

Co-operation or competition: incentives and obstacles to co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats

Craig Johnson

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School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University

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Abstract

While a party system reflects both competitive and co-operative interactions, academic research has largely focused on the competitive interactions of parties. In British politics, while the notion of a solely two-party system is increasingly contested, there has not been sufficient consideration given to party co-operation. However, the party system has changed to the extent that it no longer accurately reflects two-partism, but something more resembling moderate pluralism. This suggests implications for how parties interact. In particular, it suggests that parties might need to contemplate co-operation alongside competition. Alongside this contemporary debate, there has long been a compelling case for studying the manner of interaction between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, who have a lengthy and complicated history of competition and co-operation. This thesis explores these issues, and questions the contemporary nature of competition and potential for co-operation between the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. It proposes a theoretical framework of party co-operation to help understand why Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation may or may not take place. In doing so, it suggests a series of incentives and obstacles that need to be considered by party leaderships based on electoral, ideological and organisational considerations. The thesis then operationalises the framework by examining in detail the contemporary case of the British Labour Party and British Liberal Democrats. While there are incentives for the two parties to consider co-operation, and these incentives have increased in recent years, significant obstacles remain, and despite the changing party system, the potential for co-operation between the two parties remains limited without changes in each party's strategy.

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Summary

This thesis analyses the potential for co-operation between the British Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. Following the context of why co-operation is a pressing question to be understood in British politics through an examination of the party system, it provides a theoretical framework of co-operation that draws from both rational choice and institutional considerations, permitting an in-depth study of each party's organisation and their effect on co-operation. It then analyses the incentives and obstacles to co-operation between the two parties using a wealth of primary and secondary quantitative and qualitative data. Finally, this is brought together to highlight the challenges that political parties face in a changing system, and the opportunities and problems that co-operation provides in response. The findings raise a number of concerns about each political party in the case study, and the potential for co-operation between the two.

The main findings of the thesis are:

- That a more nuanced and flexible theory of co-operation between political parties is necessary to understand how and why parties interact in the way they do. Frameworks of co-operation need to go beyond coalitions and other individual forms of co-operation. Applying a framework of co-operation to the British Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, both parties have many incentives as to why they *should* co-operate.
- The two parties have long been closer in terms of ideology and policy than either party is with the Conservatives. Had the 2015 general election brought about a hung parliament, there was little in the way of ideology and policy that would have prevented a full coalition. However, this was not the case at the 2017 general election. Each party is influenced by different ideological histories and identities, which might limit the potential for co-operation in the future.
- A key consideration for both parties is their electoral position. While Labour gained votes and seats in the 2017 general election, they largely returned to their 2010 position. The Liberal Democrats remain fundamentally weak. Their electoral positions have been exacerbated by competition between the two since 2010. Labour-minded supporters switched from the Liberal Democrats back to Labour between 2010 and 2017, but this served primarily to help the Conservatives.

- However, co-operation is not a panacea to solve each party's problems. Co-operation between the two parties might yield some electoral reward, but the reward is likely to be small, and could cost each party more votes and seats as their current and potential supporters choose to go elsewhere.
- Both parties also need to take into account their organisations. Analysis of each party's organisational structure shows that the Liberal Democrats' grassroots have more influence over party matters than Labour's. This holds for matters relating to co-operation: Liberal Democrat members and activists currently have more influence over coalition negotiations and other forms of co-operation than Labour. Neither party's grassroots appear especially keen on co-operation with each other but Liberal Democrat activists are more positive than Labour's.
- Neither party's recent leaderships have helped the potential for co-operation between the two parties. Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband only saw the benefits of potential co-operation with the Liberal Democrats when it was too late to do anything about it, and Clegg was more open to co-operation with the Conservatives than any previous leader in the party's recent history. Corbyn and Farron's leaderships took the parties even further apart.
- Politics remains primarily competitive between the two parties, and neither party seems willing to co-operate unless it provides means to other competitive ends, such as winning office. Should a general election provide a hung parliament and suitable numbers for coalition or parliamentary agreement, then there is potential for co-operation. However, formal pacts or significant cross-party working appears less likely.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2010, the first national coalition in the post-war period was formed in Britain. It was the result of a series of changes in how parties interact. As Webb (2000: 1) argues, a party system is ‘a particular pattern of competitive and co-operative interactions displayed by a given set of political parties’. However, academic research of British politics has largely focused solely on the competitive interactions of political parties. Over time the party system in Britain has changed from being two-party, strongly dominated by competition between Labour and the Conservatives, to resembling something more moderately pluralist. This has consequences for how parties interact. In other more pluralist party systems, often with different electoral systems, political parties tend to place emphasis on co-operation as well as competition, and certainly more emphasis on co-operation than has been typically placed in Britain. In light of a changing party system, it is important to consider to what extent parties in Britain should consider co-operation as well as competition.

This thesis focuses particularly on the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. While the question of competition and co-operation between political parties is an interesting one in British politics generally, the interaction of the Labour and Liberal/Liberal Democrat parties has been a topic of academic and practical interest for over a century. As Joyce (1999: 1) writes, ‘progressive views have been principally associated with the ideas expressed by... the Liberal Party/Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party’. Labour and the Liberal Democrats’ occasional reliance upon each other throughout the 20th century has often been argued to form a ‘progressive alliance’ of the centre-left, with a commitment to harmonise social democracy and social liberalism within the confines of parliamentary democracy (Clarke, 1978, Marquand, 1991, Robinson, 2012). Marquand (1991) argues that the struggle to defeat conservative politics amounts to a ‘progressive dilemma’. However Labour and the Liberal Democrat/Liberal parties have been in competition throughout their histories, sometimes viscerally, and it is not the case of two parties united against conservatism (Crewe and King, 1995). As such, this thesis questions the nature of competition and the potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

There have been instances of co-operation between the two parties. The ‘Gladstone-Macdonald’ pact facilitated the Labour Party’s primary development as a parliamentary party, and the 1924, 1929 and 1974 Labour governments all relied on the support of Liberal MPs in

some form, the latter later forming an explicit 'Lib-Lab' pact. Following the 1979 election, some within the Labour Party argued for a Lib-Lab coalition that would unite against the Conservative Party, whilst others advocated various forms of co-operation, either formally or informally, with the Liberal/SDP Alliance, later arguing for the same with the Liberal Democrats. This continued into the 1990s, as the arguments for coalition between Labour and the Liberal Democrats were advanced, resulting in the Cook-Maclennan agreement, which established areas of common ground in policy terms between the two parties. Private discussions between party leaders Tony Blair and Paddy Ashdown also advanced the issue of co-operation: the idea became known as The Project. New Labour's electoral victory made co-operation unnecessary from their point of view, and Liberal Democrats at all levels of the party's organisation became actively hostile to co-operation with Labour over time, with policy co-ordination eventually petering out after the 2001 general election. Nevertheless, both parties entered into coalitions with each other in Scotland and Wales, and the argument for greater co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats has continually simmered, neither quite coming to the boil, nor entirely going cold.

Debates surrounding Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation thus warrant greater analysis generally, but they are particularly interesting in the context of a changing party system, which provides different opportunities and challenges for the two parties to consider. As such, this thesis assesses the viability of co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. In doing so, it aims to build on existing studies of each individual party (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005, Russell, 2005b, Seyd and Whiteley, 2002), as well as applying arguments from the comparative literature about competition and co-operation between political parties to an interesting and original context.

The two parties' current weak positions, themselves not independent from the change in the party system, also make this case study particularly timely and interesting. As will be discussed in greater detail later in the thesis, Labour were already in a weak electoral position after the 2010 general election, fell back further in 2015, and have only partially recovered since. They currently have 262 seats, 64 short of a majority in the House of Commons. They have little appeal with the electorate on the salient issues of the economy, immigration, welfare and leadership. Curtice (2015) estimated that Labour would need a nine per cent swing to them from the Conservatives at the next general election, a fate not achieved by either party since the 1997 general election. As it happened, Labour managed a two per cent swing at the 2017 general election. However, then, Labour was committed to overcoming

negative perceptions on salient issues to win votes in marginal constituencies; Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party does not yet appear to share the same preoccupation (Bale, 2016).

The Liberal Democrats are also in a dire position. At the 2015 general election, they received just 7.9 per cent of the vote and won just 8 MPs, a drop from 23 per cent of the vote and 57 MPs at the 2010 general election. The 2015 general election showed the weakness of the Liberal Democrat vote. While they increased their share of seats from 8 to 12 at the 2017 general election, they remain fundamentally weak. Much of their former vote is gone for the foreseeable future, and while they are still in a position to benefit from a multi-party arena, the challenges for small parties contemplating co-operation are significant, as they have found out to their cost since 2010. Their primary task is to regain pockets of support and increase their meagre parliamentary representation.

