeed, Kinnock assembled a strong team with some very able members of the shadow cabinet. For example, Smith as Shadow Chancellor was very strong at the dispatch box and was considered to be a 'great parliamentary orator' (Independent Website, 20th January, 2019). Gould claims that Kinnock was sometimes criticised for 'not using John Smith more' (Gould, 2011, p.124) out in the media, but the Shadow Chancellor's health was not good, which meant that Smith limited his media outings. Smith was also touted as a potential replacement as leader for Kinnock, so it may well have suited Kinnock's ends that Smith was largely unavailable for media appearances (Stuart, 2005).

Labour's parliamentary outfit from 1987-90 was good, according to the criterion set out in the model, but it was stymied somewhat by Kinnock's shortcomings at PMQs. Various sources point to disquiet about Kinnock's leadership: 'there were murmurings among Labour MPs, shadow cabinet ministers and the unions about replacing Neil' (Mandelson, 2010, p.130). Labour was also hampered by the large parliamentary majority that the Conservatives enjoyed in this parliament. In that regard, the government was only defeated once in the entire parliament, on a matter of NHS reform (Hansard, 13th March, 1990). In parliament then, Labour played its hand reasonably well, but it had not been dealt the most fortuitous set of cards. But what about wider party management? How did that aspect of 'Opposition-Craft' perform when set against the model?

Kinnock claimed that it was only after the defeat of 1987 that he was able 'to make more serious reforms to the Party' (Kinnock, 2011, p.124). He knew that internal reform and his management of the party would signal to the electorate that Labour was ready to form a government. In that respect, the policy review was to form a major plank of Kinnock's party-management strategy (Mandelson, 2010, p.106). On the one hand, the policy review was about forming a platform closer to the aspirations of the voters but, on the other, its constitutional make-up was about holding the party together towards one common goal. By binding the unions, the shadow cabinet, party members, local parties and the leadership together in the review process, Kinnock aimed to make all wings of the party responsible for its outcome (Shaw, 1993, p.113).

However, Seyd argues that Kinnock did not really take the party with him during the policy review process: 'Kinnock claimed in his introduction to *Meet the Challenge, Make the Change* that local parties, branches and trade unions had discussed the issues during the two years since the review was established, but in fact there had been very little attempt to

gauge opinion at the grassroots' (Seyd, 1993, p.82). Despite this, Shaw's contention is that there was only 'modest resistance' to the policy review inside the party' (Shaw, 1993, p.126). He claims that Labour, having been defeated on three occasions, was in acceptance of the need to change and create a more electorally appealing prospectus for government. Thus, members from all wings were quiescent with the review – a key test of the 'Opposition-Craft' model.

It became evident, however, that Kinnock 'made surprisingly little personal input to the process' of the policy review (Mandelson, 2010, p.106). He did not meet the chairs of the seven committees and neither did he float ideas about what he wanted out of the process. Mandelson argues that Kinnock was 'aloof, abstract and a nightmare to deal with on any issue of substance' (Mandelson, 2010, p.107). However, there was another perspective about the policy review and its role in party management, and that was that the review should not 'disturb the amity within the party' (Shaw, 1993, p.126). On that analysis, Kinnock's absence from the process was about keeping all wings of the party together and not pressing his particular brand of modernisation to the exclusion of others.

Seyd appears to argue from the same perspective as Shaw when he claims that 'the goal of political office was paramount, and the party leader stipulated a party of unity and political uniformity. A divided party was regarded as a defeated party' (Seyd, 1993, p.92). For Seyd then, the overarching ambition for Kinnock was to keep the party together, even if that came at the expense of the radical overhaul of the policy offer that was perhaps necessary for the party to win the subsequent general election (Seyd, 1993, p.74). For Shaw, that desire to keep the party together resulted in 'a bias towards blandness', which was a marker of the party in the post-review era (Shaw, 1993, p.126). That blandness in style is a theme picked up by other commentators and appeared to dog Labour in the build-up to the 1992 election (Newton, 1993, p.144).

According to Jones, on the policy review Kinnock was aware of the awkward fact that 'as late as 1991 there was always a significant risk that any progressive lunge that was too big or too quick could have fractured the developing consensus and retarded the whole operation' (Jones, 1996, p.129). With that view in mind, the review did not go too far in its outcome in order to keep those inside the party on board with the reform process. Jones also argues that there was a 'lack of a central philosophical theme' (Jones, 1996, p.129),

something that Kinnock had acknowledged earlier in this analysis, but according to Jones, had there been one then this might have been enough to split the party.

The efforts given over to party management under Kinnock appear to have divided opinion amongst the academic literature. Most are united on the view that there was an effort made to keep the party intact, but also note the effort to drive out the hard-left of the party. Shaw argues that 'by the end of the 1980s the hard left was a spent force' (Shaw, 1993, p.127). Despite the purge of its more extreme wing, Seyd indicates that 'a segment of the party had become totally detached from this renewal strategy' and that they rejected the product of the policy review (Seyd, 1993, p.97). However, Gould claims that this dissatisfied element inside the Labour Party remained even up to and including the 1992 general election campaign, when Gould notes that Labour unveiled posters as part of its campaign amidst 'a demonstration by Militant' (Gould, 2011, p.132). So, even years after the reforms to the party, it was still infected by the hard-left and could not claim to be utterly quiescent as advocated by the model.

Kinnock's reforms and purge of the left had an impact on membership numbers. Card-carrying members of the Labour Party 'revealed a steady decline in membership from 1984 onwards; by 1988, it had dropped by 60,000 to 266,000' (Seyd, 1993, p.88). Seyd claims that the fall in membership precipitated 'a determination to expand numbers', which only proved moderately successful in the latter years of Kinnock's leadership (Seyd, 1993, p.88). The model of 'Opposition-Craft' questions whether a party of opposition has an expanded-and-enthused membership able to fight an effective ground war. While not a small party, Labour, under Kinnock, was not in the best place to fight the subsequent campaign.

In a further bid to reform his party after the 1987 defeat, Kinnock wanted to move the party towards a system of one member, one vote (OMOV) for the selection and reselection of parliamentary candidates; however, he was initially defeated in this ambition. Despite this, it is Seyd's contention that Kinnock 'refused to let the matter rest' (Seyd, 1993, p.87). With that aim in mind, Kinnock created a working party of the NEC in order to try and bring about OMOV, but that move was, also, ultimately to fail. However, Kinnock did succeed in curbing union power in the selection of candidates, but in a failure of his strategy he never got to the point of implementing full OMOV. Thus, 'on this issue an impasse had been reached by 1991, which would be resolved only after the election' (Seyd, 1993, p.89).

Implementing OMOV would have been nothing but a pipe-dream in the early stages of Kinnock's leadership because he did not control many of the levers of power inside the party. Wickham-Jones claims that Kinnock and the leadership only strengthened its grip on the machinery of the party by the late 1980s: 'By 1989, Kinnock had dominated the NEC' (Wickham-Jones, 1995, p.471). In reference to his control over the party's governing body, Kinnock himself suggests that 'slowly and arduously I managed to secure a dependable majority on the National Executive Committee' (Kinnock, 2011, p.124). That control allowed him to move forward with party reform, but seemingly that advantage came too late in his leadership to have a sustainable impact.

The model of 'Opposition-Craft' promotes the notion that the party should be led by a tightly controlled group of effective leaders. While that was certainly not the case in the early days of Kinnock's spell as leader, by the late 1980s, just as he was tightening his grip on the party's machinery, Kinnock increased 'the size and influence of his own office' (Wickham-Jones, 1995, p.471). That aspect of party management is also noted by Seyd, who claims that Kinnock was 'surrounded by a small group of personal supporters in his private political office, the party headquarters, the shadow cabinet, and the NEC', and as a result he 'displayed a clear and consistent drive towards office' (Seyd, 1993, p.96). That grip and unity of purpose meant that '[t]he party was disciplined, professional and unified in a way that would scarcely have been credible seven years earlier' (Westlake, 2001, p.500).

In terms of party management then, Labour had many achievements throughout the period 1987-92 and consequently fulfilled many of the requirements as set out in the model of 'Opposition-Craft'. The party had undoubtedly travelled some distance towards ridding itself of its more radical, immediate past; it had gone some way towards modernising its internal party structures; and to an extent it presented itself as a unified organisation. But, in doing so, it found itself with a limp policy offer with no coherent thread, and was led by a leader who had become remote and was seemingly exhausted from the battle with his own party (Mandelson, 2010, p.130).

Despite that, in terms of the execution of his official duties as Leader of the Opposition, Kinnock did not commit any gaffes of the magnitude of his predecessor, but there were serious question-marks over whether he projected a 'prime ministerial' image. However, Kinnock used his power effectively to make appointments that signalled the direction of

travel under his leadership, as advanced as a positive attribute by the model of 'Opposition-Craft'. Following the policy review, Kinnock decided that Bryan Gould was standing in the way of his modernisation programme (Westlake, 2001, p.435). Gould was demoted to the post of environment spokesman and 'was replaced as industry spokesman by the centrist Gordon Brown', a move that symbolised 'a more conciliatory stance towards the City which entailed disavowing Labour's more interventionist ideas' (Shaw, 1993, p.120).

In a further symbolic move, Kinnock fell out with Michael Meacher who was, in 1989, Shadow Employment Secretary. Meacher had proposed that unions should have greater rights over secondary strike action, which did not sit well with Kinnock's modernising agenda. There ensued a 'war of attrition' between Meacher and Kinnock (Westlake, 2001, p.436), until the point where Kinnock decided to move Meacher to Social Security and opted to promote Blair, symbolically, to the Employment role. Westlake describes Blair as an 'altogether more committed moderniser' (Westlake, 2001, p.436) who fitted far better with the Kinnock project than Meacher, who appeared to be following a different script. Thus, 'after the 1989 reshuffle most key economic posts were occupied by Shadow Cabinet members holding positions further to the right'; all of which marked a symbol of party change (Shaw, 1993, p.127).

It is well established in the academic literature that Labour improved its management of the media and its communications under Kinnock's leadership from 1983 (Hughes and Wintour, 1990, p.16). Back in 1983, Labour only employed a marketing agency shortly before the general election campaign (Wring, 1995, p.116), such was the amateur nature of its operation. With little opportunity to improve the party's outlook, the 1983 campaign fell apart and Labour lost by a landslide (see Chapter 5 for further discussion). But, under Kinnock, things were to change and media management was to be prioritised. That professionalisation of Labour's approach bore some fruit at the 1987 election, as explained by Newton: 'Although it lost the election, it was widely thought to have won the campaign' (Newton, 1993, p.130).

From 1987, the party was to become even more controlled and professional in its approach to media relations, as noted by Westlake: 'Organisationally, it was a far more effective outfit, especially in the previously neglected area of political communications' (Westlake, 2001, p.500). Some felt that its organisational ability became so controlled that Labour's

communication strategy stifled spontaneity and became overly obsessed with projecting itself as a government-in-waiting (Newton, 1993, p.144). Thus, the likes of Gould and Mandelson argue that Labour had a much-improved media operation, but it did not have a simple message to sell because it had not done the heavy lifting in terms of policy renewal (see, for example, Gould, 2011, p.110).

That view of Labour's media management strategy was supported by what happened at the Sheffield Rally, and also the view that its 1992 manifesto launch, as argued by Newton, was 'slick – perhaps too slick' compared to the 'dull and unexciting' Conservative offer (Newton, 1993, p.156). Thus, Labour was highly effective at managing its message in parts of the media, as recommended by the model of 'Opposition-Craft', but the message was not always clear and not necessarily radically different from that which had been rejected in 1987. Ironically, Labour scored highly against the criterion set out in this aspect of the 'Opposition-Craft' model, in that it was better able to get its message across to voters, but it was not so successful in crafting simple messages which resonated with the electorate.

However, the model asks that parties of opposition are effective at communicating their message across all forms of media. During the 1987-92 period, Labour were still severely hampered in their efforts to communicate by the very Conservative-leaning printed press. According to Newton, in the months building up to the election, the Tory press 'mounted early attacks on Labour's economic competence and tax policies as well as on Neil Kinnock and other Labour leaders' (Newton, 1993, p.156). Following the attacks on Labour, the Tory press threw everything it had into supporting the re-election of the Tory government. Headlines from the time included splashes such as: 'Major Defies Labour Mobs' (Daily Mail, 21st March 1992), and 'Can You Really Afford Not to Vote Tory' (Daily Express, 9th April 1992). According to Westlake, '[s]even out of the eleven national dailies had urged their readers to vote Conservative' (Westlake, 2001, p.571). In that context, media management was always going to be a challenge for Labour, and it was ultimately unsuccessful in rebutting this onslaught from the printed press.

Crewe argues that polling evidence throughout the 1992 campaign, including the months leading up to it, skewed Labour's media management approach. Essentially, the polls were all pointing to a Labour victory or at least a hung parliament with Labour as the largest party; that evidence led to Labour's approach in the media of being cautious and attempting to appear like a government-in-waiting. However, Crewe suggests that

sampling errors in the polling data led to overstated Labour polling figures. Thus, according to Crewe, throughout this period, in reality, the Tories were always in the lead, but this state of opinion was not reflected in the polls. He concludes that 'the problem in 1992 was that the camera was faulty' (Crewe, 1992, p.487), and, 'accurate polls would almost certainly have shown the Conservatives slightly but consistently ahead during the campaign and possibly for some months before' (Crewe, 1992, p.493).

While far from the only reason for Labour's ultimate defeat in the 1992 election, the polling evidence that Crewe points to, and the mistakes inherent in it, certainly led to Labour's flawed media strategy. Voters, too, focused on Labour as a potential party of government because that is what the polls were telling the electorate was the likely outcome. Labour responded accordingly by behaving in the media in a restrained manner in a bid to look sensible and in an effort to make Kinnock look like a Prime Minister. Had the polls told a more accurate picture, Labour may well have altered its approach. Indeed, as Crewe argues, it was the very fact that the polls that were pointing in Labour's direction that made some voters nervous: 'By mistakenly placing Labour ahead, they may have helped create a Conservative government' (Crewe, 1992, pp.493-94).

On a number of levels, in terms of media management, Labour scored well when set against the criterion of the 'Opposition-Craft' model; it was organised and professional in setting out its case. However, on two key fronts it was severely hampered: 1) it did not have a simple, inspiring or fully-modernised message to sell, and 2) it had not won over large parts of the printed press, which continued to support the Conservatives. It was for later incarnations of this Labour opposition to address those two points (see Chapter 2 for further discussion).

4.6 Skills

From the outset of his leadership, 'Kinnock was determined to modernize the party' (Westlake, 2001, p.426). During his first stint in the job, various efforts were made to transform the party; perhaps most symbolic was the replacement of the red flag with the red rose as Labour's signature marketing image. The rose left Labour with a softer brand image and distanced itself from its more militant tendencies of earlier years which many associated with the red flag (Fabrik Website, 17th May, 2017). As part of the underpinning of that strategy, there was also no doubt that Labour's purge on the hard left was also begun in the 1983-87 era but, according to Seyd, that era resulted in 'only fourteen

individuals associated with Militant being expelled' (Seyd, 1993, pp.90-91). Thus, progress was slow, but following the defeat in 1987 the party found renewed impetus to reform its operation and explicitly communicate the journey of modernisation to the electorate in a bid to widen Labour's electoral appeal.

So, why did Labour continue its journey of modernisation after 1987 given that it was so comprehensively beaten at the election following a sustained period of time when it had modernised? In order to address that question, Smith picks up on ideas initially set out in Hay's 1994 paper: "Labour's Thatcherite Revisionism: Playing the 'Politics of Catch-Up'". That paper argued that there were two valid approaches to understand the motivations for change in the Labour Party during the 1980s. One of those approaches was a 'modernisation' thesis that suggests that the process of change in the Labour Party 'was finally facilitated by the advent of Thatcherism'. The other of Hay's angles was the notion of an 'accommodationist' explanation. The paper argues that once Labour attained power it would have had no choice but to accept that it would be dealing with a market economy built on capitalist principles; therefore, it was incumbent on the party to water down its prospectus in order to deal with reality, if elected to office. By extension, Smith also suggests that the capitalist economic model was essentially where the centre ground was in the UK at the time of the Kinnock opposition.

Thus, it could be argued that all Labour did under Kinnock was to move onto the 'new centre ground in order to maintain electoral support' (Smith, 1994, p.708). Pressure to modernise came, also, in the form of the SDP. Alarmed by the SDP's showing in the 1983 election, in part, Labour began its journey back towards the centre in order to repel the advance of the SDP (Bochel and Denver, 1984). To an extent, Labour had more success in 1987 of seeing off the challenge from the new party, but, to finally kill off any hope of an SDP revival, those at the top of Labour's ranks knew that they had to continue the process of modernising the party. Such was Labour's success to that end that Bill Rodgers, one of the founding members of the SDP, reflected on Labour's transformation and claimed that: 'over a wide spectrum the Labour Party has been remade in the image of the SDP' (as quoted in Seyd, 1993, p.84).

In concrete terms then, what did Labour do post-1987 to modernise? Certainly, the efforts to drive out the party's militant tendency were taken to a new level. According to Seyd, 'between 1987 and 1991 over 200 [Militant members] were expelled', which also included

'two Labour MPs identified with Militant, Dave Nellist and Terry Fields' (Seyd, 1993, pp.90-91). Labour also sought to reduce the role of the unions in the party and attempted to bring in the OMOV system for the selection of parliamentary candidates. On that score the party was only partially successful in its ambition, so in the terms set out in the model of 'Opposition-Craft', the party enjoyed mixed success but it certainly set out a direction of travel that was useful in terms of its communications to the electorate.

Gould notes that there were many in the party who were resistant to Kinnock's desire to modernise the party. He cites Hattersley, the Deputy Leader, who was concerned that the party was being given over to the 'marketing men' and that the party, in his view, should not have been out to attract 'the trendy, upwardly-mobile middle classes' – a view that was still endorsed by a number of the influential union leaders at the time. For Gould, that type of attitude from Hattersley 'encapsulated everything that had gone wrong with Labour' (Gould, 2011, p.81). On that evidence, it is not surprising that the electorate still entertained doubts about Labour prior to the 1992 election, and why, when set against the model, Labour could hardly be described as having 'explicitly changed' in the manner set out in the model.

This resistance to change was one of the key contributing factors as to why the policy review, a central aspect of Labour's modernisation strategy post-1987, was so limited in terms of its outcome. Not only did it leave Labour with some unpopular policies on taxation, but Seyd also argues that the policy review did not provide the party with a coherent programme for government. The criticism was that there was nothing linking it all together: 'What was missing was any clear sense of an underlying value system that would both offer an alternative to Thatcherism and guide the party beyond the next election' (Seyd, 1993, p.81). In that respect, under the terms set out by the model, the party did not have a 'thematically linked' policy platform with a 'coherent vision for the country' as set out in the model in Chapter 1. On that basis then, Labour's modernisation process was reasonably successful under the terms of internal party reform, but somewhat stunted on policy.