The events of the 2015 general election and its aftermath have also had some important consequences. Electoral geography has changed in Britain in a manner that it now benefits the Conservatives much more than it does Labour. While Labour improved its vote between 2010 and 2015, this was mostly in seats in which it was already winning, and so had little benefit in terms of seats. The Conservatives also bolstered their vote in seats where it was already winning, making it harder for Labour to win those seats back in future. Curtice's (2015: 39) analysis of the current boundaries shows that any result between a Conservative lead in vote share of 5.8 percentage points over Labour and a Labour lead in vote share of 12.5 percentage points over the Conservatives will result in a hung parliament. As such, the 2017 general election resulted in a hung parliament. This is wider than in any previous general election, and the previous record was in 2010. Even ignoring the problem of a future boundary review for Labour, the only time Labour has enjoyed a larger than 12.5 percentage point lead over the Conservatives was in 1997, when very different electoral geography meant that a 12.8 percentage point lead in the vote gave Labour a House of Commons majority of 177 (Curtice, 2016).

Another key consequence of a Conservative victory in the 2015 general election was the resulting referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union. Labour and the Liberal Democrats both campaigned to remain in the European Union, but the British public voted to leave. This has important consequences for both parties. It is easier for the Liberal Democrats: their stance prior to the referendum was one of wholehearted support for the European Union, and Tim Farron maintained that stance strongly after the vote. While some of the Liberal

Democrats' former electoral support is less disposed to the European Union and immigration, those voters largely left the party after they joined the Conservatives in coalition government in 2010. With the Liberal Democrats polling less than eight per cent in the 2015 general election, and 48 per cent voting to remain in the European Union, the Liberal Democrats made fighting 'Brexit' their key platform at the 2017 general election. It originally appeared to be having some moderate success: while their national poll ratings remained stubbornly low, they made impressive gains in local by-elections. More notably, they performed impressively well in David Cameron's former Witney constituency, before going on to win the Richmond Park by-election from Zac Goldsmith. However, the 2017 general election resulted in just four net gains for the Liberal Democrats. While modest, they might be pleased just to survive for now.

The vote to leave the European Union presents a much more challenging situation for Labour, as their votes and seats are spread throughout 'remain' and 'leave' areas. To have a strategy to not only respond to the huge policy challenges that leaving the European Union brings, but to make it a strategy appealing to such a broad cross-section of voters will be a continually difficult task. While some in Labour have sought to provide arguments appealing to Labour's broader electorate (Denham, 2016, Kinnock and Reynolds, 2017), there is little evidence of the leadership adequately responding to some of the challenges Labour faces in light of the referendum. However, the party made gains at the 2017 general election, and it remains to be seen if their current electoral coalition can hold.

This context suggests that Labour could win a majority government at the next general election, but it is not necessarily likely. Curtice (2016: 7) suggests that 'if a hung parliament is indeed the best that the party [Labour] can hope for, it might be thought wise for it to consider how it would handle such a scenario next time around'. For Labour to not even contemplate co-operation with other parties would appear foolishly naïve. For the Liberal Democrats, while they are enjoying the very early signs of what might be a small revival in their electoral fortunes, they have no chance of winning office without other parties. Given the disastrous effects of co-operation with the Conservatives, they should at least be considering co-operation with Labour. Indeed, there is evidence in both parties that such considerations are at least tentatively taking place (Harrop, 2017, McTague, 2016).

It is these issues that the thesis aims to address. In tackling the primary research question – what is the nature of competition and the potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats – the thesis will answer the following sub-questions:

- How can we theoretically understand the potential for co-operation between political parties?
- What role does the party system play in affecting party interaction, and where does this leave Labour and the Liberal Democrats?
- What are the ideological incentives and obstacles to co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats?
- What are the electoral imperatives that will promote or inhibit co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats?
- How do different levels of party organisation impact upon the potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats?
- What constraints are there upon Labour and Liberal Democrat leaders, and how do their attitudes affect co-operation between the two parties?

To carry out this study, and contribute to the broader literature on party interaction, this thesis draws on different understandings of co-operation to bring together a descriptively and analytically rich framework. Such a study necessitates incorporating some of the key literatures on political parties and their interaction: electoral, ideological, policy, organisational and leadership literatures must all be addressed. While the study is informed by each party's history, it focuses primarily on the contemporary potential for co-operation between the two. Particularly since 2010, a lively debate regarding co-operation and competition within and across political parties has existed in both Labour and the Liberal Democrats (Grayson, 2010, Sowemimo, 2011, Tall, 2014).

However, understanding co-operation is not an easy task. A wealth of analysis has been paid to the issue of co-operation, but most analysis focuses on individual forms and types of co-operation, rather than the broader interaction between parties. For example, a great deal of literature focuses on coalitions and governmental co-operation (Muller et al., 2008b). Another literature focuses on pre-electoral pacts (Golder, 2005). A developing literature also looks at confidence and supply agreements, or 'contract parliamentarianism' (Bale and Bergman,

2006). There is another on parliamentary votes, and another on tactical voting, and so on. In their own literatures, they provide a wealth of data and analysis on individual forms and types of co-operation. However, a revised approach that recognises the multi-faceted nature of co-operation can better illuminate how and why parties interact in the way they do.

It will also help illuminate what might be considered the ‘paradox’ of Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation: this issue has been discussed in and outside of each party for a long period at time, and some of the literature would suggest that the two parties should co-operate more than they do. Co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats is widely discussed as evidently more likely than co-operation between either party with the Conservatives. For example, ahead of the 2010 general election, Bale (2010) argued that ‘politics can be boiled down to... ideas, institutions and individuals... and all of them point... to a Labour-Lib Dem coalition’. Indeed, from the Liberal Democrats’ point of view, he argued that ‘logically, at least, it is obvious which they should choose’. That Labour and the Liberal Democrats should discuss and contemplate co-operation is a proposition based on supposedly sound reasoning, yet in practice it has rarely occurred. It is important to identify the reasons behind this paradox.

A detailed study of the two parties can thus illuminate the failure of each party to co-operate. Alongside rational choice considerations of party behaviour, this thesis also analyses some of the institutional factors that might affect Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. In particular, it analyses each level of each party’s organisational structure, from the electorate through to the grassroots through to the leadership. In considering party competition, most studies focus on the electorate and the leadership, but the differing organisational structures can often be ignored. This is important: for example, May (1973) argues that political party activists are more ideologically radical than both the party leadership and the wider electorate. Norris (1995) and Kitschelt (1989) challenge this to offer that activists are more likely to sit between the two. If a party’s grassroots have different views to the leadership, this could impact on co-operation. Also important is the power that the grassroots have in the party. Katz and Mair (1995) point to the stratarchic nature of modern political parties, increasingly centrally organised and autonomous of member control. However, they still require their local activists to be involved in order to encourage public participation (Seyd and Whiteley, 2002). Such research demonstrates the necessity of studying political parties at the differing leadership, activist, membership and electoral levels. This allows analysis to address not just inter-party

factors but intra-party factors affecting the potential for Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation.

This introductory chapter outlines the thesis. It begins by discussing the context of party interaction, and why studying the nature of and potential for co-operation between political parties, and Labour and the Liberal Democrats in particular, is a pressing question for scholars of political parties to consider. It then discusses the mixed methods approach that will be deployed throughout the thesis to answer the main research questions. It then outlines the structure of the thesis. Next, it presents a summary of the key findings of this research, and the contribution it makes both to the academic literature but also the practical reality of political parties and elections.

1.1 Research methods and data

This thesis argues that the UK is an interesting and useful case study. The UK has previously been regarded as a very good example of a two-party system and, as such, a very good example of a system providing incentives to compete rather than co-operate (Quinn, 2013). The broader literature has reflected this, with previously little focus on party co-operation in the UK, save for work on one specific example such as the Lib-Lab pact (Kirkup, 2016), descriptive historical work (Joyce, 1999), or academic analysis combined with the author's individual prescriptions (Marquand, 1991). This changed in 2010, when that year's general election delivered a hung parliament and subsequently the first Westminster coalition government since 1945. A number of academic works followed (Bale, 2011b, Bale, 2012, Jones, 2013, Lees, 2011). However, they largely focused on one very limited period, the days immediately before and after 6th May 2010, and focused solely on why the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition formed, rather than the consequences for how parties interact.