In terms of the party's value set, Westlake is somewhat more charitable when it comes to describing Labour's achievements in the policy review. He argues that much of the review left Labour with a platform that set out a general direction of travel rather than a focused set of policy details. In that regard, Westlake argues that the policy review was successful

in the sense that it provided an impressionism approach rather than a detailed explanation of party policy – a strategy very much endorsed by the model of ‘Opposition-Craft’. Westlake claims that ‘the vague and uncostable character of most of the policy review statements meant that Labour would enter government remarkably unencumbered by policy commitments’ (Westlake, 2001, p.445). He claims the party opted for this strategy so as to avoid ‘the probings of a hostile media’ (Westlake, 2001, p.427), which was exactly the same basis on which the model of ‘Opposition-Craft’ was built.

Seyd has a slightly different slant on the strategy of the policy review in that he suggests Labour set out its new-found values by ditching policies that had proved unpopular. According to Seyd: ‘After 1987, the Labour Party jettisoned most of its electorally unpopular policies. It reaffirmed its traditional social democratic credentials’ (Seyd, 1993, p.95). Effectively, through the policy review the party moved to claim that it would pay for its public spending through the proceeds of economic growth rather than through tax rises. That line of argument was very much in line with an impressionistic approach as advocated by the model in the sense that it set out a general direction of travel in terms of what they would do rather than commit the party to specific policy pledges. However, as an approach it was counter to what they argued pre-1987, so it could be argued that it had not embedded into the mind-set of the country by the time of the 1992 election.

Superficially then, the party adopted an approach towards articulating its values that was very much in line with the expectations as set out in the model. However, the party’s communication of its positive values was somewhat stymied by two major issues. Firstly, the policy review failed to find a coherent set of principles that strung the policy offer together, and secondly – and contrary to the views set out by Westlake and Seyd – Labour did indulge in detailed policy pronouncements. The shadow budget, as discussed earlier, was the clearest example of the party leaving itself wide open to attack through a pointillism strategy, as specifically rejected by the model. On a number of issues then, Labour’s stance chimed well with the electorate – especially on the ‘caring’ aspects of policy. But on the central questions around the economy, Labour’s impressionistic approach to setting out its values left an open goal for the Conservatives to attack the party on tax.

Labour, under Kinnock, was able to present itself as a party that had symbolically changed on a number of fronts: its imagery had changed, its marketing had improved, its

communication strategy and media operation had been professionalised, and it had internally reformed the make-up of its membership. In that context then, Labour, while in good shape according to the principles set out in the model, still required symbols to show that it had changed on policy as well. But that was to prove more difficult for the party. Labour were symbolically associated with caring issues such as health, housing, unemployment, welfare and education, as shown in Figure 22 below (Newton, 1993, p.131).

Figure 22: The Best Party: Labour lead on caring issues

Issue	May 1991	Sept 1991	Nov 1991	Feb 1991	Mar 1992	Apr 1992
National Health	+41%	+32%	+34%	+25%	+27%	+25%
Education	+19%	+9%	+18%	+8%	+14%	+14%
Homelessness	+39%	+30%	+38%	+31%	+31%	+28%
Environment	0	N/A	+6%	-2%	+1%	+4%
Transport	+28%	+21%	+31%	+19%	+24%	+21%
Pensions	+20%	+15%	+27%	+19%	+18%	+18%
Status of Women	+15%	+7%	+12%	+9%	+12%	+15%

Source: Gallup Poll Index (as quoted in Newton, 1993, p.132)

It was clear that voters saw Labour as the caring party and, with that position in mind, Newton claims that 'Labour's main task was to persuade the voters that it was competent to run the country, mainly the economy, but also defence and foreign affairs, relations with Europe, and law and order. This proved to be exceedingly difficult' (Newton, 1993, p.131). Indeed, 'many more thought a Labour government would cause taxes and inflation to rise and strikes and other economic troubles to increase' (Newton, 1993, p.132).

Despite all the initiatives around presenting the party as business friendly, for example the prawn cocktail offensive (Wickham-Jones, 1995, pp.468-76), and the shadow budget (Newton, 1993, p.144), the party manifestly failed to find symbols that were to convince the electorate that it had changed sufficiently on the core issues of policy. Indeed, if anything the party was hit hard by the Conservatives who used symbolic imagery of their own to attack Labour's deficiencies on core economic policies. Newton argues that the electorate was concerned about large increases in taxation, 'which they feared if Labour were elected'. In that respect, 'the Conservatives concentrated on their message about

£1250 tax increases and reinforced it with pictures of bombs, locusts and double whammies' (Newton, 1993, p.145).

Figure 23: Conservative campaign advertising posters



Crewe argues that the Tory press relentlessly pressed home the same messages of these attack adverts from the Conservative party, and claims that they had real traction with an electorate already scared of a large tax burden under a future Labour government. He also suggests that '[t]he Conservative Party's decision to hang the charges of higher taxes and higher prices around Labour's neck (the 'double whammy') was based on consistent poll findings about the Labour Party's vulnerability on both issues' (Crewe, 1992, pp.477-78). Thus, Labour failed in its hunt for symbols of change in terms of policy, despite some moderate success in finding symbols of internal change.

The model of 'Opposition-Craft' calls for parties of opposition to adopt the marketing principles of a 'market-orientated party' as outlined by Lees-Marshment (Lees-Marshment, 2001a, pp.1075-78). In other words, the party should offer policies that are attractive to voters but ones that do not jettison the brand image of the party to the extent that it might alienate the core vote. Westlake argues that all of Labour's policies in the post-1987 era were 'subject to a test of both usefulness and marketability' (Westlake, 2001, p.426), which would indicate that the party was operating very much on the lines promoted by the model. Indeed, Wring suggests that the policy review process was constituted such that its policy proposals were run past focus groups and tested for their electoral appeal before they were firmed up and presented to the public. Wring comments that '[t]he monitoring of public opinion throughout the Review process was to prove crucial' (Wring, 1995, pp.116-17).

A number of commentators have criticised Labour's policy review, and on the aspect of marketing further criticisms have been levelled at the process. According to Kinnock's policy advisor at the time, Kay Andrews, the essential task of the policy review group was 'to select a few key policies which will, because they are appealing, sensible and plausible, help us to win the next election' (Andrews, 1988). But, in doing so, the party appeared simply to jettison some electorally unpopular policies as a response to 'negative electoral feedback' (Seyd, 1993, p.85). That approach meant, however, that the party ended the process with a more appealing platform on which to stand for election, but one that lacked a consistent narrative around which the party could positively market itself, as commented on by Seyd: 'what was missing from its response [...] was any sense of the party's creating an identity around positive feedback' (Seyd, 1993, p.85).

Seyd's argument was formed in the aftermath of the 1992 defeat, but it was evident at the time that the Labour Party leadership was aware that it lacked a consistent marketing message, as a result of the review, and that they were concerned that the policy review process may have damaged the party's core appeal. In order to address that concern, and as part of its modernising journey, Labour published a text called 'Aims and Values', which was the joint work of both the leader and deputy leader, Kinnock and Hattersley. The aim of that text was to 'rebut charges from *within* the party that the policy review represented an abandonment of Labour's essential beliefs' (Westlake, 2001, p.432). The literature around this issue points to a degree of unhappiness in Labour's ranks about the outcome of the policy review, but provides little evidence to suggest that it harmed Labour's electoral appeal.

According to Wring, following the 1987 defeat, Labour 'were able to introduce a market led approach into party strategy during the Policy Review' (Wring, 1995, p.115). He notes that the party was far more willing to listen to the concerns of voters in their construction of policies. According to Wring, 'Labour shifted from a sophisticated selling approach to adopt a market orientation devoted to satisfying, in the words of one informed account of the period, "the needs and concerns of groups of voters"' (Wring, 1995, p.117). On the basis of Wring's evidence, Labour certainly satisfied the demands set out in the model of 'Opposition-Craft', but the party perhaps fell short in creating a new and coherent brand image that neatly summed up its new identity. Voters were left with a policy offer that was more in tune with their aspirations, but one that lacked clear identity associated with the Labour Party.

Media coverage was to prove a real problem for Labour during the Kinnock era. The model of 'Opposition-Craft' is explicit around the need for favourable media coverage as a prerequisite for winning the subsequent general election, but this was an area that Labour was to struggle. Figure 24 below illustrates the difficulties Labour faced in terms of getting their message across to voters in the printed press. In terms of circulation numbers, the table shows that Labour enjoyed the support of 30.5% of the daily papers and 34.2% of the Sunday papers, whereas the Conservatives enjoyed the support of 67% of the dailies and 63.4% from the Sundays, with the remainder going to independents.

Figure 24: National newspaper circulation and party support

	Circulation (000)	Percentage Total	Party Support
Dailies			
Mirror/Record	3,618.9	25.5	Labour
Sun	3,587.7	25.3	Conservative
Mail	1,667.6	11.8	Conservative
Express	1,517.7	10.7	Conservative
Telegraph	1,046.4	7.4	Conservative
Star	803.7	5.7	Conservative
Today	483.5	3.4	Conservative
Guardian	418.3	2.9	Qualified Labour
The Times	389.4	2.7	Conservative
Independent	374.2	2.6	Independent
Financial Times	290.7	2.1	Labour
Sundays			
News of the World	4,716.8	29.6	Conservative
Sunday Mirror	2,782.4	17.4	Labour
People	2,141.2	13.4	Labour
Sunday Mail	1,974.7	12.4	Conservative
Sunday Express	1,679.3	10.5	Conservative
The Sunday Times	1,173.9	7.4	Conservative
Sunday Telegraph	560.1	3.5	Conservative
Observer	542.4	3.4	Labour
Independent on Sunday	386.7	2.4	Independent

Source: Newton, 1993, p.153

That advantage for the Conservatives was to prove critical for their campaign during the period under consideration, and was to make life very difficult for Kinnock. The critical role of leader in the has meant that a lot press focus is on the individual leading the party, whether in government or in opposition (see, for example, Allen, 2003; and Webb and

Poguntke, 2012). That focus of attention was clearly exemplified in the 1987-92 period and often to the detriment of Kinnock. According to Mandelson, 'Neil mistrusted, feared, and often despised the press' (Mandelson, 2010, p.117). That uneasy relationship with the media was to culminate during the 1992 election campaign, where a concerted effort on behalf of the Conservative press was placed on attacking Kinnock and his leadership credentials, which was made evermore acute on the grounds that there was a realistic prospect of him attaining power. Commenting on that notion, Gould argues that, 'The Sun destroyed Neil and Labour with an eight-page attack entitled "NIGHTMARE ON KINNOCK STREET"' (Gould, 2011, p.149).

In truth, however, Kinnock's negative press coverage stretched back many years and was not restricted only to the 1992 election campaign. Newton argues that there was a problem with Kinnock as a communicator as 'he often spoke in long and winding sentences' (Newton, 1993, p.151), which is one of the main reasons why the tabloid press dubbed him the 'Welsh Windbag' (NewStatesman Website, 5th March, 2010). The attacks on Kinnock were simply ramped up during the 1992 campaign, but tapped into the character assassinations that had been set out in the Conservative press over many years. While the press viewed Labour largely through its leader, which was to prove problematic for the party, they did acknowledge some of the internal party reform and policy renewal that Kinnock instigated (Wring, 1995, p.115). Despite that, Newton suggests that, as a result of the problematic printed press, Labour 'concentrated most of its efforts on television' (Newton, 1993, p.158). However, that was not enough for Labour to get over the winning line.

The fact that Labour received a negative press meant that it was hard to reassure the electorate that it was the natural inheritor of government – a key component of the model of 'Opposition-Craft'. Further still, with the personal nature of the attacks on the leader, it was also hard to project Kinnock as a credible alternative Prime Minister. However, in the manner set out in the model, Labour certainly attempted to reassure the public that it was a responsible party of government. Knowing that the party was vulnerable on economic policy, Wickham-Jones claims that Smith, as Shadow Chancellor, went on tour to reassure various key economic institutions that Labour was fit for power. This tour included meetings on Wall Street and the US Federal Reserve. Wickham-Jones claims that Smith 'exuded confidence' (Wickham-Jones, 1995, p.478) in such meetings, and noted that he

was 'positively received' (Wickham-Jones, 1995, p.478) by leading figures in the City and 'frequently impressed' (Wickham-Jones, 1995, p.480) when he spoke.

While Labour certainly projected some sense of positive change and reassured to an extent that it was fit for power, Smith was not the leader of the party and in that regard his influence over Labour's popularity with voters was limited. The question of Kinnock's leadership was central to the image of the Labour Party. On that front it is impossible to disentangle Kinnock's image from the point at which he became leader in 1983; indeed, much of the public's sense of him as a potential Prime Minister was shaped from the moment he assumed the leadership. Rosen argues that Kinnock's tenure was doomed from the start as a result of his track record in more junior positions on a variety of issues which were at odds with centre ground opinion: 'Kinnock's public image as an outspoken enthusiast for policies such as unilateral nuclear disarmament, a policy to which a substantial majority of the electorate were antipathetic, made it almost impossible for him to lead Labour to victory' (Rosen, 2011, p.158).

Rosen goes on to argue that it was exactly that image as a firebrand left-winger that enabled Kinnock to modernise his party on the grounds that the party members were willing to go along with his reforms because of where he had come from in terms of his own political pedigree. But outside of the confines of the party, Kinnock's image was not good and did not work as effectively with the voting public. So, what on the one hand was a strength, in terms of the context of party management, was actually a weakness in the context of attracting middle ground voters, as Kinnock was seen very much as a creature 'of' his party (Rosen, 2011, pp.158-59) – which should be noted as a negative when evaluated against the model of 'Opposition-Craft'.

On this aspect of the model, we can again see a contrast in Kinnock's leadership ability when we note his credentials in the light of who he was facing as Prime Minister. In the early stages of the 1987-92 period, Kinnock's image improved as Thatcher's star began to fade. Indeed, when contrasted with Thatcher, to an extent Kinnock represented some of Finlayson's notion of 'extraordinary ordinariness' as outlined in Chapter 1 of this thesis (Finlayson, 2002, p.590). On that theme, Westlake suggests that 'Kinnock had always aspired to be ordinary: he repeatedly claimed that one of his qualifications to be Prime Minister was that "I truly represent the people of this country and their hopes of economic success and social justice and their aspirations because I'm from them"' (Westlake, 2001,

p.493). In that regard, his working-class roots provided a useful backstory on which to base his leadership, which articulates to a degree with the criteria outlined in the model around the leader's image. Westlake also argues that Kinnock saw himself as the perfect antidote to the Thatcher years as he was so 'normal' by comparison with her. Of course, that thesis was effectively proven correct when Major took over from Thatcher as Prime Minister, in the sense that he was probably seen as even more 'normal' than Kinnock.

However, the general consensus was that Kinnock certainly did not possess the 'extraordinary' part of Finlayson's description of the perfect party leader (Finlayson, 2002, p.590). Mandelson claims that voters did not think Kinnock was 'very prime ministerial' (Mandelson, 2010, p.104). A number of sources indicate that people thought he was uncertain as to what he believed in with regard to policy (see, for example, Newton, 1993, p.151). Ironically, that perception arose as a result of his modernising journey, which in the eyes of some voters rendered him as lacking in conviction. He also lacked confidence in his own abilities, and that manifested itself in long-winded answers to questions and also elongated his speeches to the point where his message got lost. Voters thought that he was covering up his own failings in his verbosity (Hughes and Wintour, 1990, p.177).

Mandelson claims that part of Labour's problem was its attempt to mitigate Kinnock's poor image. Drawing on that conundrum, Mandelson argues that the 1992 campaign was built around the strategy 'to play things safe' (Mandelson, 2010, p.132), and that involved muting Kinnock's personality because it did not play well with the electorate. But Westlake argues that the attempt to stifle Kinnock's personality in order to make him appear more prime ministerial did not work: 'Compared to Major's understated, uncharismatic manner, Kinnock's own more exaggerated character and mannerisms now began to appear dated and out of place. Whereas Kinnock continued to be portrayed by the media as a man squeezing his personality into managerial suits that never quite fitted, Major offered something different; quiet, efficient management backed by political experience as Foreign Secretary and Chancellor' (Westlake, 2001, p.506).

A large proportion of the literature around this era has noted that the 1992 campaign was especially focused on the leader of each of the main parties on the grounds that there was not a lot to choose between the parties in terms of policy (see, for example, Newton, 1993, p.132; and Westlake, 2001, p.506). Westlake notes that the race to win the election 'assumed a more "presidential" character' as a result of the narrow policy differences

between the major parties (Westlake, 2001, p.506). Newton suggests that '[a]n almost pure valence-issue election, the 1992 campaign was largely about images of party competence, of party caring, and of trust in leadership' (Newton, 1993, p.132). Newton argues that Labour definitely had a caring image, but there were serious questions over the leader's image and on whether it was more competent to run the country. In his concluding remarks on that issue, Westlake questions: 'Would the country prefer to see Kinnock or Major as its leader? In such comparisons Kinnock came off badly' (Westlake, 2001, p.506).

According to Crewe, suspicions around Kinnock's leadership led the Conservatives, in the dying days of the 1992 campaign, to return to 'Kinnock's qualifications as prime minister' (Crewe, 1992, p.478). Crewe bases his argument on polling data which told the Tories that voters were uncertain of Kinnock's suitability for the role of Prime Minister. By extension, Crewe goes on to argue that Labour's over-confidence at the Sheffield rally led them to announce Kinnock onto the stage as 'the next Prime Minister of Great Britain' (Crewe, 1992, p.478). What Crewe perceives as over-confidence was perhaps a manifestation of Mandelson's charge that Labour were trying to 'play things safe' (Mandelson, 2010, p.132) by appearing like a government-in-waiting. However, on Crewe's assertion, that image 'reputedly frightened straying Conservatives back into the fold' and helped them to secure a majority come polling day (Crewe, 1992, p.478).

While Labour's image improved in terms of its political communications and its ability to launch a manifesto, described as a 'slick and glitzy affair' (Westlake, 2001, p.538), the party still could not shed its image from the past. Westlake argues that, by 1992, Labour still suffered from its historical image, which he claims was 'a conflation of the "Winter of Discontent" of 1978-9, the eruptions of the 1980-83 period and the 1983 election manifesto' (Westlake, 2001, p.541). Coupled with concerns over the image of the leader, there was too much doubt in the minds of many voters when it came to polling day in 1992 for Labour to secure victory.

Labour's success in 1987 was put down to improved organisation, marketing and modern communications largely masterminded by its Director of Communications, Mandelson (see, for example, Harrop, 1990, p.289). The assumption on the part of many commentators is that those same skills were taken into the 1992 election. To an extent that was true; indeed, Newton argues that Labour had a 'technically well-organised and presented

campaign that gave the Conservative press as little ammunition as possible' (Newton, 1993, p.158). This was all suggestive of a party capable of operating as a governing party in the manner set out by the model of 'Opposition-Craft'.

However, some at the top of the party have suggested that Labour were not as organised as they could have been. Gould notes that the departure of Mandelson and Patricia Hewitt was a 'killer organisational blow' (Gould, 2011, p.95) for the party. He essentially suggests that the backroom team behind the leadership was nothing like as strong as it had been in 1987, when Mandelson and Hewitt were in charge. Gould claims that, by the end of 1991, 'there was no timetable; no day-by-day campaign grid; no strategic plan' (Gould, 2011, p.109). This all had to be put together at the last minute, which was not an indicator of good organisation and led to the charge of 'campaign confusion' (Gould, 2011, p.109). By extension, Gould claims that 'lines of command were confused' (Gould, 2011, p.110). He notes further that Kinnock was isolated from the campaign team and, with that in mind, Gould argues that the campaign lacked clear direction.

Mandelson himself notes that, in Kinnock's second term, '[his] relations with Neil would be much more distant' and acknowledges that he was not as influential as he might have been in the party's campaign (Mandelson, 2010, p.116). However, Mandelson should take some of the responsibility for this failing of organisation as it was his decision to go off and fight to become an MP in the Hartlepool constituency that led to him leaving his post as Director of Communications. Wherever responsibility lay, it seemed to the detriment of the party that Mandelson was fighting a safe seat to become an MP rather than coordinating the national campaign as he done in 1987.

Despite this, Gould argues that 'most of the time the campaign was slick and professional, but it lacked passion, anger, attack' (Gould, 2011, p.112). Newton also suggests that Labour took all the passion out of its campaign in a deliberate effort to neutralise the press. The less they gave them then the less there was to be attacked. In that regard, the message at times seemed technical and dull, but that was part of a deliberate strategy by Labour to play it safe and appear like a government in waiting (Newton, 1993, p.158).

That technocratic approach to electioneering may well have switched off the membership to supporting Labour's cause: 'Survey evidence revealed that 43 percent of the members were less active in the party, and only 20 percent more active, than five years previously'

(Seyd, 1993, p.97). It also emerged from Labour's headquarters that it had had 'greater difficulty in mobilising members into the traditional forms of party activity' in 1992 than it had in 1987 (Seyd, 1993, p.97). Despite those concerns, Labour's final seat tally at the 1992 election (271 seats) actually flattered the party as that was delivered on a 35.2% share of the vote. It was a good seat return on the grounds that the party 'did well in target marginals, on which it had concentrated its energies' (Westlake, 2001, pp.572-73). In that respect, in terms of organisational approaches on the ground, Labour was moderately successful when measured against the 'Opposition-Craft' criteria.

Kinnock's skills as a decision taker are again an area of considerable debate. He evidently took a huge decision at the outset of his leadership in 1983 to move the party towards the centre ground of British politics and to modernise it after it was gripped by the hard left (see, for example, Crick, 2016, pp.vii-viii). That decision may well have been against Kinnock's natural instincts given that it was well documented that he came from the left of the party (Jeffreys, 1993, p.128). His instigation of the policy review following defeat in 1987 was also another major decision with far reaching ramifications for the party. On the big strategic decisions, Kinnock was decisive and signalled very clearly to voters the direction in which he wished to take his party. On that score, Kinnock is highly rated by the framework for analysis in this thesis.

However, on more day-to-day matters Kinnock was perhaps not as strong in his decision taking. He was remote in terms of the party's coordination of the 1992 campaign, which led to confusion in strategy (Gould, 2011, pp.109-10). Various sources have pointed to the fact that he took few decisions over the policy review, which was a big problem as he did not stamp his authority on it (see, for example, Gould, 2011, p.110). Committee chairs were very much left to their own devices to come up with policy. It did not smack of firm leadership and was, perhaps, why some have argued that the policy review ended up as a missed opportunity. On that front, Kinnock does not score so highly against the framework, despite being supported by an able team. According to Westlake: 'his Front Bench team of Hattersley, Gould, Brown and Kaufman was considered impressive' (Westlake, 2001, p.457); Kaufman in particular was noted for his decision taking and clear vision with regard to Labour's new policy on nuclear weapons.

The leader's inconsistent approach to decision making, taken together with the view that he had been inconsistent with regard to policy as a result of the modernisation process, left

many voters questioning his emotional stability and ability to cope with the demands of the role as Prime Minister. According to his biographer, and however unfairly, '[t]he view began to be disseminated that Kinnock – supposedly verbose, intellectually lightweight and lacking in self-control – was irredeemably deficient in that gravitas necessary to persuade the public of his fitness to be Prime Minister' (Westlake, 2001, p.457). Kinnock had been in the public consciousness for some time; indeed, he was the longest serving Leader of the Opposition of the twentieth century. That time period provided too many opportunities for Kinnock to give the public examples of his unsuitability for office; from dancing at party conference or falling over on the beach early on in his leadership, to his much later ill-judged outburst at the Sheffield rally. These episodes clearly made some voters question whether Kinnock was suited to the role of Prime Minister. That view seems unfair, but it is true to say that it was a slant on his personality that was heavily amplified by the Conservative-supporting press, which did tremendous political damage to him.

4.7 Conclusion

The context in which Labour operated, during the period 1987-92, was very positive and meant that 'people expected us to win' (Gould, 2011, p.113). Ironically, however, '[t]he very success of Labour's campaign and the expectations of victory that it had aroused actually contributed to the eventual defeat' (Westlake, 2001, p.573). Assumptions about its electoral strength led to a series of mistakes by the Labour Party, which coincided with a number of strategic masterstrokes by the Conservative government. The situation Labour found itself in provides an excellent example to explode the myth that suggests 'opposition do not win elections, governments lose them' (The Spectator Website, 29th October, 2016). The Conservative government should have lost in 1992, but Labour was not convincing as an alternative.

Part of Labour's deficiency was leadership. The 1992 election focused especially on the question of leadership because it was 'an almost pure valence-issue election about style, image, and managerial competence' (Newton, 1993, p.161). Voters were invited to look at the election in terms of who they most trusted to run the country and, on that score, the Conservatives came off best, as did Major when compared to Kinnock in terms of who would make the best PM. For Jeffreys, Kinnock 'was never quite able to make the leap between inspiring the party faithful and convincing the wider electorate' (Jeffreys, 1993, p.128). Many commentators have praised Kinnock's skills as a party manager (see, for

example, Seyd, 1993; Gould, 2011; Mandelson, 2010; Blunkett, March 2020), but he simply did not have the credibility as a potential Prime Minister.

Labour also came up short on policy. Its policy review turned out to be a damp squib and failed to give 'a clear sense of purpose or vision of the future' (Shaw, 1993, p.127). For Gould, that meant the party was 'still stuck in the past' (Gould, 2011, p.110) and was particularly weak on the key issue of tax. On that theme, Lord Blunkett notes that: 'We hadn't really settled in our minds whether we were for the future or we were still clinging onto the past' (Blunkett, March 2020). The Conservatives cannily recognised voters' concerns about Labour's tax intentions and exploited them ruthlessly, which led the commentator and Labour supporter, Robert Harris, to conclude: 'I have reached the reluctant conclusion that ours is a nation of liars. People lied about their intentions up to the moment of voting, and went on lying even as they left polling stations [...] The cynics were right after all. People may say they would prefer better public services, but in the end they will vote for tax cuts. At least some of them had the decency to feel too ashamed to admit it' (Harris, Sunday Times, 12th April, 1992). And it was on that issue of tax that Gould claims: 'I knew we were finished' (Gould, 2011, p.109).

The 1992 election 'marked the end of Neil Kinnock's leadership' (Wring, 1995, p.118), in which he himself acknowledged that it 'ended in disappointment (Kinnock, 2011, p.130). Reporting to the NEC, Larry Whitty described the loss as 'the most disappointing in the history of the party' (as quoted in Westlake, 2001, p.573), largely because there were high expectations inside the party that it would win. On those grounds some commentators have drawn an inescapable conclusion that 'Labour had snatched defeat from the jaws of victory' (Gould, 2011, p.151). However, it is the contention of this thesis that the Conservatives enacted a series of initiatives in government that outwitted the Labour opposition: they changed leader, they campaigned as if they were the opposition, and they successfully undermined Labour's credibility on the economy. Without those efforts Labour may well have won.

Wring argues that the loss in 1992 'registered a serious blow' to Labour's modernising project (Wring, 1995, p. 118). There was a view that Labour had modernised, jettisoned many long-held positions on policy, and still lost – so why not change tack? On that theme, some on the left did try to wrestle back the party from the modernisers in the aftermath of its defeat: 'Left-wingers including Joan Lestor and Tony Benn argued that modernisation

had been tried and failed' (Gould, 2011, p.155). However, Wring postulates that 'the organizational changes and thinking that he [Kinnock] pioneered have outlasted his period in office' (Wring, 1995, p.118). Wring explains that the modernisation continued after 1992 because 'press coverage of the work helped vindicate the leadership's modernization strategy' (Wring, 1995, p.119).

Labour failed on a number of key tests of the 'Opposition-Craft' model, particularly around policy and leadership. It did, however, bring about some much-needed internal party reform, and improved its communication strategy. Despite that, in the words of Gould: 'Labour lost because it was still the party of the winter of discontent; union influence; strikes and inflation; disarmament; Benn and Scargill' (Gould, 2011, p.153). When asked why Labour failed to win in 1992, Lord Blunkett concludes: 'Three main things: one they [the Conservatives] changed leaders just in time [...] secondly, I'm afraid, Neil Kinnock, who became increasingly not prime ministerial [...] the third thing was that we presented a set of policies that looked like cash transfer [...] not one of those three things on their own would have lost us the election, together, with other factors, it did' (Blunkett, March 2020). Labour did enough to improve its representation in parliament quite significantly, but not enough to win. In that regard, Labour, under Kinnock from 1987-92, should be considered an unsuccessful period of opposition when assessed against the model of 'Opposition-Craft', but not a 'total failure'.

Chapter 5

Michael Foot, 1980-83: What not to do in opposition

5.1 Introduction

The model of 'Opposition-Craft' considers the period 1980-83 to be a 'total failure' of opposition politics when assessed against the framework for analysis. At the 1983 election, the Conservatives polled 43.5%, Labour 28.3%, and the Alliance 26% (Butler and Kavanagh, 1985). That result meant that Labour 'only just clung on to second place' (Morgan, 2007, p.434). Given that it faced a government which had not exactly governed in favourable circumstances, it was a disastrous result. Indeed, Labour went backwards and 'lost 9.5 per cent of its vote' (Mitchell, 1983, p.2) when compared with its share in 1979. In terms of parliamentary representation, 'the country as a whole showed a massive swing against Labour, and a loss of sixty seats' (Morgan, 2007, p.434), which resulted in the Conservatives winning 396 seats to Labour's 209 - with the Alliance on 26 seats despite securing a similar vote share to Labour (Morgan, 2007, p.434). That seat tally ensured that 'Thatcher had been returned with a hugely increased majority' (Gould, 1995, p.149).

On Morgan's analysis, 1983 represented a 'catastrophic defeat' (Morgan, 2007, p.384) for the Labour opposition. According to one Labour MP at the time, Austin Mitchell, it was 'the most decisive rejection of any political party since Labour in 1931 or the Conservatives in 1945' (Mitchell, 1983, pp.1-2). Such was the magnitude of the electoral calamity, Labour, suggested Mitchell, had been 'reduced to a rump' (Mitchell, 1983, p.2). And, as another Labour MP and future Deputy Prime Minister put it, Labour, had been 'stuffed in the 1983 election' (Prescott, 2008, p.151). This analysis will tease out the various factors that led to Labour's catastrophe at the polls in 1983, and it will also shed light on why it was not able to take advantage of what was a reasonably favourable economic context in which to be a party in opposition.

In the context of the years 1980-83, the Thatcher government presided over a recession, which resulted in high rates of unemployment and rising inflation (Backhouse, 2002). For large patches of the period it was also led by a Prime Minister who was deeply unpopular with the electorate (Tomlinson, 2007). It is true, however, that the Conservative government received a boost from its handling of the 1982 Falklands War (Norpeth, 1987), but it still went into the election in 1983 with over 3 million people unemployed – a

contextual factor which the model of 'Opposition-Craft' would suggest should be highly favourable to an opposition party. But the Labour opposition was led by Michael Foot, a man whom many of his own party, yet alone the wider electorate, considered to be utterly unsuited to be a leader of a major political party or potential Prime Minister (Crines, 2011). The party split under his leadership (Kogan and Kogan, 1982, p.1) and served up a policy menu which enthused the party faithful, but was unpalatable to the electorate (Kavanagh and Dale, 2000).

This analysis will consider those factors, but it will also acknowledge that some of the seeds of Labour's eventual rejuvenation under future leaders were actually sown by Foot. The analysis will also note the inheritance that Foot received as extremely unfavourable; the roots of Labour's internal civil war under his leadership had been laid many years before he ascended to the leader's position. It is not certain that any leader could have held Labour together at the time (Shaw, 2002). Wherever the responsibility lay for Labour's internal strife in the early 1980s, those circumstances were certainly a factor in Labour's rejection at the ballot box in 1983.

5.2 Academic Perspectives on the Foot Era, 1980-83

The catastrophic scale of Labour's defeat in 1983 generated a significant body of research, which focuses on the various aspects of the party's electoral failure. Most of that work was undertaken in the aftermath of the 1983 defeat, but as Foot's tenure as leader was tumultuous in terms of party management, some of the academic work was undertaken during the course of Labour's period of internal warfare in the early 1980s and before the 1983 election. That literature is significant because it explains many of Labour's difficulties going into the election. In that respect, the existing academic literature on the Foot era, 1980-83, can be filtered into a number of key perspectives:

Firstly, there is work which explains Labour's internal battles. That endeavour can be split down into a number of contributory themes: a) work that focuses on the origins of Labour's leftwards journey from the early 1970s (Williams, 1983), and the subsequent factional divisions within the parliamentary Labour Party that were to emerge throughout the decade (Meredith, 2019). Further academic work looks in detail at the divisions at the heart of the 1974-79 Labour administration as a key factor in the battles that were to come in the 1980s (Coates, 1980); b) literature that concentrates on the manifestations of Labour's rift post 1979 (see, for example, Jones, 1996; and Shaw, 2000 and 2002). Of the

commentary that sheds light on the post-1979 era, much of it is detailed on specific aspects of the factional warfare inside the party. In that regard, there is research on the party's split in 1981 and the formation of the SDP (Bochel and Denver, 1984; and Crewe and King, 1995). There is also discourse that examines the infiltration of the party by far-left groups such as Militant (see, for example, Crick, 2016; and Thomas-Symonds, 2005), and then, finally, there is commentary that looks at how the right of the party took back the levers of power post-1982 (Kogan and Kogan, 1982).

Secondly, there is work on the left-wing policy platform on which Labour stood in 1983 (Jones, 1996). Some of that literature explains the origins of the policy offer (Daniels, 1998), and others zoom in on the disconnection between the policy offer and the values of those leading Labour in the 1983 election (Grant, 1986). For example, there is a body of work that explains Labour's policy with regard to nuclear weapons (Scott, 2006). That work explores the internal divisions at the top of the party about what Labour's defence policy should be. Others have sought to explain how Labour expended huge effort in formulating policy during this era, but also how it had failed to consult with voters on how that policy offer would be received (O'Shaughnessy, 2002). On policy, most of the sources conclude that Labour served up a disastrous manifesto (Kavanagh and Dale, 2000).

Thirdly, there is a significant body of research devoted to the context in which Labour operated during the 1980-83 period, especially with regard to the pre-eminence of the Conservative administration that they opposed. Much of that work focuses on the media/marketing dominance of the Conservative Party under Thatcher (Scammell, 1999), and the support the party received from the Tory-supporting press (Wring, 2002). Additionally, work around those themes is augmented by commentary on events such as the Falklands War (Norpeith, 1987) and the economic conditions, which were problematic for the government for much of the era under consideration, but were to improve ahead of the election in 1983 (Baddeley, Martin and Tyler, 1998). Such was the dominance of the Conservative government at the time, those sources conclude that it was a tough environment for an opposition to win power.

Finally, there is literature which concentrates on Foot as leader of the Labour Party (Crines, 2011). The overwhelming conclusion of most of that commentary is that Foot was unsuited to leadership and was not seen by voters as a potential Prime Minister (O'Shaughnessy, 2002). By extension, much of that work also notes his poor skills as a party manager, his

animosity towards the concept of 'leadership', and his reluctance to concentrate decision-taking into his own hands as leader (Morgan, 2007). Indeed, some of the research into his leadership skills focuses instead on Foot's political abilities before he became leader, such as the paucity of evidence around his leadership credentials whilst party leader (Morgan, 2015).

While this thesis will not argue that Foot was any kind of great leader, it will seek to explore evidence that Labour's much lauded modernisation programme, usually associated, at inception, with the Kinnock era of the mid-to-late 1980s (see Chapter 4), was actually initiated under Foot's stewardship of the party. Where there are gaps in the literature around the 1980-83 period, it is around acknowledgement that Foot established some of Labour's modernisation programme. This thesis will suggest that the fightback against the extreme fringes of the party began under Foot's leadership. In that regard, this thesis will throw new and positive light onto Foot's achievements as leader. However, it will also acknowledge that there were serious shortcomings in his leadership ability when assessed against the model of 'Opposition-Craft'.

5.3 Context

On Michael Foot's elevation to the leadership of his party in late 1980, he faced a Conservative government under Thatcher that had only been in power for around 18 months (Clarke, Stewart, and Zuk, 1986). The model of 'Opposition-Craft' notes that it is especially challenging for parties of opposition to remove governments at the first time of asking; thus, on a key issue of the framework, Foot's party was in a difficult position from the outset (Crines, 2011). However, the situation was complex and not entirely set against Labour's position. In the early 1980s, the Conservatives in government became deeply unpopular as a result of the recession, and questions around Thatcher's standing as Prime Minister (Tomlinson, 2007). Thus, at the point at which Foot became leader of his party there were some grounds for optimism about Labour's position.

Elected to office in 1979, the Conservatives were mandated with a number of key commitments around the economy and trade-union reform (Dale, 2000). Upon enacting some of those reforms designed to reshape the British economy, the UK went into recession in the early part of the 1980s. The economic downturn caused unemployment to rise steeply with a resultant decline in popularity of the governing party and Prime Minister (Backhouse, 2002). In that regard, some of the key contextual elements of the model of

‘Opposition-Craft’ were in place for an effective opposition to take advantage; the fact that Labour found themselves unable to build on the unpopularity of the government will be explored throughout this chapter.

As shown in Figure 25 below, in the early stages of the parliament, Thatcher’s popularity was in the doldrums. Her approval ratings were severely negative in the early stages of her premiership up until the Argentinian invasion of the Falklands in 1982. In itself, according to the model, that should have been good grounds for Labour to fight the Conservatives.

Figure 25: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister?

Date	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Don’t Know	Net +/-%
June 1979	41%	40%	19%	+1%
Dec 1979	40%	51%	9%	-11%
June 1980	43%	52%	5%	-9%
Dec 1980	35%	59%	6%	-24%
June 1981	33%	61%	6%	-28%
Dec 1981	25%	70%	5%	-45%
June 1982	51%	44%	5%	+7%
Dec 1982	44%	53%	3%	-9%
May 1983	50%	46%	4%	+4%

Source: Wybrow and King, 2001, pp.191-92

However, when measured against the other party leaders in Figure 26, it is notable that Thatcher led Foot at all times even though her satisfaction ratings as Prime Minister were terrible. Interestingly, David Steel, as leader of the third party, benefitted from more favourable ratings, which suggested that the public were not enamoured with Thatcher, but did not see Foot as a credible alternative. Thus, at the outset of his leadership, Foot faced a favourable set of circumstances in that the model of ‘Opposition-Craft’ asks whether the Prime Minister of the day is popular or not, but his own failings could not take advantage of that situation. Interestingly, when asked by the writer about his popularity in the early 1980s and why that did not translate into votes in 1983 election, Lord Steel claimed it was ‘the Falklands war – General Galtieri was to blame!’ (Steel, February 2020).