This presents an opportunity to reflect on these issues. This thesis focuses both on the recent and contemporary potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. There is detailed analysis of Labour and Liberal Democrat interaction between 2010 and 2017. During this period, three general elections delivered a hung parliament, a tiny Conservative majority and another hung parliament, providing ample discussion of Labour and Liberal Democrat co-operation that, in the end, resulted in nothing. This thesis examines why. However, in doing so, it also seeks to provide a useful context from which to understand the current and future positions of Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The nature of future

interaction between the two parties will not just depend on future events, but events taking place in up to and including 2017. As such, the analysis and conclusions presented in this thesis will hopefully also be of interest to audiences interested in the future of these parties.

As shown above, analysing the nature of interaction between political parties through an in-depth case study requires analysis that draws from a series of literatures in political science: elections, public opinion and parties, ideologies, policy, party organisation and leadership are all analysed in this thesis. To provide a comprehensive account of the potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, this thesis employs a mixed-method approach to analyse each level of each party's organisational structure, from the electorate to the leadership. This necessitates collecting a large amount of both primary and secondary quantitative and qualitative data.

The main primary data collection was a postal survey sent to Labour and Liberal Democrat constituency party organisation chairs. This data collection was necessary on the basis that there is 'no practical alternative to collecting the information from those directly involved' (Denver and Hands, 1997: 247). Chairs were surveyed as they were the most obtainable group, and perhaps best placed to give the perspective of their local organisation. While the relevant chapter analyses each party's local organisational structure to ascertain the levels of grassroots influence in each party, this is not a replacement for but a complement to the attitudes of the individuals directly involved. Primary data collection here was necessary due to the continuing dearth of data on the attitudes of local parties and their activists, with only limited data collected of Britain's local party organisations (see Clark, 2008, Fisher, 2000). More recent studies are studying party memberships as a whole, with impressive and comprehensive data collection (Bale et al., 2016), but the full data is not yet publicly available, and also does not provide questions particularly relevant to co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

A copy of the survey sent to each constituency party can be found in Appendix 1. The survey focused on the perceptions of influence by each party's grassroots within their organisation. It then asked about each party's grassroots attitudes to co-operation between the two parties, alongside a range of questions about attitudes to intra and inter-party interaction. In total, the surveys provided data for 101 individual variables analysing different aspects of party competition and co-operation. Where possible, this survey data was complemented by secondary data on seat marginality and local party strength.

The resulting data has limitations: it is not a representative survey of party members and activists. This data, rightly, is private and the only realistic way to do survey them would be with YouGov and their database of party members in the UK. However, while some studies are beginning to make use of these, such as Webb and Bale (2014), the expense conducting these polls far outweighs the budget for this research. While party chairs have their own biases, and asking them to reflect and convey their local members and activists' attitudes is not an ideal approach, it remains the best available given the resources at hand, and a nonetheless valuable means of understanding structure of opinion within Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

Another limitation is that the survey does not cover the population or a representative sample of party chairs in both parties. Ideally, the survey would have been sent out with both central parties' consent and assistance. However, neither party's central office offered this, despite repeated efforts to obtain it. The Liberal Democrats did not reply to requests for assistance, and Labour insisted that they were too focused on winning an overall majority at the 2015 general election to warrant assisting research on hung parliaments and co-operation. Instead, contact information was collected by the researcher from constituency party websites and social media. Some local party websites included a contact address for their organisation or their chair. Others included an email address. Those with an email address were contacted to request a postal address.

In total, surveys were sent to 230 Constituency Labour Parties and 247 Liberal Democrat local parties. To try and maximise response rates, the front page of the survey was a covering letter explaining the objectives of the research, and the benefits of their participation to their study. A stamped address return envelope was included, and a second wave was sent out to anybody that did not respond to the first wave. Piloting was not possible due to the small numbers of participants, but drafts were sent for review to supervisors and colleagues with

expertise in survey research and the fields of party organisation and political behaviour.¹ No major problems were identified by respondents who returned the survey.

One of the main decisions relating to the survey was when to send it. Sending it after the 2015 general election risked catching respondents during a summer period and on holiday, and also meant that data collection would be going further into the PhD study than would be ideal. The survey was therefore sent in advance of the 2015 general election, when a hung parliament was deemed likely and potential Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation a distinct possibility. As such, the data cannot reflect potential subsequent changes in party organisational composition and attitudes. This is a particular problem in the current context, as the data was collected prior to the significant changes in both parties' memberships in 2015-2016. However considering time, contacts and resources it is the best data available, and still provides valuable insight into the organisational imperatives affecting Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. The first wave of the survey was sent out in November 2014 and the second wave in January-February 2015. Each survey was marked with a Press Association constituency code number so they could be subsequently matched with the constituency's electoral characteristics.

Of the surveys posted out, 101 (44 per cent) were returned by Labour participants, and 121 (49 per cent) by Liberal Democrat participants.² Given the lack of support from each party's central office and the sketchy availability of local party contact data online, the participant recruitment and subsequent response rate is argued to be satisfactory, and compares well with other studies of party memberships and activists (Clark, 2008, Fisher, 2000, Seyd et al., 1994, Seyd and Whiteley, 2002, Whiteley et al., 2006). A range of constituency parties responded, both in strong and weak areas, in areas with and without an incumbent party MP, and across the different British regions. Further information on this can be found in Appendix 2. The

¹ Alongside the general acknowledgements at the start of this thesis, I would like to express my gratitude to Alistair Clark, Nick Randall, Emily Clough and Nick Vivyan for their comments on drafts of the survey. Responsibility for any errors lies with the author.

² It is not known how many local parties there are for both parties in Britain, so impossible to calculate the overall response rate. There are certainly fewer than the number of constituencies in Britain (632) as many local parties join forces, but given the lack of data, the exact figure is unknown.

survey data is predominantly used in the chapter addressing organisational imperatives, but elsewhere as well where relevant.

Other primary data collected was largely qualitative, and the main method here was interviews with Labour and Liberal Democrat current and former MPs and advisers. This data is primarily used in the chapters addressing electoral imperatives and constraints upon party leaders in relation to co-operation. Interview data was considered important for a number of reasons. Firstly, data on party elites' attitudes to co-operation would be very difficult to collect using quantitative methods, and in Britain (such as through the British Representation Study) has often yielded poor response rates. Secondly, interviewing elites allows the researcher to investigate actors' subjective interpretations of relevant events and decisions. Such interpretations are often not shared with the public. In particular for this research, much of the thesis is focused on events not yet recorded in diaries, memoirs or journalistic and academic accounts.³ Interviews are thus a very useful way of obtaining otherwise unavailable data.

Interviewees were sought after and contacted on the basis of their knowledge of key events and decisions related to the research questions. This may have been in relation to coalition negotiations in 2010, or attitudes to each party between 2010 and 2015, and beyond. As expected, party leaders and those in senior cabinet/shadow cabinet positions were mostly unavailable. Where this was the case, some of their advisers kindly participated. In total, 13 interviews were conducted. To allow participants the scope to reveal the breadth and depth of their relevant knowledge, interviews were conducted in a semi-structured fashion, recorded, transcribed, and quoted where necessary throughout the thesis. With one or two exceptions, interviews were conducted in person in London in February 2016. Those interviewees who were happy for their names to be shared are cited and included in the reference list; those who were not and who are quoted in the thesis are cited as 'private interview'.

Constituency election results are utilised to look at the electoral incentives and obstacles to co-operation. Particular focus is on the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative shares of

³ Where records have been published, the thesis makes use of them (for instance, see Adonis, 2013, Cowley and Kavanagh, 2015, Laws, 2016a)

the vote in relevant constituencies over time, in order to show whether or not co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats would electorally benefit either party. This data is collected from a variety of sources, including the British Election Study, Pippa Norris's elections dataset, and the BBC website. Alongside this, the thesis uses secondary survey data to analyse public opinion to co-operation between political parties generally, as well as Labour and the Liberal Democrats specifically. Where data is used it is cited individually, but the most used sources in the thesis are the British Election Study and surveys carried out by YouGov ahead of the 2015 general election. British Election Study data is publicly available, and YouGov kindly provided the researcher with the full datasets from two surveys on party co-operation carried out in March and April 2015.

Further secondary quantitative data was utilised in the form of manifesto data collected by the Manifesto Research on Political Representation (MARPOR) project (formerly the Comparative Manifestos Project), which has collected manifesto data since 1945. This data was used to map out party policy positioning by the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties between 1992 and 2015. This was complemented by qualitative analysis of policy documents and manifestos ahead of the 2015 and 2017 general elections. This data is shown in the chapter addressing ideological and policy considerations.