Figure 26: Who would make the best Prime Minister?

	Thatcher	Foot	David Steel	Don't Know
No data available from May 1979 until October 1981				
Oct 1981	32%	20%	34%	14%
Jan 1982	30%	19%	36%	15%
Apr 1982	32%	16%	38%	13%
May 1983	47%	14%	23%	8%
Jun 1983	44%	11%	31%	9%

Source: (Wybrow and King, 2001, p. 199)

Figure 26 above, however, also shows that Thatcher's approval ratings improved significantly towards the end of the parliament as the election approached. A number of contextual factors influenced that improved position, but not least was the government's handling of the Falklands War in 1982 (see, for example, Norpeth, 1987). According to Morgan, 'On 2 April 1982 Argentine forces invaded without warning the British territory of the Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic' (Morgan, 2007, p.410). Following the invasion, Thatcher assumed control of the war effort and set about recapturing the islands into British control. Her actions, according to the Labour MP Bryan Gould, 'transformed a politician who had been a not very impressive Leader of the Opposition and was deservedly unpopular as Prime Minister into a figure of glamour and international standing' (Gould, 1995, p.143). Others agree that Thatcher's image was utterly transformed following the war; indeed, Morgan observes that she was boosted 'by the jingoism of the Falklands War' (Morgan, 2007, p.418). What is interesting, however, is that Thatcher's net satisfactions ratings were only just in positive territory, despite the war, which again suggests that Labour could have taken advantage had it been led by a more electable leader.

It was not just the war, however, where the tide had turned in the Conservatives' favour. The party was elected on a platform of trade-union reform, privatisation of public utilities, and also the widely popular move to sell off council housing into private housing stock (Dale, 2000). The public appeared, in 1979, to have voted in a government charged with shrinking the state. Bryan Gould notes that 'Thatcher was making a big appeal to many working-class voters who found her policies on issues like the sale of council houses especially attractive' (Gould, 1995, p.148). Certainly, by 1983, some of those Thatcherite reforms had been enacted, but there was sense that the programme of reform was not yet complete. The model of 'Opposition-Craft' asks whether the central mission of the government has been achieved, but by 1983 it appeared that there was an appetite

amongst the electorate for more of the same, rendering Labour's position somewhat obsolete.

A further area of government vulnerability was on the rate of unemployment. Voters were aware of high levels of unemployment (Baddeley, Martin and Tyler, 1998), which resulted from the Conservatives' economic reform agenda. Labour was certainly keen to communicate its concerns over the issue and, at the 1982 Labour conference, Foot attacked the Conservatives on unemployment: 'Look how they have been prepared to accept mass unemployment on a scale we have not known since the war' (Foot, Leader's Conference Speech, 1982). Foot often betrayed his frustration that the issue of unemployment failed to gain the traction with voters that he felt it deserved. This was, however, because the public trusted Labour no more than the Conservatives to get unemployment levels down while maintaining sound economic management (Wybrow and King, 2001, pp.58-68). Many of Foot's speeches were devoted to attacking Thatcherite monetarism policies and congratulating people for protesting against them, but there was little in the way of concrete proposals for how Labour would arrest the rise in joblessness. Labour failed to convince voters that it would govern in line with their priorities or provide improved competence in their ability to manage the key issues. In that regard, on another area of weakness for the government, Labour were unable to take advantage of the position with which they were presented.

While the model of 'Opposition-Craft' asks that we assess an opposition against the government that they oppose, it is also appropriate in this era that we look at the SDP/Liberal Alliance as well (Crewe and King, 1995). Labour split under Foot's leadership and the SDP was formed (Bochel and Denver, 1984). According to Seyd, 'the SDP had been established in protest at Labour's leftward leanings' (Seyd, 1993, p.84). The SDP was by definition a party created in Labour's image but with more centre-ground appeal. The situation Labour faced towards the later part of the 1980-83 era was one whereby the government appeared to be governing in the mainstream centre, but one where it also faced a very significant challenge from a third party set up to operate in the centre of British politics. The 'Opposition-Craft' framework suggests that context would be highly challenging for an opposition party to thrive in, and so it proved to be.

One area where Labour should have been in a strong position was on the economy given the recession of the early 1980s. However, again, Labour failed to take advantage of the

hand it was given. While the recession was deep, the economic position was to improve ahead of the election in 1983 (Baddeley, Martin and Tyler, 1998). At its height, the economic downturn undoubtedly had an impact on Tory support, as Morgan comments: ‘Conservative support stood at only 27 per cent in March 1981 – a time of monetarist finance and rapidly rising unemployment’ (Morgan, 2015, p.234). But, by 1983, the economy was on the turn as ‘severe deflation eventually resulted in low inflation, which, when coupled with reductions in direct taxation, resulted in moderately rising living standards’ (O’Shaughnessy, 2002, p.49).

The uptick in economic performance was matched by rising levels of Conservative support. Morgan claims that there ‘were signs in the opinion polls through late 1982 that the economy was showing evidence of recovery, partly because the Thatcher government began to moderate some of the more extreme aspects of its monetarist policy, and unemployment began to fall’ (Morgan, 2015, p.235). That economic optimism was reflected in voters’ opinion about the financial position of their own household. As Figure 27 below indicates, back in 1981 there was a negative ‘feel-good’ factor of -25, but by the time of the election in 1983 that had turned into a positive score of +6.

Figure 27: How do you think the financial situation of your household will change over the next twelve months?

Date	A lot better	A little better	Stay the same	A little worse	A lot worse	Feel-good factor	DK
Dec 1981	2	13	39	25	15	-25	5
May 1982	3	19	43	21	9	--8	6
Dec 1982	2	18	47	19	8	-7	5
Mar 1983	3	21	49	16	6	2	7
May 1983	3	22	48	14	5	6	7

Source: Wybrow and King, 2001, p.307

Thus, the early 1980s witnessed a seismic shock to the economy – a contextual factor which the model suggests should be conducive for an opposition party to take advantage, but by polling day the effects of that shock had largely dissipated with the exception of the high levels of unemployment. Polls showed that Labour had the best policies to deal with

unemployment – 42% favoured Labour compared to 25% for the Conservatives in May 1983 (Wybrow and King, 2001, p.68). However, coupled with that position was Labour's wider lack of credibility in managing the UK economy. Polling evidence showed that voters did not trust Labour to manage the economy and also indicated that, despite previous economic woes, the Conservatives were far more trusted on this aspect of governance (Wybrow and King, 2001, pp.58, 63-64).

While the economy was certainly strengthening by 1983, it could not be claimed to be booming. Indeed, the 'feel-good' factor noted above was relatively low when compared with other economic positions sampled prior to UK general elections in which the governing party was to win (see, for example, Wybrow and King, 2001, pp.306-19). Around the world, other western economies were also suffering in the early 1980s, which was to prove fatal for those governing parties, but not for Thatcher's administration, as noted by Gould: 'from Australia to France, from Canada to West Germany – in the face of global recession in the early 1980s, incumbent governments were crashing to defeat. But in Britain the Conservatives were easily re-elected' (Gould, 2011, p.19). On the basis of that evidence, in terms of the economic context in which Labour operated as an opposition, 1980-83, it should have done far better than it did at the polls in 1983.

According to Morgan, Foot 'could not understand how the Tories appeared likely to win with unemployment at such a high level' (Morgan, 2007, p.428). Foot's frustration with the electorate was a perfect example of an opposition believing in political folklore that all an opposition has to do is wait for a government to slip up for the electoral tide to turn in their favour. That notion was debunked at the outset of this thesis; while oppositions can take advantage of missteps on the part of the governing party, they have to provide a positive alternative for the electorate to sign up to. Foot's party put forward little in terms of a wider economic policy platform that the electorate thought would mitigate the impact of high levels of unemployment (Kavanagh and Dale, 2000). Part of Labour's deficiencies, in that respect, was down to the chaotic state of the party ahead of and during Foot's tenure in the role as leader.

The seeds of Labour's internal civil war were planted many years before Foot became leader (Williams, 1983). It started with disillusionment among some party members over the actions of the Wilson and Callaghan Labour governments of the 1960s and 1970s which, according to Kogan and Kogan, 'failed to satisfy the demands of the left' (Kogan and

Kogan, 1982, p.2-3). Some in the party felt that those two Labour administrations failed to challenge the prevailing orthodoxy of the capitalist market economy, and also failed to enact socialist principles in the manner that they sought. That disgruntlement inside the party germinated after the surprise defeat at the 1970 election, as described by Gould: 'From 1970 onwards, the left began their slow, inexorable assault. Labour's long death march had begun. The centre of gravity inside the party was shifting decisively to the left' (Gould, 2011, p.33).

Kogan and Kogan observe that following the 1970 election, 'the party embarked on a decisive move towards the left, triggered off by the discontent of some of its membership with the policies of the traditional leadership' (Kogan and Kogan, 1982, pp.1-2). Those rumblings continued throughout the 1970s and became worse as Labour took office again in 1974 (Meredith, 2019). According to Shaw, the left became increasingly angry with 'the performance of the 1974-79 Labour Government' as a result of 'its abandonment of cherished goals like full employment and the expansion of welfare services'. Shaw goes further and claims that, for the left, the 'leadership became almost synonymous with betrayal' (Shaw, 1989, p.187).

At the same time, Labour membership was noted to have moved towards the left as a result of the work of a new group called *Outside Left*. It organised an influx of more left-wing members, which changed the nature of membership patterns inside Labour (Kogan and Kogan, 1982, pp.1-2). The result was an increasingly fractious membership, some of whom appeared to coalesce around Tony Benn, who 'emerged as at once the leader and the tool of the new Left' (Healey, 1989, p.470). Despite being a leading member of the Labour government of the 1970s, Benn seemed to garner support among left-leaning members unhappy at the direction of travel of that government. He appeared as the standard-bearer of socialist principles and a focal point for disgruntled members; his off-message contributions acted as an accelerant to more extremist opinion in the party (Powell, 2001).

As the membership changed in nature, the left gathered momentum and proceeded to seize control of the levers of power inside the party. Crucially, it became the dominant faction on the party's ruling body, the NEC (Kogan, 2019). At around the same time evidence began to emerge that the party had been infiltrated by the hard-left Militant group (Crick, 2016). That was a cause of considerable concern for those particularly on the

social-democratic wing of the party. According to Thomas-Symonds, '[t]he issue of dealing with Militant first came to prominence in the 1970s' (Thomas-Symonds, 2005, p.31), but with control of the NEC resting with the left of the party, little was done about the influx of those thought to be part of Militant. In that regard, '[t]he right bitterly resented the NEC's failure to nip Militant in the bud in the 1970s' (Shaw, 1989, p.181). Therefore, both flanks of Labour's coalition were set on a collision course, which was to manifest itself in the early 1980s under Foot's leadership.

Labour lost power in 1979, which again eroded the position of the right inside the party. According to Jones, '[t]he increasingly marginalized position of social democrats within the Party at this time was even more starkly exposed after Labour's election defeat in 1979' (Jones, 1996, p.109). Thatcher won with a majority of 43 at the 1979 election (Butler and Kavanagh, 1985); consequently her majority in parliament was stable and, thus, in accordance with the model of 'Opposition-Craft, that context provided Labour with another difficult set of circumstances in which to operate during the 1980-83 period. Coupled with that majority was the shift in profile of the 1979 intake of Labour MPs, which according to Healey, 'shifted the composition of the Parliamentary Labour Party some degrees to the left' (Healey, 1989, p.478).

Callaghan eventually resigned the party leadership in late 1980, which resulted in a leadership election. In that election, Healey was 'thought to be a certain winner' (Drucker, 1981, p.384). Healey was the candidate of the right and the assumption at the time was that the PLP was right-leaning. However, the work of Heppell and Crines (2011) shows that, on the key issues of policy, Labour MPs were actually more left-leaning than was previously assumed. Foot was not initially going to stand for the leadership, but according to Heppell and Crines his appeal lay in the fact that he was 'seen as a far stronger "stop Healey" candidate than Shore and Silkin, but he was also seen as a "stop-Benn" candidate' (Heppell and Crines, 2011, p.82). Momentum escalated around his candidature.

Foot won the leadership contest and, 'to much surprise, came home with 139 votes to 129 for the front-runner Denis Healey' (Morgan, 2015, p.233). Heppell and Crines contend, however, that 'the victory of Foot was not that surprising given that the PLP was leaning to the left on each of the dominant ideological policy divides that defined Labour Party political thought at the time' (Heppell and Crines, 2011, p.92). His victory was narrow, however, and was brought about by many of the future defectors to the SDP, who

‘deliberately voted for Foot in the hope that it would speed up the disintegration of the Labour Party and leave the way open for a new party of the moderate left to emerge’ (Morgan, 2015, p.234).

Ultimately, Foot inherited the leadership at a time of tremendous division inside the party. His leadership victory is seen by Jones as ‘a phase of factional “civil war”’ in which the party exemplified ‘a sharp and dangerous polarization of policy and ideological positions’ (Jones, 1996, p.109). Jones argues that disagreement within the party centred on two issues: policy and redistribution of power inside the party. The left wanted to seize the policy agenda, but it also wanted to empower the membership and the party conference. The right wanted to resist that advance, and thus a ‘period of bitter conflict arose, in the first place, from what Minkin has described as “unprecedented internal schism over Party democracy...unlike anything known before in Labour Party history”’ (Jones, 1996, p.109).

In accordance with the criterion set out in the model of ‘Opposition-Craft’, Foot’s inheritance on assuming the leadership in 1980 was bleak, especially in regard to the party’s internal affairs, but it was not without promise. Labour was a first-time opposition, facing a government with a healthy parliamentary majority – that would be a tough assignment for any opposition, especially as the party was completely unreformed following its defeat in 1979. In furthering its troubles, however, Labour’s policy platform moved further away from the centre ground under Foot’s leadership, whilst at the same time the party was utterly riven with factional infighting. In that regard, while the economic position and the unpopularity of the Prime Minister may have been promising for the opposition, the condition of the Labour Party under Foot’s leadership was so dire as to not provide a realistic alternative to Thatcher’s Conservative administration.

5.4 Strategy

Labour’s internal strife was not just a problem in terms of its ability to look like a party ready for government, it also had an impact on what it served up as its policy offer (Jones, 1996). With the left largely in charge of the party’s machinery, that wing of the party was in the ascendancy in terms of formulating policy around more left-wing ideals. According to Jones: ‘This development and adoption of overtly left-wing policies after 1979 eventually produced the wide-ranging NEC policy statement *Labour’s Programme 1982*, which argued in fundamentalist terms that “our social and economic objectives can be achieved only through an expansion of common ownership substantial enough to give the community

decisive power over the commanding heights of the economy” (Jones, 1996, p.110). What that statement effectively meant was that Labour was in the business of ‘restoring to public ownership all privatized utilities’ (Jones, 1996, pp.110-11).

This framework for analysis questions whether a party of opposition is on the centre ground of British politics as a precondition for electoral success. With the left in charge, at its core, Labour had become a party that was overtly challenging the principles of the British market economy at a time when the electorate was in favour of a smaller state, selling off council houses, and getting a taste for share ownership (Edwards, 2017). With its core principles in mind, Labour was nowhere near the centre ground of politics. Indeed, it operated its economic policy under a banner known as the Alternative Economic Strategy (AES), which was meant explicitly to communicate the sense that the party was about challenging the prevailing economic orthodoxy (Daniels, 1998).

According to Daniels, ‘[t]he Alternative Economic Strategy (AES), to which the party was committed in the early 1980s, was based on a mixture of protectionism, assistance to national industries, renationalisation and expansionary Keynesian spending programmes’ (Daniels, 1998, p.83). That programme was entirely at odds with the economic policies as enacted by the Conservative administration under Thatcher. What Labour offered on the economy amounted to revolutionary change as opposed to a continuation of governance in the mainstream centre, which was a strategy that the model of ‘Opposition-Craft’ would question as an effective operating model for an opposition to follow. Further still, Labour’s AES, according to Daniels, was ‘incompatible with the obligations of EC membership’ (Daniels, 1998, p. 83). Thus, the implications of the so-called AES were to call into question Labour’s relationship with the European Community (EC), which at the time would have taken Labour yet further from the centre ground of British politics.

The left, however, did alter Labour’s stance towards its membership of the EC, known more colloquially at the time as the ‘Common Market’. Left-wing suspicions around the EC were rooted in a belief that membership of the Common Market would limit a Labour government’s ability to bring back privatised utilities into public ownership and enact its AES. But the left won out and committed Labour to a policy of immediate withdrawal from the Common Market, with Foot pronouncing at the 1982 conference: ‘We are committed as a party to come out of the Common Market’ (Foot, Leader’s Conference Speech, 1982). Pouring scorn on that policy, Daniels argues that leaving the EC at the time was simply

'unrealistic' (Daniels, 1998, p.83). Again, Labour appeared to be at odds with the public on this policy commitment, with support for continued membership of the EC at 43% immediately prior to 1983 election (with 30% thinking it was 'bad' for the UK to continue membership of the EC) (Wybrow and King, 2001, p.301). It was another symbol of Labour's values articulating hostility towards the principles of a market economy, which again demonstrated the distance between Labour and the centre ground of British politics.

It was not just on those fundamental questions around state versus private control in the economy where Labour was not offering policy close to the aspirations of the electorate; its internal battles also had a direct effect on defence policy. According to Scott, 'Labour's defence and disarmament policy in the 1980s was inextricably bound up with the party's internal political condition' (Scott, 2006, p.691). While it was the left that championed a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament, they found little resistance from Foot, as leader, given that he was '[a] founder member of CND and stalwart of annual CND protest marches' (Scott, 2006, p.691). Foot argued passionately for the CND cause both before and on becoming leader. Speaking about the devastating impact of nuclear arms, Foot declared: 'This is why I was a supporter of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and why I remain a supporter of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament' (Foot, Leader's Conference Speech, 1982). And so it was that Labour went into the 1983 election with a commitment in its manifesto for unilateral nuclear disarmament, in addition to a commitment to sever ties with NATO.

The disarmament commitment was a cause of further internal unrest inside the Labour Party. Scott claims the 'victory of the left in making unilateralism party policy accelerated the exit of those who joined the SDP, thereby further weakening those on the centre-right who opposed the anti-nuclear policy' (Scott, 2006, p.691). In that regard, defence policy was in itself one of the contributing factors which led to Labour's split and the formation of the SDP. The battle over defence policy also spilled over into the election campaign in 1983, when Jim Callaghan 'roundly condemned a unilateralist approach' when speaking to his Cardiff constituents (Morgan, 2007, p.433), and in doing so underscored Labour's internal divisions.

While the policy on defence further exacerbated the internal warfare in Labour, of more importance, when measured against the 'Opposition-Craft' model, was the fact that the policy was rejected by voters, who were overwhelming in favour of the UK maintaining a

nuclear defence programme and believed that the Conservatives had the best policy to deal with Britain's defence (see, for example, Wybrow and King, 2001, p.106). In that regard, Labour's decisions around defence policy seemed to be about keeping its activist base happy rather than about appealing to the mainstream centre where the electorate were located.