1.2 Key findings and original contribution

The theoretical and empirical analysis over the coming chapters yields a number of findings and contributions to the British and comparative literature on political parties and their interaction. First, the thesis develops a more nuanced understanding of how co-operation between political parties might be considered. Currently, discussion of it as a concept rarely goes beyond its individual forms and types. This limits the applicability of literatures to practical case studies. This framework seeks to address the most important incentives and obstacles to party competition and co-operation, and in particular address salient issues that might have been previously neglected or understudied. The framework offers three main conclusions. First, co-operation relies on there being compatible interests to be jointly pursued. Most of the incentives to co-operation in this chapter relate to it being a helpful means to other ends of political competition, such as achieving office or defeating a shared opponent. Politics remains primarily competitive, and parties will usually look to co-operate if it provides means to other ends. Second, even in those circumstances, co-operation is

dependent upon a range of incentives and obstacles. Electoral, ideological and organisational considerations affect the decisions made by leaders in political parties. Finally, if co-operation between parties is difficult to achieve because it relies on a balance of various incentives and obstacles, it is ultimately difficult because it relies on there being a balance in more than one party. There is a co-ordination problem to party co-operation.

The substantive analysis in later chapters also offers key findings. Each party's ideological and policy platform also provides many incentives to co-operation. Labour's overlap and often acquiescence with social liberalism has been evident throughout the 20th century, and its interpretations of socialism have predominantly been in an evolutionary, reformist form. Even the Liberal Democrats' economic liberals have social liberalism as their primary objective. The Liberal Democrats' policies are arguably more aligned with the Conservatives than at any point since their inception, but they still remain closer to Labour. While there are disagreements between both parties, particularly on home affairs issues and certain policy issues arising from the Liberal Democrats' participation in coalition with the Conservatives, there is little that presents an obstacle to co-operation. The difficulty comes when co-operation needs to be sustained over a period of time, or advanced to a more significant level. Here, ideological differences between the parties are likely to be more of an obstacle. Alongside this, if ideology and policy considerations present such an incentive for co-operation, that the two parties have co-operated as little as they have suggests other considerations may be more important.

There are electoral incentives to co-operation for both parties: co-operation might bring about an opportunity to prevent a Conservative majority government, and subsequently a potential Labour-Liberal Democrat or Labour-led government. Labour will be competing against a weakened Conservative Party if the Liberal Democrats are stronger. If the Liberal Democrats can count on the support of Labour supporters in Conservative-Liberal Democrat marginals then there is potential for the party's electoral prospects to significantly improve, which is crucial for the party's survival in the coming years. However, the electoral obstacles are numerous too. Most Liberal Democrat supporters willing to vote Labour tactically probably already did so in 2015 and 2017, and there are not many other Liberal Democrats left in Labour-Conservative marginal seats. For Labour to co-operate with the Liberal Democrats would be to spend political capital on a move that could achieve very little electoral benefit in Labour seats, or potentially backfire by haemorrhaging further support to other parties.

Electoral, each party focusing on addressing their individual electoral issues, while not completely closing the door to co-operation, might be the best course of action.

Each party's organisation provides different incentives and obstacles to co-operation for each party. Formal organisational structures permit the Liberal Democrats' grassroots more influence in their party than Labour's do.⁴ When applied to grassroots' perception of their own influence, the same findings apply: Liberal Democrat activists feel they have more influence in their own party than Labour activists do. Applied to co-operation, the Liberal Democrats' grassroots had much more influence over co-operation in 2010 than Labour's would have done, and this presently remains the case. The data collected also provides findings regarding grassroots' attitudes to co-operation: Liberal Democrat respondents were more supportive of Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation than Labour respondents, and events between 2010 and 2015 appeared to make Labour respondents less supportive of co-operation with the Liberal Democrats.

Finally, each party's leaderships also reveal important considerations for the potential for Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. Leaders and their individual actions are not as important as the electoral factors that might affect co-operation. However, decisions taken by each party's leaders are still important. Between 2007 and 2010 or 2010 and 2015, the Labour and Liberal Democrat leaderships constructed their interests in a fashion that inhibited co-operation between the two. Gordon Brown was never able to convince the Liberal Democrats that his idea of co-operation was ever going to advantage anybody but the Labour Party. Nick Clegg was never as keen as previous Liberal Democrat leaders on Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. Ed Miliband saw the Liberal Democrats as a goldmine of voters that would help him become Prime Minister in 2015, and not as a party with which he should seek to co-operate. For both Brown and Miliband, co-operation seemed an option that appeared as a last resort. While this is often the case for most party leaders, it meant that when they actually came around to realising the benefits of co-operation, they operated from a position of weakness rather than a position of strength. It also meant that the Labour leaders faced greater

⁴ There may be the prospect of this changing with a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour Party, but at the time of writing the Liberal Democrats afford much more formal influence to their members and activists than Labour.

hostility from their parliamentary party: while co-operation has always been the end-game for a Liberal Democrat leader, it has not for a Labour leader. This fundamental question may need to be addressed by Labour leaders in future. For now, neither Corbyn nor Cable is showing much interest in co-operation, but this may change.

Together, the findings throughout the thesis suggest that there are many incentives to Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation, but parties have tended to consider them outweighed by obstacles. This is perfectly reasonable, as to co-operate with another party brings with it a great deal of risk and uncertainty. Nevertheless, the party system has changed over time in a manner that should encourage greater co-operation between political parties. Partisan identification is at historically low levels (albeit on the increase again recently), and co-operation between parties potentially has greater incentives than it did previously. Co-operation is now commonplace throughout the British party system, with coalitions and confidence and supply agreements now common in local and sub-national parliaments, assemblies and councils, and hung parliaments still likely nationally. The two party's electoral weaknesses might facilitate action. As Panebianco (1988), and Harmel and Janda (1994) argue, electoral failures can 'shock' a party into changing. The continued existence of a party system encouraging co-operation and weak Labour and Liberal Democrat parties might incentivise co-operation.

However, the party system remains primarily competitive and adversarial, and it will likely take more than continued electoral defeat to encourage co-operation over competition. Both parties are primarily led by elites influenced by a series of factors and constraints. Many of those factors and constraints provide an obstacle to co-operation, and leaders are unlikely to risk their own position to overcome them. Both party leaderships would likely face strong opposition to co-operation from their parliamentary party, and both parties to some extent would face opposition from their grassroots. This is particularly the case for the Labour leadership, but also the Liberal Democrats. While electoral factors provide some incentive, co-operation is not some panacea for a party's problems with the electorate.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

Following this introduction, Chapter Two introduces a theoretical framework of party co-operation. It draws on a series of literatures to discuss how Labour-Liberal Democrat co-

operation is to be understood, and the incentives and obstacles that might promote or constrain it are specified. This framework forms the structure for the rest of the thesis.

Chapter Three provides the context from which Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation is to be discussed, by charting the evolution of the party system and interaction to the present day. It begins by theorising how we might understand a party system, and how it helps us further understand the nature of interaction between political parties. It argues that the notion of Britain as a two-party system is inaccurate. While the two-party system persisted for a period of the 20th century, it has otherwise not existed or it has only existed in the national parliamentary arena. The hung parliament following the 2010 general election, the small majority for the Conservatives following the 2015 general election, and a hung parliament in the 2017 general election suggests that the influence of smaller parties is not going away from British politics anytime soon. As such, it provides a platform from which to understand the potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

Chapter Four begins the substantive analysis of the extent to which there are incentives and obstacles to co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. This chapter assesses ideological and policy considerations in each party, and how they affect the potential for co-operation. The first section focuses on the ideological compatibility between each party, focusing on the core issues of the individual, society and the state. The second section analyses the policy compatibility of each party, examined within the spatial and salience structures of party interaction. This is done through qualitative analysis of manifestos, policy documents and speeches for recent election campaigns, and quantitative analysis of manifesto data between 1945 and 2015 to provide a longer term perspective. The fourth section provides a contemporary analysis of policy developments in each party in light of their 2015 and 2017 general election performances.