Further chaos emerged when it came to assembling the manifesto for the 1983 campaign. While a number of policy commitments had been agreed (as outlined above), they had not been turned into a manifesto. Indeed, Labour merely assembled its policy platform into something called the Party Programme, which Kinnock described as a 'rambling document' (Kinnock, 2011, p.118). It was for the Clause Five Group (CFG), the group designated to approve the manifesto, to assume responsibility for production of the final manifesto document. Various accounts have described how the CFG met for an incredibly short period of time and simply approved the Party Programme as the manifesto (see, for example, Grant, 1986). And, according to Kinnock, 'that was how what Gerald Kaufman called "the longest suicide note in history" became every last word of it, the 1983 manifesto' (Kinnock, 2011, p.118).

The left, therefore, secured policy victories in a number of areas, with 'commitments to unilateral nuclear disarmament, unconditional withdrawal from the EC and an Alternative Economic Strategy involving a substantial extension of public ownership and control' (Jones, 1996, p.110). In addition, the manifesto also included a commitment for the 'abolition of the House of Lords' (Morgan, 2007, p.429). For Rosen, it was clear that 'Benn and his allies foisted a more left-wing and statist manifesto on Labour for the following election [1983] and in doing so condemned Labour to its worst defeat since 1931' (Rosen, 2011, p.157). Callaghan also described the manifesto as 'a thoroughly Bennite document' (Callaghan, 1990, p.45). Whatever its roots, it was unquestionably not a document designed to win centre-ground appeal. Entitled, *A New Hope for Britain*, the manifesto was conceived in internal conflict and division, and it was revolutionary in tone. Labour had planted itself about as far away from the centre as is possible – a position utterly rejected by the model of 'Opposition-Craft'.

Labour's ultra-left programme was matched by its narrative. Aside from the bitter conflict inside the party, which was very much communicated in the media at the time (Healey, 1989), it consistently peddled a narrative which argued against the current economic and

political consensus. The party was in full-on protest mode (Kogan, 2019) at the Thatcherite reform programme which, whilst satisfying for the converted, did nothing for Labour's image as the party suited to be the 'natural progression from the existing governing hegemony' (see 'Opposition-Craft' model in Chapter 1). On that aspect of the 'Opposition-Craft' framework, Labour failed. However, the Conservatives were helped significantly in framing the economic and political consensus of the day with the support of the Conservative-supporting press.

Alan Clarke (1986) points out that the Conservatives had a strategy, which suggested that 'there is no alternative' to their reform programme (Clarke, 1986, p.34). He argues that the Tory press, alongside the broadcast media, made no attempt to challenge the Conservatives' governing hegemony of the time. Thus, the concept of Thatcherism was dominant in that supply-side economics was just accepted as a given despite that fact that it caused high levels of unemployment. Thus, the spectre of mass unemployment as an unacceptable policy outcome was never really challenged because it was just accepted that it was the tonic needed by the country. Clarke claims that '[t]he election was fought on the agenda drawn up by the Conservative Party' (Clarke, 1986, p.34). The essence of his argument is that it was near impossible for Labour to craft an alternative narrative because the government line had been swallowed wholeheartedly. In that context, the left-wing manifesto that Labour proposed looked ridiculous on the grounds that it ran counter to the received wisdom of the times.

The Labour MP Austin Mitchell appears to agree that the Conservatives were dominant in the sense of capturing the public's imagination around economic policy: 'The public was largely unconvinced that Labour's policies would work, because they shared Mrs Thatcher's piggy-banking approach to economics, disapproving of borrowing to finance expansion and feeling fantastic about unemployment: 84 per cent of the *Sunday Times* panel felt that whatever government did numbers of unemployed would remain over 2 million, while 60 per cent felt it was impossible to reduce unemployment substantially without a lot of inflation' (Mitchell, 1983, p.141). The poll cited by Mitchell appeared to underscore the success of what Clarke has described as the 'no alternative' strategy as enacted by the Thatcher government. However, Labour certainly did not help itself in the sense that it could not provide voters with a credible and appealing alternative.

According to Mitchell, Foot's narrative was all about appealing to existing party members and those faithful to the Labour brand. He claims that it was all about 'maintaining the image of Labour as the party of permanent demonstration with unruly, chanting mobs, led by a limping figure with a walking stick' (Mitchell, 1983, p.96). Harsh though that analysis is, others appear to agree: 'Labour was still the party of failed solutions, still the party of trade-union domination and state control' (Gould, 2011, p.20). However, Seyd takes a different approach and suggests that that Labour's narrative on 'nuclear disarmament, nationalisation, and protection of trade unionist' rights' actually drove away the support of its traditional base as well (Seyd, 1993, p.71). He claims that Labour had lost touch with its core support among the manual, male working classes. Such was the toxicity of its message that Gould indicates that Labour 'even lost the trade unionists, where the swing to the Conservatives was 8 per cent' (Gould, 2011, p.18). On a similar theme, Morgan claims that 'more trade unionists seemed likely to vote Conservative than Labour' (Morgan, 2007, p.428).

In that regard, Labour did not project itself as able to govern more effectively at the centre of British politics; indeed its message seemed to be about turning the political and economic consensus on its head. The Conservative government was seen as the mainstream party, whereas Labour was far-left and fringe alternative (Clarke, Stewart, and Zuk, 1986). Thus, when assessed against the framework, on all levels around its narrative the Labour opposition was an unmitigated failure. That failure to convince voters of its suitability for office was exacerbated further when it came to its leader's abilities.

Obvious to some from the start was Foot's lack of leadership ability. However, others came to that conclusion later, for example, John Prescott notes that: 'Footy is a lovely man. I voted for him, but I was voting with the heart and not the head' (Prescott, 2008, p.142). Prescott later claimed that those on the left made a mistake in voting for Foot: '[W]e were wrong, as we soon discovered Foot was not a party leader' (Prescott, 2008, p.142). For others, that realisation was there from the start and simply manifested itself over the next three years, as observed by Austin Mitchell when he suggests that Foot had a 'general failure to lead' the Labour Party (Mitchell, 1983, p.94).

Foot was a deeply principled individual who believed in many strongly-held policy positions. For example, his stance on defence and nuclear weapons came very much from his 'deep political convictions' (Scott, 2006, p.691). But party leadership requires many

things, including the ability to work nimbly around policy positions and tap into the public mood of the times. Foot was unable to do that. Indeed, Foot's problem with leadership was more deep-seated than his rigid dogma and image problem; it was that he actually did not believe in the concept of leadership. According to Morgan, 'Foot's prejudice against leadership, and against seeming to act like a leader himself, was the root cause of many of his problems' (Morgan, 2007, p.383). Foot believed in party democracy at all levels and, with those principles in mind, he was intrinsically against the notion of himself as a decision-taker. Thus, he acted in a manner that in no way showed that he had 'demonstrated firm and decisive leadership over his own party' in the manner suggested by the model in Chapter 1. It is an inescapable conclusion that, at a very fundamental level, Foot was at odds with the model.

No academic work or political commentary has credibly argued that Foot was a good leader, and this thesis will not seek to challenge that position. He was a terrible leader of the Labour Party, but there were aspects of his position and performance that were consistent with some of the principles set out in the model of 'Opposition-Craft'. For example, and to the surprise of many, he took a firm stance on the Argentine invasion of the Falklands Islands (Norpeh, 1987), and he set up the first real attempt to rid the party of the Militant group (Crick, 2016). He won plaudits for both of those positions, but perhaps more because they seemed so at odds with his normal working pattern than because he was demonstrating firm leadership.

On the Falklands, Foot was counter-intuitively hawkish in outlook (Morgan, 2007, p.411). He himself was perhaps more in tune with the sentiments expressed by the voting public than he was with his own party, who were somewhat more sceptical about the war. He was perhaps a little more centrist than his party on economic matters too, in that he was personally not entirely on board with Labour's Alternative Economic Strategy (Daniels, 1998). Thus, on two key principles of policy, Foot could be considered to be marginally more centrist than his party – principles on which the model of 'Opposition-Craft' suggest are grounds on which an opposition might do well. The fact that he was at odds with his party and did little by way of leading them towards his position, however, says something about his ineffectual leadership. Further still, the praise he received on those two issues was perhaps more about the fact that he appeared to show some agency as opposed to being at the mercy of his party.

For Shaw, Labour was 'ineptly led' by Foot, and he claims that it was Foot's appalling leadership skills that drove the party to a 'stunning debacle' at the 1983 election (Shaw, 1993, p.112). O'Shaughnessy assesses Foot's skills and concludes that he 'was perceived to be weak and eccentric – quite unsuited to be prime minister' (O'Shaughnessy, 2002, p.50). This is a sentiment echoed by Morgan: 'Foot was not perceived as a likely or even credible Prime Minister' (Morgan, 2007, p.418). Thus, it is safe to conclude that Foot was neither an effective party leader nor potential Prime Minister and, on those grounds, he fundamentally undermined Labour's case for office when assessed against the model of 'Opposition-Craft'.

5.5 Tasks

In terms of opposing the government and holding it to account, in the manner described by the model, Labour fell far short of the mark required to be a serious contender for power. It is not that Labour failed to highlight governing deficiencies – it used up plenty of its political communications strategy to emphasise high levels of unemployment and rising inequality (Wring, 2005). Labour's problems lay more in the manner by which it campaigned on those issues. Foot often held huge rallies where he would preach about such issues to the already converted. He was also never more comfortable than on a demonstration where he would protest at what he saw as Tory austerity measures (Morgan, 2015, p.239). Labour's opposition towards much of the Conservative programme of government was obvious to the electorate, but it was done in a manner which did not smack of a government-in-waiting in either tone or substance. As well as doubts over the picket-line style of protest, the electorate could not see what Labour's alternative was to the economic problems faced by the country (Wybrow and King, 2001, p.149). In that regard, Labour was ineffective at developing a narrative that exemplified how it would provide better governance than the Conservative administration.

The model questions whether the opposition is selectively able to oppose the government of the day as a means by which to communicate its values and potential programme for government. Labour, under Foot, did not oppose everything Thatcher's government put forward (Cronin, 2004). Indeed, on the Falklands, 'no one reacted with greater passion than that famous "inveterate peace monger", the pillar of CND and many other neo-pacifist organizations, Michael Foot [...] He was adamant that the Falklands should be defended and liberated' (Morgan, 2007, p.411). The model calls for selective opposition and, in some regards, this could be described as a good example of an opposition supporting a

government as a means by which to communicate its value system. However, many presumed Foot was a pacifist (which, of course, he was not), but nonetheless that image seemed to be debunked by his support for the war, which ultimately caused ructions in his own party who were perhaps more genuinely pacifist in outlook than Foot himself (Crines, 2011). Thus, what could have been good opposition tactics for Labour turned into yet more party warfare.

Foot's support for the war was best exemplified in the House of Commons. According to Morgan, 'Foot's speech, perhaps his last great parliamentary performance, galvanised the nation' (Morgan, 2007, p.411). This view was echoed by media commentary at the time; *The Guardian* claimed that Foot 'stole the show' (*The Guardian*, 15th April 1982) with his oratory in the house. The praise for Foot's parliamentary prowess did not stop there - Margaret Thatcher described Foot as a 'gifted orator' and praised him as a great 'parliamentarian' (Thatcher, 1993, p.360). In that context, it is unsurprising that 'colleagues felt that he should have run rings round Mrs Thatcher in debate, given his intellectual superiority and Callaghan's earlier domination of her, but his natural courtesy towards women held him back' (Morgan, 2007, p.389). His skills as a parliamentarian should have been a strength when he worked as Leader of the Opposition, but that ability was in fact neutralised as a result of his deference to Thatcher's gender. In that regard, he was not effective at PMQs and could not project himself in a prime-ministerial manner.

The comfortable parliamentary majority that Thatcher enjoyed post 1979 provided a difficult environment for the opposition to provide challenge in parliament (Butler and Kavanagh, 1980). Indeed, the Thatcher government, 1979-83, was defeated only once during this period when, in 1982, a motion disapproving of changes to immigration rules was passed by 290 votes to 272 (Hansard, 15th December, 1982). The Thatcher government consequently looked solid in parliament, which made the job of the opposition all the more challenging. The opposition did, however, benefit from a shadow cabinet with considerable parliamentary and cabinet-level experience, with the likes of Healey, Hattersley, and Shore (Coates, 1980). However, under the terms set out in the model, parliament was a hard setting for Labour to show readiness for office given the arithmetic of the Commons and the association of Labour's top team with its period in government.

Labour was an incredibly challenging party to manage from 1980 to 1983 (Shaw, 2000). It is uncertain that any party leader could have successfully guided the party during that

period, but in his actions Foot appeared to be uniquely bad in the role. His mismanagement of the party made what was a challenging task appear like a total disaster. On his arrival in post, the party was already in a state of chaos, as was outlined in the context section of this chapter. Its largely left-wing membership base was made up of radical and young activists from a predominantly middle-class background. It was also well represented by left-wing pressure groups inside the party who had been encouraged to join by the *Outside Left* organisation (Jones, 1996, p.110). That left-wing bias in the membership was exacerbated as they played a role which was 'increasingly influential in constituency parties' (Jones, 1996, p.110). In that respect, the power inside the party in the late 1970s/early 1980s had shifted away from the leadership and into the hands of the membership.

Seyd argues that members of the Labour Party 'gained significant powers in the late 1970s' (Seyd, 1993, p.72), but he also suggests that power base brought significant problems for the party in the sense that they were not best placed to manage their own internal affairs. He suggests that the party was 'constrained by the cultural ethos that has placed great stress on the democratic role of party members' (Seyd, 1993, p.72). In other words, to get things done, the party needed to get the democratic endorsement of the party. While in principle that might have sounded like a good idea, the problem lay in the fact that those members did not just come from one ideological home. Seyd claims that 'those members have lacked ideological and social cohesion' (Seyd, 1993, p.72). Therefore, Labour in the early 1980s had a dominant left-wing faction, which appeared to contain a broad-spectrum of opinion, and to the right of its coalition it had a social-democratic wing almost completely at odds with the left-wing direction of travel. Labour was not 'quiescent' or moving towards 'one common goal' as described in the model of 'Opposition-Craft'.

With the left of the party firmly in control, it appeared that they wished to enact two identifiable principles. Firstly, they wished to implement constitutional changes on the party. That essentially meant that members would be in charge of the party and that party conference would be the supreme authority when it came to decision making (Smith and Spear, 1992). Secondly, they wished to use those constitutional changes to move the party in a leftwards direction in terms of policy (Jones, 1996, p.110). In essence, they wanted to reduce the power of the leadership and the PLP. When assessed against the model of 'Opposition-Craft', that stance does not score highly as it does not smack of firm governance over the party. It also meant that decision-making would have been a

laborious process. The model suggests that electors look for firm governance by a powerful Prime Minister, yet Labour had manoeuvred itself into a position which was the antithesis of that model of governance.

Superficially, Foot's personal political position could have been an advantage to Labour, but it was to prove anything but. Coming from the left of the party, Foot had the opportunity to build a consensus with the right, especially as his pedigree was of the left, but he was not the preferred candidate of the left for the leadership (Heppell and Crines, 2011). Bryan Gould notes that initially Foot was not going to stand for the leadership of the party – the left was going to line up behind Peter Shore. It was agreed that Foot would 'urge his supporters to vote for Peter' (Gould, 1995, p.139). However, it was decided at the last moment that Foot had a better chance of stopping Benn from becoming the eventual winner, so Foot elected to stand. In stopping Benn, but from a leftist position, the party could perhaps have united around his leadership. However, the party did not unite.

Following Foot's leadership victory the membership wished to assert their authority on the party. Consequently, the 1980 leadership election was to be the last contested only with the votes of MPs. The membership wanted a say in who would be leader of the party going forward. In that context, a special conference was arranged at Wembley to discuss and reform the leadership-election process. Foot brought his own proposals to the conference, as did the NEC, and the unions (Jupp, 1981). In the end none of the options carried favour amongst delegates, and according to Drucker: 'The leader could not lead. The NEC had no authority. The right found no support' (Drucker, 1981, p.387). As it turned out, no-one got their way, as the conference voted for an 'electoral college in which the unions had 40 per cent of the vote with 30 per cent each for the PLP and CLPs' (Drucker, 1981, p.387). What that meant, however, was that the membership was in an even more powerful position as far as party management was concerned. For some in the party, that was a position they were no longer prepared to accept.

The Wembley Conference led to the long-threatened breakaway of some Labour MPs. Jones notes that 'the social democratic right was driven on to the defensive' following years of leftwards movement inside the party (Jones, 1996, p.111). For those MPs, Wembley was the last straw. The day after the conference, Roy Jenkins, David Owen, Shirley Williams and Bill Rodgers met at Owen's Limehouse residence and declared that they were setting up the SDP. They were to be followed out of the door by others over the

coming few weeks, but the Wembley Conference itself was the point at which the party split (Drucker, 1981, p.387). Foot proved early in his leadership that he was unable to keep all wings of his party happy and together in the manner set out in the model of 'Opposition-Craft' and, consequently, according to Morgan, '[f]rom then on, Foot's prospects of coming anywhere near winning power seemed to disappear' (Morgan, 2007, p.395).

While officially the split occurred in the immediate aftermath of the Wembley Conference, in truth the battle between Labour's warring factions had been going on for years. In fact, even after the split, the boil of factional infighting had yet to be lanced. Why? Because some on the social-democratic wing of the Labour Party chose to stay and fight a 'rear-guard action' (Jones, 1996, p.112). That meant that Labour leaked support on the right to the SDP, but they still faced the prospect of internal warfare in a party that still contained both Bennite and social-democratic traditions. According to Jones, the fight between the social-democratic left and the Bennite left formed the 'most serious Party split in fifty years' (Jones, 1996, p.112), a split that was not solved with the formation of the SDP.

Following the split with the SDP, Labour's internal strife was to get deeper and was perhaps best exemplified over the battle for its Deputy Leader position (Punnett, 1990). Healey was Labour's Deputy Leader in the early 1980s and recalled later in his memoirs that: 'On April Fool's Day 1981 [...] Tony Benn had decided to fight me for the Deputy Leadership' (Healey, 1989, p.481). The seeds of that contest lay in many ways between the two competing types of socialist vision as offered by Foot and Benn. So, while the party was split with its social-democratic leanings, it was also evident that a schism had opened up amongst those on the left of the party. To cite Morgan again: 'In turn that meant an unending conflict between the contending socialist visions held by Michael Foot and Tony Benn, two kinds of socialism, in the struggle between which tormented the party henceforth' (Morgan, 2007, p.396).

Aside from their differences over policy, Benn and Foot did not get along. Their personal animosity went back years and stretched into their time in office during the 1970s: 'Foot thought that Benn was fundamentally disloyal, both in his leaks about Cabinet discussions to the press and in his disavowal of collective responsibility' (Morgan, 2007, p.396), and Benn felt that Foot's attitude towards him had often left him feeling 'steamed up' (Benn, 1994, p. 76). In that regard, cooperation between the two leading figures on Labour's left is described by Morgan as 'tortuous' (Morgan, 2007, p.396). Once the campaign for the

Deputy Leadership got under way, Labour's internal strife was to go into overdrive and was marred by 'bitter personal attacks on the candidates from the rival camps' (Seyd, 1993, p.71). Indeed, others report that the contest sparked 'actual fighting in a Brighton hotel washroom' which, according to some reports, involved amongst others the future leader, Neil Kinnock (Morgan, 2007, p.400).