Chapter Five focuses on electoral considerations and public opinion to co-operation. First, it provides the theoretical foundations from which to understand the electoral incentives and obstacles to co-operation between the two parties. The chapter then focuses on pre-electoral co-operation, analysing the differing incentives and obstacles in Labour-Conservative seats and Liberal Democrat-Conservative seats. It then analyses public opinion towards co-operation in Britain, between political parties generally and in particular between Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

Chapter Six applies the organisational element of the thesis's theoretical framework, and focuses on two key questions: to what extent can each party's grassroots influence their party's approach to co-operation, and to what extent do each party's grassroots' attitudes differ from their party's elites? First, the chapter applies arguments from the comparative literature regarding the extent of grassroots influence to analysis of Labour and Liberal Democrats. This is done by analysing each party's formal and informal organisational structures, as well analysing party activists' perception of influence within their party. Second, the chapter assesses opinion structures within each party's organisation, by measuring ideological positioning, what the most important issues are in each party, and the importance of policy, office and vote-seeking theories to the grassroots. Third, the chapter analyses the attitudes of each party's grassroots to co-operation with each other and other parties. The chapter concludes by assessing the extent to which each party's grassroots is able to provide incentives or obstacles to co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

Chapter Seven focuses on the final key aspect of understanding political parties and their interaction: leadership. How can we understand party leadership in relation to party co-operation? In particular, the chapter addresses three key questions. First, to what extent have Labour and Liberal Democrat leaders sought to co-operate with each other? Second, to what extent have they been influenced and constrained by institutional and structural factors? Third, how does this affect the contemporary potential for Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation? The first section introduces the 'leadership capital' framework proposed by Bennister et al. (2015) as a useful guide from which to understand how each party leadership has approached co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The second section examines the period 2007-2010 and the leaderships of Gordon Brown and Nick Clegg. The third section examines the period 2010-2015 and the leaderships of Ed Miliband and Nick Clegg. The fourth section briefly discusses the positions of Jeremy Corbyn and Tim Farron. The concluding section brings this together to assess the role of leadership in understanding the incentives and obstacles to co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The final chapter concludes the thesis, bringing together the arguments made throughout to discuss the contributions it makes both to domestic and comparative understandings of political parties and their interaction. It also discusses the implications for both Labour and the Liberal Democrats, and the implications for further academic research.

The vast majority of research conducted in this thesis was carried out well in advance of the 2017 general election. While it has been updated throughout to reflect the 2017 general

election result and its aftermath, much of the substantial research reflects findings gathered beforehand, and it remains too early to draw anything other than tentative conclusions from the events of the 8th June.

Chapter 2: A theoretical framework of co-operation between political parties

This chapter sets out how co-operation and competition will be understood throughout the thesis, and the different issues that affect Labour-Liberal Democrat interaction. In doing so, it aims to address a ‘paradox’ of co-operation: much of the literature would expect parties to co-operate more often than they do. Indeed, specific studies of Labour and the Liberal/Liberal Democrat parties remark on the surprising and, for those who support such objectives, disappointing lack of co-operation between the two. Joyce (1999) writes of the realignment of the left, while Marquand (1991) writes of the progressive ‘dilemma’. The existing literature does not adequately explain why party interaction veers at various points between competitive or co-operative interactions. The paradox as discussed here is understood as a UK phenomenon: it is less obvious that this paradox applies across Western democracies, and this thesis is specifically focused on two political parties within a national party system.

One of the primary considerations of political science in the 20th and 21st centuries has been political parties and the competition between them. Schumpeter (1942) thought it the most important consideration in understanding democracies. Key works in the 20th century considered voters and parties in a similar fashion to the role played by consumers and companies in an economic market (Dahl and Lindblom, 1953, Downs, 1957). Social democratic theories of party competition understood voters as giving a mandate to political parties to enact policy programmes (Birch, 1971). More recently, theories have sought to combine rational choice and simple assumptions about voter objectives with more organisational and institutional considerations of party competition (Muller and Strøm, 1999, Strøm, 1990, Ware, 2009).

One issue is that there is ambiguity in the very idea of party competition, in that the situations in which parties interact are not always strictly competitive (Ware, 1989). Rational choice theories alone tend to be more interested and better equipped to understand party competition, but less so to understand party co-operation. For example while in some situations, such as in definitively two-party systems, competition should theoretically be predominantly zero-sum and conflictual in character, this is not the case in other party systems. More competitors (parties) contesting elections may not only alter the nature of competition, but might provide situations in which parties do not necessarily look to solely compete.

Such situations involve co-operative elements as well as competitive ones. However, co-operation remains an ambiguous term too. It is often referenced within the academic literature, but is often used to refer to a narrow range of types and examples. The most common of these remains multi-party cabinet coalitions (Debus, 2008, Laver and Schofield, 1990, Muller et al., 2008a). It is now a vast literature, often drawing on data from many cases in many countries. However, other literatures also exist, covering examples such as legislative co-operation that does not include cabinet coalitions, and pre-electoral co-operation. The literature on co-operation generally covers three broad ‘arenas’. First, co-operation is understood in the governmental arena through the formation of coalitions (Muller et al., 2008b). Second, co-operation is understood through the legislative arena through the process of confidence and supply arrangements (Boston and Bullock, 2012). Third, co-operation is understood through the electoral arena by the process of pre-electoral pacts or public campaigns (Golder, 2005).

This chapter looks to bring together some of these theories to help better understand the nature of competition and co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. To this end the chapter first sets out how co-operation is to be understood, and then the incentives and obstacles that might promote or constrain co-operation between the two parties.

2.1 Three arenas of co-operation

This thesis operationalises as co-operation in the executive (coalition), co-operation in the legislature (confidence and supply agreements, and parliamentary votes), and co-operation in the electorate (formal or informal electoral pacts). Competition is operationalised as efforts which hinder those outcomes. This is set out in more detail in the following sections.

2.1.1 Co-operation in government

In parliamentary democracies, when a single party does not command a legislative majority, some co-operative arrangement usually takes place.⁵ One of the most common arrangements is a coalition: that is, a governing agreement between two or more parties. Muller et al. (2008b: 6) define a coalition as follows:

A government coalition refers to the sharing of executive office by different parties. More precisely, a coalition party is a party that has at least one designated representative that enjoys voting rights in the country's top executive policy-making body (which we generically refer to as the cabinet).

Their shape and size depend upon context and decisions, ranging from coalitions that seek to act in as similar a fashion to single-party governments, to coalitions where special provisions are made for parties to disagree on certain issues. Coalitions have received a wealth of analysis in the comparative literature (Debus, 2008, Laver and Shepsle, 1990, Martin and Stevenson, 2001, Muller et al., 2008a). While they remain an unusual phenomenon in post-war national British politics, coalitions were a reasonably common form of government before 1945 (Bogdanor, 2004). The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government that formed after the 2010 general election was the culmination of change in the British party system since 1970 (Curtice, 2010). Coalitions are also common in sub-national and local government.

2.1.2 Co-operation in the legislature

The first form of co-operation in the legislature is a 'confidence and supply' arrangement, where a minority government relies on the support of one or more parties that are outside of the executive. This could be an informal arrangement of co-operation, or a more explicit form of 'contract parliamentarism' (Bale and Bergman, 2006). The fusion of executive and

⁵ Securing a majority, either alone or with other parties, is not always crucial: although rare, minority governments are not unheard of in western democracies (Gallagher et al., 2005).

legislative powers often confuses analysis. As Boston and Bullock (2012: 363) argue, ‘simple distinctions between executive and legislative coalitions or between government and non-government coalitions fail to do justice to the diversity now apparent in multi-party arrangements’. Confidence and supply arrangements, like coalitions, can have a variety of formal and informal structures. Like governmental co-operation, legislative co-operation has received less attention in Britain – with most of the political science literature covering examples from New Zealand (Boston and Bullock, 2012). However, there are examples from Britain: the Lib-Lab pact of 1977-1978 was a legislative arrangement between the Labour government and the Liberal Party. While the Liberal Party did not join Labour in government, the pact represented a formal cross-party understanding. The Conservative-Democratic Unionist Party parliamentary agreement following the 2017 general election also falls under this section.

Another form of legislative co-operation can take place via parliamentary votes: parties can vote together on a single issue, or side more generally with another party’s position over a long period of time. Co-operation may also take place away from parliamentary votes but in Select Committees, although the relative weakness of the second chamber and the committee system compared to other democratic parliamentary systems can often make analysis of parliamentary actions in British politics difficult (Dowding, 2006). However, as Cowley and Stuart (2003: 401) argue, ‘a party’s parliamentary wing is one of its most public manifestations’. It gives party parliamentarians a voice that is denied to others, and has an impact upon the overall platform that a political party displays to the electorate.

2.1.3 Co-operation in the electorate

Parties can co-operate in the electorate by establishing an electoral pact, or a ‘pre-electoral coalition’ (Golder, 2005). This involves one or more parties reaching agreement ahead of an election, and signalling to voters that they intend to govern together after the election. They clarify a party’s intentions, and signal clearly their objectives following a vote. Depending on the electoral system, this might result in encouraging voters to support one party/candidate as their first preference and the coalescing party as their second preference, or parties might enter into a pact in order to further the chances of another party or candidate winning. There are examples of this both in Britain and internationally, and can happen over one or a series of elections. In Britain, the Co-operative Party stands officially as a separate entity, but presents

candidates for election only in conjunction with the Labour Party. The Liberal Party joined with the Social Democratic Party to form the ‘Alliance’ in the 1983 and 1987 general elections. Internationally, Golder (2005) shows that between 1946 and 2002, 186 pre-electoral coalitions formed across 19 West European countries.

Pacts and agreements can also take place much more informally, with no formal signal or suggestion of co-operation in government. In Britain, again there are examples, such as in the parliamentary constituency of Tatton in 1997, when Labour and the Liberal Democrats withdrew their candidate to boost the chances of the independent candidate, Martin Bell. Bell subsequently defeated the Conservative candidate. There are also failed attempts: the Liberal Democrats urged Labour to stand down their candidate in the 2016 Richmond Park by-election to beat the de facto Conservative candidate,⁶ and some Labour MPs agreed. Three Labour MPs argued that ‘the Lib Dems are far from perfect but... it may be time for Labour to put the national interest first’ (Nandy et al., 2016b). Labour eventually decided to stand a candidate, finishing a distant third.

2.2 A broader understanding of co-operation

There is thus a vast literature on party co-operation, but this literature tends to focus on individual forms of co-operation, such as cabinet coalitions, legislative agreements or electoral pacts (Debus, 2008, Gschwend and Hooghe, 2008, Muller et al., 2008b). This extensive literature has aided our understanding of the dynamics of co-operation: we know more about how offices might be distributed, the policy-payoffs for each actor, and the potential costs and benefits that might result from bargaining.

However, we know less about the parties involved and the reasons for, and consequences of, their interaction with each other. Regarding the potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, it is one thing to analyse why the two parties did not enter into coalition following the 2010 general election, but the relationship between the two parties

⁶ Zac Goldsmith officially stood as an Independent, but was formerly the Conservative MP and was heavily backed by the local Conservative association.

during the 2010 parliament was affected by decisions at the previous general election. Those decisions had an effect on the two parties' interaction ahead of the 2015 general election, and all had an effect on their interaction in the present. A longer-term, more coherent analysis of party interaction, rather than just focusing on one-event in time, has been theorised and modelled before in the comparative literature (Austen-Smith and Banks, 1988, Schofield, 1993, Strøm, 1990). Analysing events, their effects, and the role of political parties within them provides an opportunity for an in-depth analysis of a single case study, which can then better inform our understanding of Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

More broadly, the purpose of research on co-operation should not be just to better understand the structures of coalitions and the payoffs of bargaining, but to also understand the motivations of political parties and actors involved in the process, and the considerations they make about co-operation as a means of achieving their objectives. Political parties – often party elites but this depends on their organisation – have decisions to make which affect how they interact with other parties. As Michels ((1915) 1959: 130) argues, 'different individualities react differently to the same environment'. Such choices might depend on the potential costs and benefits that might follow a course of actions, or other organisational factors. How co-operation is understood and addressed by political parties is an important question to be answered.

The thesis thus draws from different understandings of co-operation to hopefully provide a descriptively and analytically rich framework. This raises the understandable objection that bringing together different understandings of co-operation fails to adequately understand each form of co-operation individually. Each arena of co-operation has received dedicated and specific attention in its own right (see Boston and Bullock, 2012, Fisher, 2004, Golder, 2005, Muller et al., 2008a: as examples). However, they are all forms of co-operation, and a revised approach that recognises the multi-faceted nature of co-operation can better illuminate how and why parties interact in the way they do. Many of the challenges parties face in making decisions about one form of co-operation can apply in another form as well. Indeed, parties are often choosing between a variety of potential forms of competition or co-operation. For instance, a pre-electoral pact suggests a clear signal of co-operation between two parties that strongly signals the possibility of further co-operation after an election (Golder, 2005). Legislative co-operation does not necessarily have different incentives and obstacles to governmental co-operation (Boston and Bullock, 2012, Strøm, 1990). Together, the sheer

diversity of co-operation and academic analysis of it suggests that a revised approach that recognises this is required.

As a starting point, it is useful to consider co-operation as a form of party interaction, alongside party competition. From Ostrogorski's (1902) work on the British and American party systems through to more contemporary analysis of Western democracies, rational choice models of competition remain the dominant prism through which to understand party interaction. Downs' (1957) spatial vote-maximising models assumed that voters were rational and individualistic, and introduced an economic approach to the study of party competition along a largely left-right ideological scale. Stokes (1963) later argued that certain 'valence' issues could not be explained by spatial models of competition. However, the two are not entirely discrete interactions. As Schattschneider (1960: 71) argues, 'the crucial problem in politics is the management of conflict'. Competition and co-operation provide the means of doing so.⁷

To understand a party's objectives, Muller and Strøm's (1999b) triad model of office-seeking, policy-seeking and vote-seeking is a helpful starting point. The office-seeking model argues that parties seek to maximise their control over political office: that is, governmental or sub-governmental appointments or portfolios (Leiserson, 1966, Riker, 1962). These theories were argued to give insufficient attention to policy, and policy-seeking theories thus were put forward, with their supporters arguing that political parties look to have maximum influence on public policy and achieving their policy objectives (Axelrod, 1970, De Swaan, 1973). The vote-seeking model, although now often connected with the office-seeking model, suggests that parties are vote-maximisers, and that policies are primarily the means to that goal (Downs, 1957). These three models of party behaviour, or more specifically party elite behaviour, are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Indeed, Downs recognised that a party's policy programmes involved understanding the preferences of the electorate. Party elites may seek votes as a means of winning office or implementing policy. They could implement

⁷ Franzmann (2011) makes a persuasive case that competition should be used more to describe the structures and conditions in which parties interact, and that the two described types of interaction should not be competition and co-operation, but contest and co-operation. However, I argue that abiding by the most recognised terms of competition and co-operation provides the most useful platform from which to understand party interaction.

policy to win votes to then win office. However, they can impact each other in both positive and negative ways. Just as being in office could lead to implementing vote-seeking policies, it could also generate electoral costs due to unpopularity or perceived incompetence. Each action has consequences that will affect the other.

Competition and co-operation thus provide a means for political parties to achieve these objectives. However, they remain different in their operation. Parties look to win office: to do so requires a majority or coalition potential. One competitive means of achieving this objective would be to put candidates forward in every seat available in an election, attempting to defeat other parties in as many seats as possible to win an electorally relevant share of seats that grants them office. One co-operative means of achieving this objective would be to support another party's candidates (and/or vice versa) in order to defeat what they see as a greater opponent(s). In light of an election, should no one party have a legislative majority, parties may need to form alliances of some sort in order to pass legislation.

The overarching objective – winning office – remains the same. The means of doing so - competition or co-operation - differ. Competition and co-operation can run alongside each other. For example, should two parties co-operate in any manner short of a merger, it necessarily follows that they will still be competing in some shape or form. Two parties joining forces in a coalition may still contest elections against each other. Two parties operating in an electoral pact in some constituencies may still compete in others, and they may not then co-operate in a coalition or legislative agreement. It is not necessarily the case, and indeed in practice very unlikely, that parties solely co-operate but not compete. Different aspects of party interaction are thus somewhat autonomous of each other (Ware, 2009).

Nonetheless, the two forms of interaction are sufficiently different to warrant analysis of their respective characteristics. Co-operation is a fundamentally different action from competition. Co-operation might involve two parties maximising organisational resources to defeat an opponent in a constituency, or collaboration over the course of a parliament, be that in coalition or a looser arrangement. It sets about a process of working together that, even if it is a means of satisfying office, policy and/or vote-seeking objectives, involves coordination and collaboration in a manner not necessarily witnessed in competition. In doing so, it recognises the importance of another party to achieve your objective. Co-operation might therefore be understood as *the collective pursuit of compatible interests by two or more political parties, with the recognition that those interests cannot necessarily be achieved alone.*

This understanding is slightly different to that proposed by Bartolini (1999: 439), who argues that, in co-operative relationships, ‘actors may still be considered as pursuing individual interests, but they must accept at least some partial subordination of such interests to a collective, all-actors’ goal’. Co-operation need not always involve a collective interest. For example, co-operation between Labour and the Liberals predominantly rested on Labour wanting to accelerate its political development and the Liberals wanting to form a government. There may be situations where interests remain distinct but co-operation still takes place. The crucial point is that interests are compatible.