However, with regard to the contest itself, according to Crick, 'in the end Dennis Healey held on' (Crick, 2016, p.195). According to Healey himself: 'I scraped in to victory by a hair of my eyebrow – 50.426 per cent against 49.574 per cent for Benn' (Healey, 1989, p.483). Healey was adamant that, had he not won, there 'would have been a haemorrhage of Labour defections to the SDP both in Parliament and in the country. I do not believe the Labour Party could have recovered' (Healey, 1989, p.482). Healey was equally blunt about his opponent, Benn: 'he came close to destroying the Labour Party as a force in twentieth century British politics' (Healey, 1989, p.471). Benn, however, saw the result quite differently and argued that his tilt at the Deputy Leadership 'had been far more successful than I could possibly have dreamed at the beginning' (Benn, 1994, p. 155). Reflecting on the Deputy Leadership battle, Morgan articulates what many others observed years later: 'It was the closest of close-run things. Yet in retrospect it marked a turning of the tide' (Morgan, 2007, p.399). From that point on the left's domination of the party started to recede.

It would be unfair to Foot to claim that he was at fault over the Deputy Leadership contest in 1981; the seeds of that election had been planted many years before he came to the leadership and at some point there would have been a manifestation of the fault lines in the party. However, as he failed to stamp his leadership credentials and vision on the party, he created the political vacuum into which Benn could plausibly mount a challenge. Foot's limp-natured leadership style continued following the 1981 contest. In an attempt to smooth over differences inside the party, after a period, Foot sought to reach out to Benn. According to Peter Jenkins writing in *The Guardian*: 'after a year of vacillation and ineffectiveness [Foot] slapped down Benn with an olive branch' (The Guardian, 30th September, 1981). Thus, Foot made Benn the party's spokesman on energy, but Benn was disloyal again and made up policy on the hoof in the House. In one infamous contribution, Benn claimed that 'Labour favoured renationalization of the assets of industry, without compensation' (Morgan, 2007, p.401). That contribution had not been cleared by the party and was undoubtedly an example of Benn using his public platform to articulate his own

views rather than sticking to a party line. Foot's efforts in this regard were about trying to manage all wings of the party, an attribute favoured by the model, but it was a symbolic gesture made after Benn's star had started to fade.

Following the Deputy Leadership contest, the 'left itself became increasingly fragmented' (Jones, 1996, p.111). As a result of that fragmentation, the right of the party began to reassert itself. The right prioritised recapturing control of the NEC as a way to take back the levers of power inside the party. According to Healey, '[t]he main battlefield in the war for the Labour Party's survival was its National Executive Committee, which in 1979 was solidly dominated by the Left' (Healey, 1989, p.471). At the outset of Foot's leadership, the NEC was in the hands of the hard-left. Of the twenty-nine places on Labour's ruling body, fifteen were controlled by the hard-left, and fourteen were with the soft-left and the right (Morgan, 2007, p.398). However, the left lost its majority in the NEC in 1981 and with it 'the initiative passed to a new coalition of the centre-left (supporters of the recently elected leader, Michael Foot) and the right' (Shaw, 1989, p.182).

The return of power to the right and soft-left on Labour's NEC proved crucial in Labour's efforts to deal with the Militant group. Labour had been dogged for many years by members who subscribed to Militant's ultra-hard-left tendencies. According to Kogan and Kogan: 'The Militant Tendency was composed of Labour Party activists who operated mainly in local constituency parties, advocating Trotskyist policies' (Kogan and Kogan, 1982, p.6). The leadership and the right of the party had been unable to deal with the issue because they lacked control of the NEC, but Foot's personal convictions also stood in the way of Labour's efforts to rid itself of Militant. Thomas-Symonds observes that 'Foot apparently only "reluctantly" came around to the idea that something had to be done about Militant during the course of 1981; his own personal conviction restricted him from acting sooner' (Thomas-Symonds, 2005, p.33).

However, '[b]acked by the new right/centre-left majority. Foot's call for an enquiry was approved by 19 votes to 10' (Shaw, 1989, p.182). Thus, in December 1981, '[t]he NEC set up a full-scale inquiry to look into Militant' (Crick, 2016, p.200). However, much to the disappointment of those on the right, the outcome of that initial enquiry was that Militant was not proscribed as a group inside the party (Shaw, 1989, p.183). Despite that, later in 1982 and following the disappointment of the initial enquiry, 'the NEC had no option but to proscribe Militant. This it did, by 18 votes to 9, in December 1982' (Shaw, 1989, p.185).

Thomas-Symonds is critical of Labour's attempt to proscribe Militant as it resulted in 'a pitifully low number of expulsions; and, since the proscription happened so late, it allowed a number of Militant candidates to be selected as parliamentary candidates, creating a further problem for the future' (Thomas-Symonds, 2005, p.33). In concrete terms, under Foot, Labour managed to expel only five members of Militant. According to Morgan, '[i]t was a token gesture and no more' (Morgan, 2007, p.424). Morgan also claims that Militant did 'colossal harm to Foot's leadership' (Morgan, 2007, p.425)

Foot prevaricated about Militant, and when he finally decided to take action against them, what he achieved was risible. However, what often gets forgotten in the analysis of Foot's tenure as leader is that he was actually the first of Labour's leaders to act against Militant. Labour's path back to power – inextricably linked as it was to Labour's side-lining of the hard-left – is often assumed to have started in 1983 under the leadership of Kinnock (see Chapter 4 for further discussion). However, without Foot's intervention around Militant, the full-on purge post-1983 would have been somewhat neutered. Thomas-Symonds (2005) argues that Foot did what he could in the circumstances, and in some respects saved the Labour Party because he set the fight back in motion against Militant. That analysis is very much set against the popular view that Foot's handling of Militant made a bad situation worse.

Militant was seen by most commentators as a major problem for Labour (see, for example, Crick, 2016). However, Shaw throws a different light onto the issue. He acknowledges that 'Militant was a problem for Labour' (Shaw, 1989, p.180), but argues that, '[m]easured by the amount of energy lavished upon it, it is easy to exaggerate—as the media commonly did—the scale of the threat Militant posed to Labour. At the height of its fortunes, it never exercised any influence upon national policy-making; it has so far only elected three MPs; and even within the "hard" left its voice was only one amongst many, a single thread in a complex tapestry' (Shaw, 1989, p.180). Despite Shaw's opinion, when assessed against the model of 'Opposition-Craft', it was necessary for Labour to quell the opposition from Militant inside the party. It smacked of firm party management when it was finally done, and it enabled the party to become more 'quiescent', as described in the model in Chapter 1, with its various factions once the extremists were driven out.

It was evident that Foot struggled with party management during his spell as Labour leader. That task was made harder by his own animosity towards explicit acts of leadership, but it

was also due to the fact that he did not have sufficient resources around him as leader in order to stamp his authority on the party. The model of 'Opposition-Craft' calls for leaders to assemble small groups of managers around them, but Foot was to take that principle to an extreme. Morgan makes the argument that the team around Foot was far too small to undertake their tasks in opposition: 'It was an indefatigable thin red line, but nowhere enough to help the leader impose his authority on the party and the country. It was almost impossible for him to spell out the main lines of policy that should be followed, or to give the party and the movement a sense of direction or priorities' (Morgan, 2007, p.386). In that respect, on yet another key tenet of party management, Foot was to score badly when assessed against the model.

In the respect of morale in party membership, it would be logical to conclude that the rise of internal party democracy meant that party members were happy with the direction of travel inside the party. However, according to Kogan, party membership declined under Foot's leadership: 'The party had lost one in five of its individual members between 1980 and 1981 (71,000 out of a total of 348,156, according to the 1982 NEC Annual Report)' (Kogan, 2019, p.41). Seemingly, a number of members became disillusioned with the party's internal warfare, and perhaps some defected to the SDP. What was left was more than probably a membership base enthusiastic with the party's policy platform, but who were unable to sell that message on the doorstep.

Foot's shambolic leadership spilled over into his execution of official duties. He was caught up in an incident in 1981 that became part of political folklore, and a lesson in how a Leader of the Opposition should not behave while carrying out official duties. At the Remembrance Day service that year at the Cenotaph, Foot appeared dressed in what the press dubbed a "donkey jacket". It was, in fact, simply a short overcoat, which was a blue-green colour rather than the regulation black expected at such an event. Nevertheless, the description of it as a "donkey jacket" captured the imagination of the public as the press remorselessly attacked Foot in what they saw as the height of disrespect to the fallen soldiers he was meant to be remembering. Prescott agrees and suggests '[t]hat was certainly an occasion for a smart suit and a tie if ever there was one, out of respect and propriety. Foot just didn't think about things like clothes' (Prescott, 2008, p.143). The negative press coverage clearly made its impact, and it is worth noting that Foot turned up in a black suit for the 1982 service at the Cenotaph, which went largely without comment.

The fact that Foot did not wear black in 1981, or appear to be smartly dressed, was absolutely typical of the man who was not interested in matters of image or what he would have seen as froth. Foot would never have meant any disrespect in how he dressed, but it was another facet of his personality that demonstrated to many voters that he was not suited to high office or positions of leadership where such things matter. In that regard, Prescott claims that 'Foot was one of those people who was marred by his public image' (Prescott, 2008, p.143). Morgan also argues that the Cenotaph incident 'became one of the defining images of Foot's period in charge' (Morgan, 2007, p.390). The model of 'Opposition-Craft' argues strongly that symbolic gestures on the part of an opposition can be highly effective in proving suitability for office, and it is just as true that those symbols can be as effective in proving unworthiness for power as well.

Analysis of Labour's media management strategy from 1980-83 is difficult to assess on the grounds that there was little attempt to manage its message in the media until the start of the 1983 campaign. Nick Grant was appointed as Director of Publicity in January 1983, but his appointment came far too late to have any serious impact on the election, which was due later in that year. Labour also employed an advertising agency a matter of weeks ahead of the election, again coming far too late to have any serious impact on the election. In fairness to Labour it was the first time they had employed such an agency, or stepped professionally into the world of advertising – both traits that the model of 'Opposition-Craft' advocates. According to Jonny Wright, of *Wright and Partners*, the firm employed to mastermind Labour's advertising campaign: 'Wright and Partners were appointed to handle the Labour Party's advertising in February 1983, initially for the local election scheduled for the 5 May and subsequently for the general election' (Wright, 1986, p.77). Wright notes that he was surprised they were appointed on the grounds that they were 'close to Saatchi and Saatchi' who worked for the Conservatives at the time (Wright, 1986, p.77).

The Saatchis had a long-standing working relationship with the Conservatives and had run their advertising efforts at the 1979 election. There is general agreement amongst academics that the Conservatives were massively ahead of the game in terms of their media, marketing and advertising strategy in the early 1980s (see, for example, Scammell, 1999). Indeed, Wring argues that '[t]he innovative Conservative Party campaign effort of 1979 is sometimes referred to as a watershed in the development of the phenomenon in Britain' (Wring, 2002, pp.24-25). In that context, Labour faced an extremely organised, professional, and well-funded media onslaught from the Conservatives, as noted by Clarke,

who claims that '[m]any commentators have noted the strong grasp which the Conservative Party Central Office retained on the campaign through its skilful handling of the media' (Clarke, 1986, p.34). By appointing communications staff and advertising agencies so late in the day, Labour was never going to score highly when assessed against the model.

Labour's problems on that front did not stop at the tardiness of their appointment, however. Wring (2002) argues that *Wright and Partners* were distanced from the Labour Party machinery. For Wring, there were two problems in the relationship between the advertiser and the party: 1) The advertiser was not part of the decision-making process inside the party, and 2) they did not have continuous access to Labour's own marketing research. In that regard, '[t]hese organisational problems were closely linked to political factors and, in particular, ongoing factional divisions within the party. These were in turn exacerbated by the then-leader Michael Foot's personal preference for not playing a central role in the management of strategy' (Wring, 2002, p.29). In accordance with the model, organisationally, Labour was poor, and yet again some of that deficiency was down to the leader and his attitude towards effective opposition skills.

Wright and Partners were instructed by Labour officials to campaign on caring issues, but Wright claims that their research found that '[t]he "Caring makes economic sense" ideas was great strategic thinking, but very difficult to grasp and understand and believe in' (Wright, 1986, p.79). In that regard, Labour's message was a complex one during the election campaign and lacked simple clarity. Complex messaging is rejected by the model as an effective campaigning tool, and it did not work for Labour in 1983. After working with the advertiser, Labour elected to go with the slogan 'THINK POSITIVE. ACT POSITIVE' in its campaign advertisements. However, Wright claims that 'after much agonising "Think positive" was accepted, but the addition of "Act positive" was insisted on – wrongly, in our judgement' (Wright, 1986, p.80). Thus, in spite of employing an advertising agency to handle its messaging, Labour elected to ignore some of its advice.

On this evidence of its tasks in opposition, again there is some suggestion that Labour's fightback as an effective party began under Foot's leadership. He was the first Labour Leader to appoint an advertising agency to handle professionally Labour's message in the media, and he created a professional post inside the party in order to advance Labour's publicity drive. He should have credit for that, but unfortunately it came far too late for

Labour's 1983 campaign. Labour also faced a Conservative Party that was very far advanced in terms of its ability to communicate its message in an already sympathetic media (Wring, 2005). But Labour's messaging was always going to face an uphill task in the election campaign, as what had gone before from around the time of Foot's elevation to the leadership in 1980 had sealed Labour's image for many voters.

Foot was not good in the media. His physical appearance came to symbolise his chaotic leadership style, and his oral contributions on television articulated a similar impression. In media interviews, Morgan claims that Foot 'tended to orate in unstructured fashion rather than give the brisk, concise comments that interview demanded' (Morgan, 2007, p.389). With those weaknesses in mind, the leader was not capable of articulating simple, core messages through the media, as advanced by the model. The party was also stymied by its internal battles over the previous few years, which had played out on television and in the printed press. Crick claims that the hotly disputed Deputy Leadership campaign in 1981 'received wider media publicity than the leadership battle of 1980' (Crick, 2016, p.195).

Healey also argues that the campaign for the Deputy Leader post was toxic in the media. Healey blamed Benn and the far-left groups that he attracted into the Labour Party: 'In my rally at Birmingham such groups were joined by a mass of IRA supporters who made it quite impossible for me to be heard. All these scenes were transmitted by television into ordinary homes throughout the country. They gave the Labour Party a reputation for extremism, violence, hatred and division' (Healey, 1989, p.483). Healey also suggests that 'the shameless ballot rigging by the trade unions were fully covered on press and television. They did the Labour Party enormous and lasting damage' (Healey, 1989, p.484). In that regard, in the media, Labour transmitted a terrible image of itself. It demonstrated that it had little or no organisational capability, it conveyed a dreadful brand image, and came nowhere near the point of being able to attract swing voters to the party through its media operation. Of Labour's many tasks in opposition, its media management was a catastrophe.

5.6 Skills

There is no plausible analysis that suggests Labour had 'modernised' by the time of the 1983 election; indeed, Seyd argues that Labour's failure to modernise and meet the aspirations of voters meant that the party was destined for 'decline and decay' (Seyd, 1993, p.70). However, contrary to Seyd's view, there is just about enough evidence to suggest

that the party had begun a process of modernisation along the lines set out in the model. By 1982, supported by the trade union general secretaries, the right of the party had started to take back control of Labour's direction. A register of groups within the party was formed, the purge against Militant began, and the left ceded control of the NEC to the right (Kogan and Kogan, 1982, p.3). That all came far too late to inform the policy platform for the 1983 election or show much real progress in terms of internal party reform, as advanced by the model, but it was certainly a start.

Labour's policy platform had not been modernised by the time of the election. If anything, its offer in 1983 was further away from the aspirations of the electorate than it had been in 1979. The dominance of the left and the weakness of the leader left Labour with commitments to leave the EC immediately, unilaterally disarm the nuclear deterrent, and nationalise the UK's top 50 private companies (Kavanagh and Dale, 2000). The model, as set out in Chapter 1, asks for the policy platform to be 'thematically linked to form a coherent vision'. On that front, Labour scored highly when analysed against the model – the platform was an undiluted leftist offer. The problem, however, was that it appealed strongly only to a small percentage of the electorate. Most were completely turned off from it. While appealing to some Labour Party members, the offer did not resonate with the wider electorate.

The model asks for parties of opposition to spell out a 'general direction of travel' through its policy platform and argues that should be achieved through an impressionism approach as opposed to a pointillism strategy on detail. It is not that Labour was too detailed in its policy offer or that it had not set out its values; the electorate were only too aware of where Labour stood on the key issues of the day (Shaw, 2002). Indeed, in some respects, the party followed the model to the letter in terms of effectively setting out its stall around its values and where it would take the country if elected to office. The problem was that what it offered in terms of values and direction of travel did not, in the words of the model, 'chime well with the electorate' (see 'Opposition-Craft' model in Chapter 1). Thus, whatever good work had been undertaken around its agenda was undermined by the voters' rejection of its offer.

Labour struggled, too, to find positive symbols of its intent that resonated with the electorate largely because its policy offer was not in tune with voters' aspirations. Voters were suspicious of Labour's defence and foreign policies (Scott, 2006), which were

symbolically underscored by Foot's attitude towards foreign visits. According to Morgan, 'he made virtually no formal visits abroad. The only exception was to the Soviet Union in September 1981' (Morgan, 2007, p.388). That symbolically communicated the idea that Foot was not interested in building relations with foreign governments, provided evidence for the charge that Labour was about 'socialism in one country' (Kelly, 2018), and showed that, if anything, Labour was prepared to cosy up to the UK's enemies in the USSR. It came as no surprise then that 'Foot never went to the United States, nor did he show any sign of wishing to' (Morgan, 2007, p.388). The optics, in other words, were all wrong.

On communicating its message through marketing operations, the opposition was a shambles. Labour was the very definition of Lees-Marshment's 'Product-Oriented' party – it argued for what it stood for and believed in with no attempt to compromise with the electorate, as rejected by the model of 'Opposition-Craft' (Lees-Marshment, 2002, p.696). O'Shaughnessy argues that the party poured endless amounts of energy into producing a left-wing policy offer with 'little or no thought [...] given to how these policies could be sold to the public' (O'Shaughnessy, 2002, p.50). On a similar theme, Nick Grant, Labour's Director of Publicity, claims that 'there had been no opinion research conducted by Labour since the previous general election in 1979. The first work by MORI for the coming election began in January, shortly after my arrival' (Grant, 1986, p.85). However, even when that polling work was undertaken, for example on unilateral nuclear disarmament, 'MORI repeatedly told Foot that this was deeply unpopular with the voters, but he ignored their advice' (Morgan, 2007, p.428). On marketing then, Labour rejected every principle outlined in the model.