It is proposed here that there may be multiple motives for co-operation. Although co-operation might involve sharing, collaboration and co-ordination, that does not make it an ideal for party elites to engage in. Political parties, whether co-operating or competing, are concerned with their own interest. In this sense, actors within political parties are rational actors: that is, they are motivated by ‘private’ desires, such as power and reputation (Laver, 1997). Co-operation, for the most part⁸, is the means of achieving it. It is the recognition that interests might still be distinct, but are nonetheless compatible, and might be most readily achieved by some form of co-operative action.

Parties need to take into account to what extent co-operation can help them achieve their interests and objectives, be those office, policy or vote-seeking. As argued by Koole and subsequently by Carty (Carty, 2004, Koole, 1994), how a party organises itself will shape and affect the manner of the actions that it takes (in this case, co-operation and competition between parties). Whether party elites take decisions in their own personal interest or in their party’s interest, the consequences remain. A useful way of breaking down the various interests within a political party with regard to competition and co-operation is to think of *incentives* and *obstacles* to party co-operation. If co-operation increases a party’s coalition potential, or electorally weakens a competitor, or increases the chance of maximising votes or implementing policy, then this presents an incentive to co-operation. If on the other hand, co-

⁸ In some cases, co-operation could be an end in itself, i.e. to promote a less adversarial political system. Examples of this objective, particularly in the context of British politics, are rare.

operation has negative consequences for these considerations, it presents an obstacle. The same applies to decisions surrounding competition.

Incentives and obstacles can also apply to actors within each party. As will be argued throughout this thesis, actors within both Labour and the Liberal Democrats have faced and continue to face these decisions. Co-operation could have consequences for actors within parties. For example, a party leader could see their support within their party or the country eroded if they co-operate with another party. Party members might not countenance their party co-operating with another. Actors at every stratum of a political party make these decisions freely, and they shape the structure they are in, but it is a reciprocal process. The next section outlines the incentives and obstacles to co-operation that this thesis will consider.

2.3 Incentives and obstacles to co-operation

A broader theory of co-operation between political parties necessitates an explanatory framework of different incentives and obstacles that parties should consider. As will be shown in the later chapters of this thesis, the incentives and obstacles will differ depending on context, be that the form of co-operation, the size and nature of the party, and the organisational and institutional structures in which the party operates. However, some broad areas of interests can be outlined.

2.3.1 Ideology and policy

There are any number of definitions of ideology and policy. Alexander (2015: 982) argues that an ideology is ‘a view about what ought to be thought, said and done about politics’. Freedon (1996: 140) defines ideologies as ‘combinations of political concepts’. Griffiths (2014: 24-29) adds that ideologies are a series of ‘concepts, values, aspirations and even aversions’. To inform analysis of party competition and co-operation, ideologies can be understood as the structured sets of ideas and values that guide political action. Particularly in relation to policy, ideologies can be used to summarise often detailed and complex policy programmes in a manner that voters can understand (Webb, 2000). This might be in relation to a party’s approach to the state and market, or the individual and society.

Policies can be understood as the contemporary expressions that realise the values and ideas of an ideology. For instance, a liberal ideology might be expressed through home affairs

policies that prioritise liberty over security. A conservative ideology might be expressed through more restrictionist immigration policy. A social democratic or socialist ideology might be expressed through a state-financed and state-run education or health care system. As such, ideology and policy are interdependent. Both are concepts that influence the definitions and understandings of each other.

Coalition theory has already noted some of the incentives and obstacles to co-operation between parties presented by ideology and policy. The ‘policy-seeking’ theories of Axelrod (1970) and De Swaan (1970) argue that the more policy-aligned parties are, the more likely they are to form a coalition, suggesting incentives for broader party co-operation. If a party cannot be in government without co-operating with another party, this provides an opportunity to work with a like-minded party to co-ordinate ideologically agreeable policy programmes. Connecting ideology and policy concerns with voters’ perception, comparative evidence suggests that voters perceive the senior party to bear the greatest responsibility for the policy successes and failures of a coalition government (Duch et al., 2015, Fisher and Hobolt, 2010, Johnson and Middleton, 2016). This appears to often be the case in practice: Boston and Bullock (2012) show in their study of New Zealand parties that junior parties struggle to influence and criticise their senior partners.

Considering ideology and policy incentives and obstacles in a broader context than coalition, parties express ideologies that evolve over time, and co-operation across parties can be based on ideology. How ideological and policy considerations affect the potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats reflects the trade-offs between ‘policy, office and votes’ highlighted by Muller and Strøm (1999). Co-operation between political parties with more compatible ideologies might facilitate greater collaboration in office. For instance, Diamond and Kenny (2012: 8) argue that there is a ‘compelling case’ for greater co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, based on the broader relationship between social democracy and social liberalism. However, British liberalism remains more complex than social democracy combined with more liberal understandings of freedom, and a significant proportion of the Liberal Democrats remain just as aligned with ideas more commonly associated with the Conservative Party (Astle and Bell, 2008, Astle et al., 2006). Similarly for Labour, its ideological tradition is much more than just a liberal conception of social democracy (Geary and Pabst, 2015). The two parties are not necessarily ideologically aligned.

Co-operation also relies on more than just ideology and policy-alignment between parties (Lees et al., 2010). In a context still dominated by competitive party interaction, small policy differences can be exaggerated and emphasised at the expense of party co-operation. Considerations of history and identity are also important: to what extent can parties overcome traditional identities that might be more tribal, and does co-operation with other parties challenge those identities (Dunphy and Bale, 2011)? This potentially represents an obstacle to greater co-operation between parties. While co-operation allows the opportunity to debate policies with like-minded parties, it could also potentially undermine a party's ideological principles. Olsen (2007) found that the merger to form the German 'Left Party' (die Linke) resulted in policy conflict for the different groups involved. Parties could be accused of 'selling-out' should they co-operate with other parties, and lose voters as a consequence (Bale, 2012). Lees et al. (2010) argue that greater co-operation between parties relies on the establishment of trust between key agents in each party. Trust might generally be built, maintained and lost by the actions of party leaders. Policy differences between parties could potentially also undermine trust, and present an obstacle to greater co-operation.

While some parties derive their policy programmes and positions from ideologies with roots in articulated political philosophies, others are more committed to programmatic commitments based on a particularly defined constituency of supporters (Gunther and Diamond, 2003: 171). Incentives to stress or ignore the role of ideology also relates to electoral context, and the extent to which party politics is ideologically convergent or divergent. How much stock a party places in its policy platforms, and how they differ from another party, will help to determine the impact of incentives and obstacles to the broader potential for co-operation with other parties.

2.3.2 Electoral

Assuming that parties are office-seeking, co-operation presents an electoral incentive if it furthers that objective. For example, coalition theory generally assumes that parties look to hold office and power with as few partners as possible. The most likely coalition to form would be that with the minimum number of seats required to form a majority, in order to provide its members with the optimal division of governmental reward (Riker, 1962). This is known as the 'minimum winning coalition' or 'cheapest winning coalition'. Leiserson (1966) adapts this argument, arguing that it is not the minimum number of seats to form a majority

that is decisive, but the minimum number of parties: the most likely coalition to form would be that with the minimum number of parties required to form a majority. Austen-Smith and Banks (1988) argue that the strongest party in parliament, the 'formateur', is the decisive party most likely to form a government. Co-operation is also a consideration for political parties prior to an election. If two parties can find a number of seats where one of them stepping down would heavily improve the other's chances of winning, and vice versa, then both parties could have more representatives in parliament, and further their coalition and blackmail potential. In each instance, co-operation presents an incentive in that it furthers this office-seeking objective.

A key consideration of whether competition or co-operation will favour the office-seeking objectives of political parties is the institutional electoral environment in which they interact, and in particular the electoral system and electoral laws. Duverger (1954) argues that there is a strong association between a single member simple plurality system and two-party competition, firstly at the constituency level and then at the national level. More recently, research has suggested that Duverger's 'law' does not always function as expected, and the single member simple plurality system can often produce multi-party systems (Clough, 2007). Nonetheless, there is a relationship between the type of electoral system and the proportional nature of the outcome, with distortions generally larger in single member systems (Farrell, 2001). This has often meant, despite electoral results suggesting multi-party politics, parliamentary representation in Britain has often remained somewhat two-party, to the extent that it has become embedded in British political culture (Bardi and Mair, 2008, Webb, 2000).

Distortions within the electoral system can also produce heavy victories for one party at the expense of others. It is from this basis that Strøm et al. (1994: 316) argue that the more disproportional the electoral system, the greater the incentive for electoral pacts and alliances. This is on the basis that parties that do not benefit from a disproportionate electoral system should want to balance the rules of the game. On this basis, the UK should be a prime example of pre-electoral pacts. However, as will be discussed in the following chapter, pre-electoral pacts are a rarity in the UK. The main reason for this is that disproportional electoral systems only provide incentives to co-operation where there are a sufficient number of parties (Golder, 2005). The single member simple plurality system favours parties with concentrated geographical support. This has mostly benefited either the Labour or Conservative parties. If Labour and the Conservatives are going to benefit from the electoral system, then there is

little incentive for them to look at co-operation with the smaller parties in the system, as they would not provide enough electoral benefit.