The product Labour was trying to sell was deeply flawed, but it was undermined even further by the media coverage that Labour received. The party faced a deeply hostile press that was very pro-Conservative in outlook (Wring, 2005). Linton argues that the Conservative-supporting press were not in the business of exposing Tory faults: 'there was rarely any concerted attempt to draw blood' (Linton, 1986, p.157). He illustrates his point when he cites 'Margaret Thatcher's admission, for instance, that the real value of unemployment benefit would not be guaranteed under her manifesto' (Linton, 1986, p.157). Linton argues that admission went completely unchallenged by the press. On a more positive note, he suggests that 'the Conservatives' handling of the press conferences smacked of the resolute approach' (Linton, 1986, p.156) – in the sense that the Conservatives were skilled at managing the media.

Those skills were in contrast with the Labour campaign, which was not 'sticking to its own election planning and was unnecessarily changing its press conferences at short notice, which added to the aura of indecision' (Linton, 1986, p.156). The press also relentlessly attacked Foot, who, according to Morgan was 'mercilessly pilloried by right-wing journalists' and 'was depicted as a "sad old man in the wrong place at the wrong time"' (Morgan, 2007, p.432). It seemed that Labour had not caught up with modern electioneering strategies, which 'were no longer won at mass meetings, demos or protest marches, but in well-managed press conferences, and especially on the television screen' (Morgan, 2007, p.431). In the parameters set out in the model, Labour had a poor message to sell, but it went on to sell it really badly as well.

The model calls for oppositions to provide reassurance over their ability to govern. It also suggests that they should set out their credentials as the natural inheritor of government and form links with the governing party's hegemony over policy. Labour did the exact opposite by formulating a manifesto far removed from where the governing consensus lay on policy (Kavanagh and Dale, 2000). It explicitly rejected virtually everything the Conservative Party stood for in 1983, despite the evident popularity of much of the Conservative offer. To illustrate this point, Labour adopted a policy of unilateral disarmament. That policy was directly opposed to the Conservative stance on the issue and was in opposition, also, to popular opinion. Thus, when it came to reassurance, Morgan notes: 'Asked whether they felt Britain would not be properly defended under a Labour government, 53 per cent agreed, and only 32 per cent disagreed' (Morgan, 2007, p.432). The public were not reassured by Labour's offer on this issue and many others. Labour was certainly offering a vision of change, the problem was that the country was not attracted to it.

Neither could Labour reassure in terms of its leader. According to the model, the party needed to communicate an image of a leader ready to take on the mantle of the premiership; Foot, however, was ill-suited to those aspirations. According to Crines, 'Foot was a man of deep scholarship and learning which led to him acquiring respect with the Labour Party' (Crines, 2011, p.15). Indeed, Smith notes that 'Foot was a truly gifted orator, and a wise and learned man' (Smith, February 2020). Intellectually, there was no doubt that Foot was up to the job as Prime Minister; he was a highly intelligent man and was extremely well-read, but unfortunately, '[s]everal colleagues believed he did not have either the disposition or the political (or perhaps temperamental) equipment to be a

leader' (Morgan, 2007, p.383). The model observes that the role of Prime Minister requires candidates to be so much more than simply an intellect, and on virtually every other level Foot was found wanting. Contrary to Finlayson's notion of 'extraordinary ordinariness', Foot was neither 'extraordinary' nor 'ordinary' (Finlayson, 2002, p.590).

On a physical level, Foot simply did not look the part of a Prime Minister. According to Morgan, '[h]e often appeared in public looking unkempt and even shabby' (Morgan, 2007, p.388). Unfair as this may seem, his glasses and walking stick did not instil the impression of a man in his prime ready to take on the huge responsibilities as head of government, thus his image 'did not suggest the leader of a nation' (Morgan, 2007, p.389). His public image was the very antithesis of modernity as proposed by the model. His image was also in sharp contrast to that of Thatcher: 'When Labour lost the general election of 1983, a decisive factor cited by the voters in poll after poll was Michael Foot's qualities as a leader. Compared with the abrasive, authoritarian image of Thatcher, who was admired as a leader if not widely liked, he always ended up far behind' (Morgan, 2007, p.384). In that respect, Foot did not possess statesman-like appeal, or look like an alternative, credible Prime Minister.

Foot was certainly not seen as a centre-ground politician; indeed, he very much looked to be a creature of his party rather than a skilled front man who could stand above the fray, as suggested by the model (Crines, 2011). Coming from the left, Foot won the leadership, and having been in the public consciousness for many years having served as a cabinet minister in previous Labour administrations, his leftist image was sealed. But when working as leader, Foot appeared more of a ditherer, which led Lord Steel to claim that 'Labour was seen as weak under Foot' (Steel, February 2020). According to Kogan, Foot cut an 'ambiguous figure' (Kogan, 2019, p.36) in the sense that he did not seem to either support or take a stance against the march of the left in the early 1980s. He seemed more interested in keeping the party together than setting out his own vision. In that regard, he appeared as a man owned by his party and at the mercy of its internal warfare rather than a leader who could set the weather and lead from the front. None of that led voters to a place where they saw Labour or Foot as having governing credibility.

In the words of Gould, Labour's 1983 election campaign was 'a shambles' (Gould, 2011, p.43); in Morgan's view it was a 'total shambles' (Morgan, 2007, p.430). Both commentators criticize the campaign planning, which some sources conclude was 'largely

conspicuous by its absence' (Grant, 1986, p.82). Grant claims that Labour had undertaken no planning and preparation for the election when he took up his post as Director of Publicity in January 1983. By his reckoning the election was due to take place some 120 days later, with Labour thoroughly unprepared for the event. Grant points to further evidence of a culture inside Labour that harnessed the notion that all they had to do was point out governing deficiencies on the part of the Thatcher government and they would win power: 'Mechanical preparations, largely based on the "war-book" of previous procedure, went ahead as if all Labour had to do was attack the government's disastrous economic policy and voters would throw off their doubts about Labour and return us to power' (Grant, 1986, p.83). That mentality is rejected by the model of 'Opposition-Craft' as it implies that oppositions are not the agents of their own success and it certainly did not work for Labour in 1983.

Much of Labour's ill-preparedness in 1983 stemmed from its internal battles over the preceding years. Morgan suggests that 'morale and organization in the constituencies were in much disarray after the troubles associated with Benn, Militant and the hard left' (Morgan, 2007, p.425). The hangover of those battles was not just felt in the constituencies, it was evident that much of the content of the manifesto was derived from those internal squabbles (Shaw, 2000). Grant argues that Labour went into the election with a front-bench team unable and unprepared to defend the policy offer: 'the vital missing ingredient was the wholehearted consent of all those involved. Without this Labour lacked the necessary determination to win – and without that determination, the organisational discipline which is essential to any election campaign never materialised' (Grant, 1986, p.82). In that regard, Labour presented itself as a party that was disorganised and unable to offer a clear vision of a future Labour government. That hardly smacked of the organisational ability of a party ready for power, as suggested by the model.

Labour also lacked organisational ability to take advantage of the first-past-the-post electoral system (FPTP). Foot took to campaigning in non-marginal seats – particularly safe Conservative ones where the Labour candidate stood no chance of winning – and consequently demonstrated that Labour had no target-seat strategy (Butler and Kavanagh, 1980). Morgan points to a day in the Banbury constituency, which 'was not a marginal, but had a safe Conservative majority, and there was no point in Foot wasting his time by going there at all' (Morgan, 2007, p.430). However, he did go there in order to support the local candidate, but his presence in Banbury only added to the sense that the Labour campaign

was in chaos. Labour was fortunate, however, to have fought that election under the FPTP system. Despite polling only 2.3% more than the SDP/Liberal Alliance, Labour attained 209 seats to the Alliance's 26, slightly more than nine times the volume of its competitor in opposition (Butler and Kavanagh, 1980). But 209 seats was Labour's worst showing in 50 years and was achieved, in part, by failing to organise a target-seat strategy. Labour could have won more seats, even on its derisory share of the vote, but it failed in that respect and left the party in a pitiful position for the subsequent parliament.

The lack of campaigning organisation was, for Wring (2002), another example of Foot's lack of leadership skill. Foot was never an effective decision-taker in the manner promoted by the model. Wring explains that 'his relatively low-key organisational role made effective decision-making difficult. The problem was exacerbated by the lack of a core group of leader aides and party officials able to execute committee decisions and liaise with outside advisers. The resulting campaign was thus paralysed before it started' (Wring, 2002, p.29). Those who worked closely with Foot report that he was incapable of influencing others by taking clear decisions and that he would often simply facilitate warring factions inside the party without being clear about what he wanted. Mitchell claims that he would 'let shadow cabinet meetings ramble on with no lead' and gave 'no positive impetus.' (Mitchell, 1983, p.95). Healey agrees: 'He was a natural rebel, and found leadership uncongenial; moreover, though a brilliant orator, he had no administrative or executive ability' (Healey, 1989, p.481).

Providing the best example of Foot's problematic relationship with decision-taking were the machinations over the Bermondsey by-election in 1982 (Robinson, 2007). The local constituency had selected Peter Tatchell as Labour's candidate. Tatchell was from the hard left of the party and a prominent gay-rights campaigner. Recognising that Tatchell was ill-suited to fight the by-election for Labour, Foot wanted him to stand aside in favour of a more mainstream candidate. However, Foot's view was not universally supported by all of Labour's governing bodies. Foot was faced with a choice: 1) he could have taken his decision to the NEC and risk not being backed, or 2) he could have chosen to back down, which risked public humiliation. He opted for the latter, which to the public made him look weak (Mitchell, 1983, p.97). According to Gould, that decision 'turned a safe seat into a 9,000 majority for the Liberals' (Gould, 2011, p.35). Such was the chaotic state of the party at the time, most assumed that Tatchell was the candidate supported by the leadership in Bermondsey largely because he appeared to embody the leftist credentials of Foot's party.

It says something about Foot's management that he actually wanted rid of Tatchell from the off but failed to achieve that end – it was also disastrous in terms of setting out a 'positive direction of travel through their explicit decision taking' as promoted by the model.

Michael Crick (2016) takes a slightly more positive angle on Foot's decision-making qualities. He describes Foot as quite decisive over Militant once he had made his mind up on the issue: 'Until then he had helped to prevent any action against Militant, but afterwards he was to the fore in initiating it'. According to Crick, the issue of Militant created a 'new Michael Foot' in the sense that he was prepared to take a 'tough stand' (Crick, 2016, p.200). On that front, there was at least the beginnings of a positive message to sell to the electorate on internal party reform, as advocated by the model. However, the electorate had a very acute sense that Foot was indecisive, and any sense of party reform was very much in its infancy under his leadership.

In terms of the appointments he made and his ability to wield the knife when it came to removing underperforming shadow ministers, Foot's record can be viewed in a number of different lights. His shadow cabinet was remarkably stable given the internal machinations of the Labour Party of the time. Of the 26 positions, 21 were held by the same personnel throughout Foot's leadership. Indeed, the only resignation he received was that of Bill Rodgers on formation of the SDP (Bochel and Denver, 1984). Two members of the shadow cabinet died in office, and the only other replacements came as a result of elections to the shadow cabinet. In some regards, Foot benefitted from the stability of his shadow cabinet, especially as it was packed with big beasts from the last Labour government. On the other hand, the fact that he did not remove colleagues from office showed that perhaps he shied away from such confrontational settings. The model suggests that a leader's ability to make appointments and remove others from office is a key test of a leader seeking to be Prime Minister; Foot simply did not demonstrate those skills in office. Indeed, his shadow cabinet looked like something from a past Labour administration, so possibly could have done with refreshing.

The model points to the need for an opposition leader to present themselves as having the emotional stability and intelligence to cope with the demands of the job of Prime Minister (Greenstein, 2009). There is nothing significant in terms of concrete evidence in the literature that points to Foot as a man lacking in emotional stability. However, there is

plenty of evidence to suggest that the press wished to present Foot as an oddball and, thus, suggest that he was temperamentally ill-suited to the top job in politics. The imagery and headline presented in Figure 28 below illustrates the point.

Figure 28: Media coverage of Michael Foot



In that regard, it would not be in the least bit surprising if the electorate viewed Foot as lacking in emotional stability, but it is hard to point to evidence of where that was the case. There is, however, evidence that his decision-making caused some colleagues to have concerns about his suitability. For example, Mitchell claims that Foot's response to the Bermondsey by-election showed that Foot gave 'a weak man's response to a bad situation' (Mitchell, 1983, p.97). That evidence, coupled with his facilitative style, and his animosity towards the concept of leadership, is suggestive of a leader ill-suited to the role of Prime Minister, but perhaps not enough to suggest that he was emotionally deficient for the task.

5.7 Conclusion

It is the contention of this thesis that Labour suffered its 'worst election defeat, in terms of its share of the popular vote since 1918' (Jones, 1996, p. 112) largely because of the context of its own internal affairs in the early 1980s. True, the party was damaged by its leader and policy offer, but they both arose as a result of Labour's internal warfare. In that regard, all roads led back to the impossible position that the party found itself in under Foot's leadership. The seeds of that chaotic position were sown many years before, but the destruction of the party happened under his watch. Labour certainly had agency in its self-immolation, it is just that its slow-moving descent into chaos began in 1970, but it was not until 1983 that the party paid the full price for it. Labour could have taken advantage of problematic economic circumstances and a comparatively unpopular Prime Minister, but it was unfit to govern and played the hand it was dealt appallingly.

Foot was not the right person to lead the Labour Party and neither was he a potential Prime Minister in the mould described by the model; in blunt terms, '[h]e did not look or sound like a credible leader' (Morgan, 2015, p.232). His decision-making, image, organisation, and political positioning score very badly when assessed against the model; they mark Foot out as a poor leader when compared with other more successful Leaders of the Opposition. However, Foot's accomplishments are not sufficiently acknowledged. To that end, others have stepped in to defend his record. According to Kinnock: "'Nobody, in the circumstances, could have done better than Michael did'" (as quoted in Thomas-Symonds, 2005, p.27), and even his opponent Lord Steel acknowledged that he was 'very honest and straightforward' (Steel, February 2020). Given the state of Labour in 1980, Foot's accomplishments are moderately impressive: he created the register of legitimate groups inside the party, began the purge on Militant, reclaimed control of the NEC from the hard left, introduced Labour's first professional foray into marketing, and oversaw the decline of the hard left. None of that paid political dividends until many years after he left office, but they were enough to lead Mervyn Jones to comment that: 'the truth about Michael Foot's place in history is that he was the man who saved the Labour Party' (as quoted in Thomas-Symonds, 2005, p.27). This thesis does not share that full-throated endorsement of Foot, but certainly more credit should be given over to his achievements.

Contrary to the centre-ground position advocated by the model, O'Shaughnessy claims that 'Labour entered the election campaign with possibly the most left-wing manifesto in the party's history' (O'Shaughnessy, 2002, p.49), which was in stark contrast with the Conservative programme, described by Morgan as 'undeniably popular' (Morgan, 2015, p.235). Voters had a very stark choice around policy in 1983, and they chose the Conservatives. Labour failed to test its policy offer with voters as it was 'deeply suspicious of opinion research' (Grant, 1986, p.85). The model utterly rejects that mentality as an effective electioneering strategy. The best that can be said of Labour's policy platform in 1983 is that it learnt from its mistakes (Scott, 2006, p.692). Labour went into the election with the most radically left-wing manifesto of any post-war opposition. It was about as far away from the centre ground of UK politics as any opposition dared to position themselves in the post-war era; the result was an unmitigated fiasco.

Such was the scale of its 1983 defeat that Seyd concludes 'the Labour Party faced the electoral abyss' (Seyd, 1993, p.71). However, the very fact of its devastating defeat ushered in a new mentality inside the party and, according to Morgan, 'a new mood for

unity and electoral recovery followed' (Morgan, 2007, p.384). This theme is also picked up by Grant: 'Paradoxically, the defeat of 1983 seems to have been so profound as to consolidate the party in a new determination to fight back' (Grant, 1986, p.83). On all the key measurements in the model: leadership, policy, communication etc., Labour failed completely, but was to do far better at subsequent general elections on the grounds that it recognised many of its faults. Had the debacle of 1983 not happened, it is not certain that Labour would have renewed in the manner that it did. Whatever the future positives for Labour following its 1983 defeat, it is an inescapable fact that Labour, under Foot from 1980-83, is to be considered a total failure of opposition politics when assessed against the model of 'Opposition-Craft' framework for analysis.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

At the outset of this thesis, the question was posed: what factors shape a political party's ability to get back into government after a spell in opposition? In answering that question across this project, we have noted both the internal factors, which are largely in the control of a political party in opposition, and the more external factors, such as the context and political environment in which the opposition exists, which are largely out of the control of the party. In the confines of this thesis we have discussed four factors in the make-up of 'Opposition-Craft': 'context', 'strategy', 'tasks' and 'skills'. The context is the only one of those factors which could be considered external, as the research has shown that, as a variable that sits inside the concept of 'Opposition-Craft', it is largely out of the control of a party of opposition. The other three factors, however – the skills, tasks and strategy – all sit within the ambit of an opposition party and therefore should be considered internal factors.

We have suggested that the context in which a party of official opposition conducts its affairs is perhaps the most important factor in determining its ability to win a general election. However, we have also noted that, on its own, the context is not enough to supplant a sitting government – the opposition has to prove its worth to the electorate by honing its abilities across internal factors such as the skills, tasks and strategy it deploys, if it is to win. In that respect, this thesis has comprehensively debunked political folklore which suggests that 'oppositions don't win elections, governments lose them'. What 'Opposition-Craft' has shown is that governments can lose elections when oppositions can prove they deserve to win. In that regard, we can also conclude that UK politics is ultimately a comparative exercise for voters; parties are assessed across a range of attributes, as outlined in this project, and voters make a choice against those competing qualities. 'Opposition-Craft' has also shown that governing parties have an inbuilt advantage in that comparative exercise, which is especially electorally potent for governing parties in their early years in office. An opposition can become more attractive the longer its opponent has been in government, but it must still earn the right to win, no matter how dysfunctional the governing party might prove to be.

So, why are governing parties at an advantage when it comes to general elections? The 'Opposition-Craft' model has put forward a series of factors that need to be in positive territory for the opposition to win, as effectively it has to show that it would be a more

credible government than the incumbent. That task is difficult. This research has shown that key aspects of governing credibility that an opposition must demonstrate are having a leader who looks and sounds prime ministerial coupled with a policy offer that is credible and popular. On those criteria alone, a party of government is at an advantage. Firstly, a leader installed in Number 10 already looks prime ministerial no matter how ill-equipped they might be at fulfilling the role; the same is not true of aspirant Leaders of the Opposition who must work much harder to achieve the same level of credibility. Secondly, the governing party's policy platform will appear mainstream and in the centre ground by virtue of the fact that it appeared in a winning manifesto at a previous election and has been either fully or partially implemented by the time of the next election, whereas an opposition has a set of policies largely untested. In short, it is much easier to win from office than from opposition.

The preceding four chapters have shown that, to achieve total success at the ballot box from opposition, the party should be ahead in all four factors outlined in the model. The Blair period of 1994-97 is perhaps the best example of when an official opposition has demonstrated its suitability for office across all the factors; indeed, it is perhaps the only example in the period where the opposition has been so comprehensively effective in framing the arguments that it has also had a hand in shaping the 'context' in which it operated. Both Kinnock, 1987-92, and Cameron, 2005-10, showed that the 'context' in which they did their business was positive, but they did not do enough on the internal factors to drive home fully their advantage; the difference between those two periods was Cameron's appeal in 2010 as a potential Prime Minister when compared against Brown, whereas Kinnock in 1992 was never able to convince the electorate that he could head the government in the way that Major could. Foot, in the years 1980-83, lacked in all areas against the model despite having some elements of the 'context' to his advantage.

Thus, the model of 'Opposition-Craft' has provided us with a structure by which to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of various official oppositions. We have applied that framework to four periods of opposition in order to exemplify a spread of electoral performance and relative success when mapped against the framework, but it could equally have been tested against other eras. If it had been set against other passages of opposition then the same themes would have emerged: the necessity for a conducive environment in which to operate, the need for a strong leader with prime-ministerial credentials, and a policy platform which appeals and reassures in equal measure.

As noted in Figure 29 below, in the post-war, there have been twenty-four major and distinct passages of opposition. It is not possible to ascribe one of the evaluative judgements from the model of ‘Opposition-Craft’ to each era, as some ended in the death of the Leader of the Opposition (Gaitskell and Smith), and some did not reach a general election (for example, Duncan-Smith), but it is the inescapable conclusion of this analysis that Labour, having been in opposition for many more years than the Conservatives, and notching up many ‘unsuccessful’/’total failure’ periods of opposition, are simply not very good at being in opposition, whereas the Conservatives are far more successful at regaining power.

Figure 29: Major passages of opposition

Passage of Opposition	N/A	Total Failure	Unsuccessful	Partially Successful	Successful	Party
Churchill, 1945-50				✓		Conservative
Churchill, 1950-51					✓	Conservative
Attlee, 1951-55			✓			Labour
Gaitskell, 1955-59		✓				Labour
Gaitskell, 1959-63	✓					Labour
Wilson, 1963-64					✓	Labour
Home, 1964-65	✓					Conservative
Heath, 1965-66		✓				Conservative
Heath, 1966-70					✓	Conservative
Wilson, 1970-74				✓		Labour
Heath, 1974-75	✓					Conservative
Thatcher, 1975-79					✓	Conservative
Callaghan, 1979-80	✓					Labour
Foot, 1980-83		✓				Labour

Kinnock, 1983-87			✓			Labour
Kinnock, 1987-92			✓			Labour
Smith, 1992-94	✓					Labour
Blair, 1994-97					✓	Labour
Hague, 1997-2001		✓				Conservative
Duncan- Smith, 2001-03	✓					Conservative
Howard, 2003-05			✓			Conservative
Cameron, 2005-10				✓		Conservative
Miliband, 2010-15		✓				Labour
Corbyn, 2015-20	✓					Labour

Note: This table omits very short periods of opposition like, for example, Major in 1997, or Beckett in 1994, which should only be considered 'interim' in nature. It also does not form a judgement for Corbyn (2015-20) on the grounds that this thesis relates to the period up 2016; the two elections Corbyn fought were in 2017 and 2019 and therefore sit outside the remit of this project.

So, why has the Conservative Party been so good at opposition and the Labour Party so bad? Rosen observes that '[t]he Labour Party has spent far more of its history in opposition than in government. Unkind observers might suggest, given it has had so much practice, that it ought to be quite good at it. But Labour has spent so much time in opposition simply because it has not got better at it' (Rosen, 2011, p.155). For Kogan, Labour's 'record of failure' should 'raise the fundamental question of why continue to fight a losing battle?' And, thus, Kogan questions whether Labour is 'a party of protest – designed to be only a voice of opposition, commenting on flaws and falsities of Conservative policy – or a party of power?' (Kogan, 2019, p.x).

There are various theories as to why Labour have so often lost general elections. Kogan argues that Labour's problem has been due to intra-party warfare around the schism between its coalition on the left and right flank, or as he describes it: 'a *Game of Thrones*, with kingdoms constantly fighting it out for different moments of supremacy, to greater cost of the throne' (Kogan, 2019, p.xi). The incongruence of its warring factions is, perhaps, exacerbated further by the tribal loyalty that the party inspires amongst its membership.

Even in its darkest days under Foot's leadership, Blair's arch-moderniser, Philip Gould, claims: 'never for a moment did I consider leaving Labour and deserting to the SDP. In part this was emotional, all my roots, all my instincts belonged to Labour' (Gould, 2011, p.35). By sticking together under extreme tensions, Labour has often appeared to be a party ill-at-ease with itself, which has never been better exemplified than most recently under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn.

Labour's ability to lose is, for others, about external factors beyond its control. Writing in 1986, Linton argued that: 'The conventional wisdom has been that the Labour Party can win elections against a hostile press, so press hostility does not matter. The alternative view is that the Labour Party has only won two elections with a parliamentary majority in double figures, 1945 and 1966, and on neither occasion was it fighting against an overwhelmingly hostile press, so the truth may be that press hostility does in fact matter' (Linton, 1986, p.158). Linton's sentiment is probably true, also, of Labour's electoral victories under Blair in a later era; he won with the support of much of the press. There is no doubt that many inside the Labour Party feel that the odds are stacked against them as a result of a hostile media, but it is also true to note that evidence exists to suggest that Labour is able to get the media onside, but only when it has an effective strategy in place.

Others have concluded that the party's failure to win elections is rooted in its unease around the concept of 'leadership'. Morgan claims that the 'Labour Party has always had problems with the idea of leadership. It used to think of itself as a socialist party, a body which exalts collectivity and the general will and plays down the role of individuals' (Morgan, 2007, p.382). Under the Corbyn project since 2015, that same mentality around leadership has been evident, or as John McDonnell notes: 'Let's be clear, we don't believe in leaders...we believe leaders should be following the masses' (McDonnell as quoted in Kogan, 2019, p.211). McDonnell's long-time acolyte on the left of the party, Jon Lansman, has claimed: 'I don't want Labour leaders to run the party. I want the NEC on behalf of the membership and the affiliates to run the party' (Lansman, in Kogan, 2019, p.329). In that respect, for much of its history Labour has not liked its leaders to act in an overtly 'leader-like' style, which is in direct contradiction with the principles around leadership, which the model promotes, and is a key reason why it so often loses.

Mitchell claims that Labour's leaders have been another beneficiary of the party's instincts around tribal loyalty. He argues that, on the issue of leadership, Labour has 'a collective

propensity to wishful thinking' (Mitchell, 1983, p.101). In other words, while members are prepared to moan about their leaders, the party is not prepared to remove them because they are instinctively loyal to leaders (failing or otherwise), and always think that the situation will somehow improve. Asked whether Labour have held on to failing leaders for too long, Lord Blunkett suggests that opinion was 'undoubtedly true'. Indeed, he goes further and argues that: 'We hang onto leaders until they virtually drop dead in the street', a prevailing mentality that he puts down to Labour's instincts around 'Comradeship' and the fact that, in the Labour Party, 'You don't attack your own' (Blunkett, March 2020).

In the post-war era, Labour have never forced the resignation of their leader while in opposition, even when it has been obvious that their leader was failing. When in government, however, its attitude towards its leaders has been different. Rosen argues that Labour has never been comfortable in government because it 'retains a cultural predisposition to fear of "betrayal" in government by its leadership' (Rosen, 2011, p.171). There has always been a sense that some inside the party are uncomfortable with governing because to govern inevitably leads to compromise, which in turn strips away the ideological purity that so many of Labour's members appear to value (Shaw, 1994). In the post-war period, the only time Labour have forced the resignation of its leader was Blair, the most electorally successful leader in the party's history; that in itself says something about the party's attitude towards power (The Guardian Website, 7th September, 2006). For Andrew Rawnsley, Labour's problems around winning elections is deep-rooted: 'Many on the British left have an eccentrically self-destructive relationship with the concept of success [...] throughout its history, Labour has had this perverse compulsion to revere its failures and recriminate against its winners' (Rawnsley, in the Guardian Website, February 23rd, 2020).

It is the contention of this thesis that the most influential internal factor in determining the fate of an opposition, as detailed in the model of 'Opposition-Craft', is leadership. In that regard, a party of opposition hoping to win power will act decisively and remove their leader if they are perceived to be failing. Figure 30 below demonstrates some of the key factors and conditions under which a party leader might resign or be forced out. The table draws on the work of Bale (2016, p.315) around drivers of Conservative Party change, which attaches values to the condition of the party, and which could explain its subsequent incentive to change. In that same spirit, Figure 30 assigns a value from -10 through to +10 for an act around leadership that will improve the electoral chances of the party. For

example, a party willing to force the resignation of a leader that they thought would lose the next election like, for example, Iain Duncan-Smith in 2003 or Theresa May in 2019, would score most highly at +10. At the opposite end of the scale, there is a -10 score for a leader who has lost an election but who has refused to resign and been allowed by the party to continue in post. There are scores of lesser values (+5 and -5) for acts which might lead to the same end but under different circumstances – for example, a party leader resigns but only after they lost an election. Essentially, the table credits actions around leadership which might advantage the party at the next election. While those values may seem arbitrary, they are drawn from the research presented in this thesis in the sense that the leader is either a key positive or a key negative in the success or otherwise of an opposition.

In applying those criteria to leaders and parties in the post-war era, the residual scores noted at the bottom of the table clearly shows that the Conservatives (+55) are much more willing to remove failing leaders than Labour (-30). The Conservative Party's mentality around leadership directly corresponds to their electoral success and is one of the many reasons why they are generally good at being in opposition and getting back into government. Conversely, Labour are more loyal to their leaders, but they suffer electorally as a result. The model of 'Opposition-Craft' endorses the idea that parties in opposition should act decisively against their leader and remove them should they prove to be an electoral liability.

Figure 30: Labour's difficulties around leadership up to 2017

	Lost an election and did not resign	Lost an election, and therefore resigned	Forced out for other reasons	Resigned of their own freewill	Thought would lose an election, so forced out	At some point was prime minister
Score	-10	-5	-5	+5	+10	+10
Labour Leaders						
Attlee	XX			X		X
Gaitskell*	X					
Wilson	X			X		X
Callaghan	X			X		X
Foot		X				
Kinnock	X	X				
Smith*						
Blair			X			X
Brown		X				X
Miliband		X				
Corbyn	X					
Total	-70	-20	-5	+15		+50
Conservative Leaders						
Churchill	X			X		X
Eden			X			X
MacMillan				X		X
Home		X				X
Heath	XXX		X			X
Thatcher			X		X	X
Major		X				X
Hague		X				
Duncan-Smith					X	
Howard		X				
Cameron				X		X
May			X		X	X
Score	-40	-20	-20	+15	+30	+90

Note: *died in office as Leader of the Opposition

Party	Residual Score
Labour	-30
Conservatives	+55

In that regard, set against the backdrop of the model, Labour are poor at opposition for a number of reasons: they are often to be found split and fighting amongst themselves, and they are too willing to accept failing leaders; in essence, their tribal loyalty binds them into an uncomfortable embrace, which is electorally unappealing. Lord Blunkett has suggested that Labour's problems in opposition are more complex: 'Labour has always fought the election before last [...] rather than fundamentally looking at where the electorate are now and where they will be in five years' time' (Blunkett, March 2020). Cognisant of the unique difficulties faced by the Labour Party in opposition, it was ironically Margaret Thatcher who noted: 'Being Leader of the Opposition, as I well-remembered, is not an easy assignment. Leading the Labour Party in opposition must be a nightmare' (Thatcher, 1993, p.360).

Labour has too often been drawn to the idea that, in opposition, all it must do is wait for the mistakes of a Conservative administration to mount before the electorate will turn to them as the governing alternative. Pierre Mendes-France, the former Prime Minister of France, declared that 'To govern is to choose' (as quoted in Tiersky, 2003, p.85); thus, governments alienate voters by the decisions they make. Labour's hope, too often, has been to just wait for the unpopularity of a Conservative administration to rise and for the pendulum of popularity to swing back to them in opposition. Of Labour, Rosen argues: 'They assume that the electorate's prospective disenchantment with a Conservative government will simply swing the electoral pendulum and propel Labour back into government' (Rosen, 2011, p.158). In the post-war era, Labour have tested that theory to destruction in 1955, 1959, 1983, 1987, 1992, 2015, 2017, and 2019; so it is surprising that so many in the party seem to believe still that they have no agency in their electoral success from opposition.

The 'Opposition-Craft' model has argued strongly that there is a set of contextual circumstances that must be met if an opposition is to have any chance of victory. But that in itself is not enough – a point drawn on by Heppell and Hill, who argue that 'just because a government is vulnerable to the charge of incompetence, does not mean that the opposition is going to be automatically swept into power. The party of opposition has to demonstrate that it is credible and worthy of replacing the incumbent administration' (Heppell and Hill, 2015, p.209). In reality, official oppositions will win if governments alienate voters and oppositions can show that they can be trusted to govern. If both those

variables are in play at the same time, then it is highly likely that a party of opposition will win a general election. Labour have just been very bad at understanding that it needs both principles to be active at the same time if it wishes to win elections from opposition.

Labour has also failed to appreciate that politics, for many voters, is a comparative exercise. Voters will compare one policy offer with another, and one leader with another. The job of opposition is to have policies which are more popular and mainstream than those of the government, and to have a leader who looks like a more effective prime minister than the incumbent. It is not enough that a governing party might have an unpopular leader/Prime Minister; if the Leader of the Opposition is less popular then they will not win. This was best exemplified at the most recent 2019 general election when, going into that election, Boris Johnson had a net satisfaction rating of -11%, but by contrast Jeremy Corbyn's was at -50% (YouGov, (b)). Both leaders were unpopular, but Corbyn was more unpopular than Johnson. The result was that the Conservative administration was returned to power for a fourth term of office.

Across all elections in the post-war era, the electorate has been consistent in some of its core values. It appears to like overt and strong leadership, centre-ground politics, strong valence-style management on policy, sound management of the economy, and patriotism. Many of those themes are to be found embedded into this model of analysis, 'Opposition-Craft', on the grounds that voters will take a comparative perspective on where the two main parties sit on those core issues. Too often, Labour has elected a poor leader who has not been seen as prime ministerial or patriotic, and presented a portfolio that is too left-wing, which consequently looks like it would damage the economy. Thus, voters have rejected it time and again. However, in the three elections between 1997 and 2005, Labour successfully managed to do the exact opposite of its normal *modus operandi* and voters flocked to them. The Conservatives, on the other hand, have a brand-image synonymous with many of those core factors that sit at the heart of the model, which is why they have so often won general elections in the UK. According to D'Ancona: 'The deepest Conservative instinct is to cling on to power, and the only force that can break its grip is Labour' (D'Ancona, 8th July, 2019, The Guardian website).

This thesis started with an observation of Bulpitt's paper on Statecraft (1986), which referred to the art of governing and the governing party's ability to sustain itself in power by concentrating on core big-picture themes, such as having a popular policy platform and

a reputation for good management. This project has simply taken the key themes of Bulpitt's work, applied them to opposition, and augmented them with other key aspects of good politics like, for example, furnishing the opposition with a leader who looks and sounds like a Prime Minister. While the model of 'Opposition-Craft' has many micro-level evaluation schedules, it essentially asks that an opposition have some sound structural pillars in place: they must have a fertile environment in which to operate, they must have a credible leader, and they should promote a thematically linked policy platform, which is believable, reassuring, and popular. Without those structural pillars, all the finer details of the model (such as having an effective media strategy) will be largely irrelevant.

Commenting on New Labour's famed communication skills in opposition, Lord Blunkett notes: 'The communication is only as good as the underlying sense of direction that you're providing. You can do one without the other but if you've got the two together then you've got a winning combination' (Blunkett, March 2020). Thus, in the opinion of a key figure from the New Labour era, on some of the finer details of the 'Opposition-Craft' model, such as the communication strategy, it is necessary for an opposition to have key structural elements in place before any of the more granular details will work.

What is certainly evident in this analysis of opposition politics is that all the key elements of the framework should be bent and flexed according to the time period to which they relate. For example, in the 1950s and 1960s, politicians had to become used to the television age, and voters' perceptions of their political masters were mediated by the TV in living rooms across the country (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999); today that challenge has shifted to the largely unmediated world of social media. The kind of leader and type of communication strategy required today is very different from that of fifty years ago. Parties need leaders who not only look good on TV, but who are also be able to communicate directly with millions of voters over *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *Instagram* (Gibson, 2015). The challenge for oppositions is that they need to work with those changes and adapt their strategy accordingly. It is therefore the contention of this thesis that the 'Opposition-Craft' principles are constant, but the detail underneath its core message should be adaptable to the environment in which it is applied.

Where the model of 'Opposition-Craft' becomes more tested is around even more fundamental shifts in how our politics works. At the outset of this project, it was stated that the model applied mainly to a two-party system where there is one party in government and one party acting as the official opposition. Since 1945, the UK has had a

two-party system operating where the Conservatives and Labour have alternated in government and in opposition. But in recent years that system has begun to be eroded; for example, since 2010, we have had two periods in which the UK parliament has been hung, resulting in either coalition, or minority government. We have also seen the rise (and in some cases fall) of smaller parties that have challenged the settled two-party system and, in that regard, it is quite possible that more than two parties will vie for power (Heath and Goodwin, 2017). In a multi-party system, it is questionable whether the principles of the model could so easily be applied. The same would be true should the UK chose to replace its first-past-the-post (FPTP) voting system. FPTP exaggerates the winning margin of the victor and benefits the two major parties in Westminster (Blais, 2008); if that voting system were to be abandoned, would the model of 'Opposition-Craft' be so applicable to parties of opposition?

There are also existential questions circling around British politics in the post-Brexit landscape that might also affect how the model is interpreted. How will leaving the EU impact on the two-party system? Have the traditional left/right dividing lines been redrawn following Brexit? And then there is the question of the UK as a continued union, with both Northern Ireland and Scotland at risk of leaving the United Kingdom following Brexit. How will that geopolitical tension strain the way in which we are governed (McCorkindale, 2016)? Indeed, since the financial crash of 2008, the political certainties of the post-war period have come under increasing pressure. Collins argues that the period was marked by the promise that each generation would be better off than the last, but since the crash that has not been true. Collins notes the 'twin virtues of British democratic politics [...] it grants power to the people and it provides them, fairly, with benefits' (Collins, 2018, p.4). Essentially, he argues that, since the crash, falling wages coupled with high property prices have meant that people are not getting the benefits out of society that previous generations have enjoyed. Thus, it is his contention that we are now living in different times with a different political settlement, which has resulted in political upheaval like Brexit and the rise of populist leaders across the globe (Gusterson, 2017).

Inevitably, the coming years will establish whether a new political settlement has emerged, in which case there might be basis for further study around the model and its applicability to a new era. However, there are elements of the model which appear immutable: the requirement for the governing party to have departed the mainstream centre, the need for a leader who looks and sounds like a Prime Minister, and for a policy platform which is

coherent, believable and popular. There is nothing in the new political landscape which has altered those facts of electioneering. Drawing on those thoughts, it is the contention of this thesis that oppositions have agency in their own fortune and that, should they operate in the manner set out in this model, they have every chance of electoral success. In that respect, if Bulpitt's theory on statecraft is the art of successful government, then 'Opposition-Craft' is the art of successful opposition.

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