Therefore, it may be more the case that disproportional systems only provide pre-electoral incentives to co-operation when larger parties within a system are negatively affected, although identifying a specific threshold is tricky. As will be discussed throughout the thesis, the Labour Party might be becoming such a party. The UK party system is beginning to accommodate more parties, such as the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish National Party, UKIP, the Green Party, and Plaid Cymru. Indeed, the electoral system heavily benefitted the Scottish National Party in the 2015 general election (they won 95 per cent of the seats in Scotland with 50 per cent of the votes), and to a lesser extent in the 2017 general election (they won 59 per cent of the seats in Scotland with 37 per cent of the votes). As the party system changes, the incentives for co-operation and competition might change.

The discussion so far suggests that the electoral incentives and obstacles to co-operation can be different depending upon the size of a party. Smaller parties may have more incentives to co-operate with other parties, but their reasons for co-operating often also mean they have little to offer as a consequence. A small party might only have a handful of voters in constituencies: while these voters might be crucial in swaying an outcome, the ability of the party to sufficiently influence their voters' actions is more doubtful. This gives them little bargaining power with any potential co-operating parties.

A smaller party on a more extreme wing of a political spectrum, be that left/right/ or authoritarian/liberal, may also alienate any potential co-operating parties' supporters. For example, the Greens and UKIP present very different options to a larger party than the Liberal Democrats. Smaller parties can also face difficulties following co-operation. The comparative literature on coalitions suggests that junior parties struggle to get credit for their participation (Duch et al., 2015, Dunphy and Bale, 2011). For a larger party, this might provide incentives for co-operation to shield themselves from scrutiny, and for a smaller party this might provide an obstacle. Related to this, parties look to fight elections as distinct entities – they seek votes by offering a different programme of policies and agenda to the electorate than their competitors. The 'crowded centre' of party competition, with parties all vying for the centre ground, has already made this increasingly difficult (Green, 2015). The prospect of co-operation with other parties would undermine this even further.

Another particular circumstance that might incentivise co-operation is to avoid or delay electoral defeat in the hope of securing electoral advantage in the future. The Lib-Lab pact of 1977-1978 came about, in part, so that the Labour government could remain in office and not face an immediate election (Hazell and Paun, 2009). The Liberals did not want an election at that point either. The Liberal Democrats also knew that if they did not go into coalition with the Conservatives following the 2010 general election, a second election was a potential outcome, which would have been financially unaffordable for the party (Evans and Sanderson-Nash, 2011). In certain circumstances, preventing an election might amount to an incentive to co-operate.

Co-operation also relies on successful party strategy. Taylor (1973) argues that the decline of the Liberal Party in the 1920s was due primarily to poor decisions made in electoral pacts with the Labour Party. As Franklin et al. (1994) note, people do not always vote rationally. This makes it difficult for parties to know exactly how to plan their strategy. Should parties signal to voters in certain constituencies that they should vote tactically? If they do not at all, then it is unlikely to have a great effect. Yet how might they signal? One way is for a party to publicly state that their chances of winning this seat are nil, and they should consider voting for another like-minded candidate. Another, more subtle way is for a party to reduce the amount of campaigning that it does in a seat, hoping that voters will go to their preferred alternative candidate. Without party signalling however, this is primarily sensible management of scarce resources than articulated co-operation.

Ultimately, there will always be electoral trade-offs for any parties contemplating co-operation with others. In certain cases, electoral incentives could indicate a greater potential for co-operation between parties. Co-operation might provide an opportunity to win more votes or seats and further the prospect of obtaining office and passing legislation. Alternatively, electoral obstacles could indicate a smaller potential for co-operation between parties. Co-operation might improve or damage a party's identity to the electorate, and any electoral benefits of governing might be 'stolen' by another co-operating party. How such trade-offs present themselves at any one time will be crucial in influencing the potential for co-operation.

2.3.3 *Organisational*

As well as electoral and policy incentives and obstacles, the potential for parties to co-operate is also influenced by their organisational structure(s). Parties are not monolithic entities, but multi-faceted organisations, structured around a ruling elite of individuals that is constrained by rules, norms and practices, both formal and informal, within their party organisational structure (Koole, 1994, Rye, 2015). Two questions are therefore important in this context.

First, might the opinions of a party's elite towards party co-operation in government differ from the other strata of their party organisation? Assuming that parties are office-seeking and vote-maximising, there is a need for parties to present a unified message to the electorate. Indeed, one of the key reasons suggested for parties becoming more professionalised is to appeal to a wider electorate than individual party activists and members (Kirchheimer, 1966, Panebianco, 1988). This might suggest that activists and members have different, i.e. more radical, views than the electorate.

Such an assumption was outlined by May (1973) with the 'law of curvilinear disparity', which can be summarised thus: voters are moderate actors and tend to endorse the status quo, or very minor reforms of it at most. Party leaders, as rational actors, are keen to capture their votes in order to achieve political office, and so will cater to the voters' views. Activists stand apart, however, and insist upon far more radical programmes than most voters would support. Parties are thus successful when their elites are able to pursue an electoralist strategy that at the same time does not dissatisfy their activists. Whilst May's hypothesis has influenced much literature on this topic, it is flawed. Norris (1995) responds to May's piece in a study of the various strata of the British Labour and Conservative parties, finding the curvilinear disparity hypothesis wrong on all counts. Kitschelt (1989) is similarly critical, while Van Holsteyn et al. (2015) suggest that May's law should be renamed 'May's myth'. Together, each criticism suggests that the attitudes and interests of members and activists need not be necessarily divergent from party elites, and if they are they might not necessarily be more radical. How different party strata differ in terms of policy and strategy has important consequences for co-operation.

The second question concerns influence: to what extent can the grassroots of a party organisation influence its elite? Whatever the level of divergence on co-operation by party elites and grassroots, grassroots need to be able to act upon their attitudes if it is to present an incentive or obstacle to co-operation. Much of the literature suggests a weakened role for

members and activists within a party's organisation. One strand of thought, famously referred to as the 'iron law of oligarchy' (Michels, (1915) 1959), argues that leadership groups become dominant in democratic organisations, and in his study of the British Labour and Conservative parties, McKenzie (1955) reached similar conclusions. Some arguments inevitably go on to note that such leadership power comes at the expense of grassroots influence. The 'catch-all' party organisational model suggested that leadership elites seek to develop party policy and electoral strategy without the influence of party members (Kirchheimer, 1966). Panebianco (1988) developed this further to point out the decline of traditional party organisation in favour of professionals and leadership groups, influenced by the 'opinion electorate'. Whiteley (2011) argues that increasing state-backing of political parties makes it easier for party members to be ignored.

However without members and activists, parties would not have candidates for local, sub-national and national elections. They would lack democratic legitimacy and struggle to win elections. Fisher and Denver (2009: 196) summarise it as follows.

Party members are the mainstay of traditional constituency campaigning. They provide voluntary labour for a variety of tasks, such as doorstep canvassing, delivering leaflets, taking numbers at polling stations, 'knocking-up' voters on polling day and so on. Without members, it would be nearly impossible to run a traditional constituency campaign focused on identifying supporters and mobilising them on polling day.

Therefore, how parties are organised and where power is located affects wider party activity, and in this context, the potential for parties to co-operate. If the grassroots within a party are powerless, May's Law becomes irrelevant in practice, as the leadership could ignore them with reasonable impunity. If the grassroots have enormous influence, May's Law becomes crucial.

If there are members and activists within a party's grassroots that have different views to co-operation in government to the party elite, what options might they have? Hirschman (1970) uses the concepts of 'exit', 'voice' and 'loyalty' to discuss the options to organisations and consumers in market-based societies. These concepts are also useful in the context of political parties and co-operation between them. In short, should members of either party not get what they want, they have three options.

Firstly, they can ‘exit’ the party. Prior to recent surges, the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties have all faced the issue of declining membership in recent years (Johnson, 2014, Pemberton and Wickham-Jones, 2013, Webb and Bale, 2014). This leads to declining membership revenue and party activism and campaigning. It is also a demonstration of discontent with a party by its (former) members. Those who stay can still exercise their second option: show their ‘voice’. That is, they can voice their discontent from within the organisation. Hirschman (1970: 30) defines voice as ‘any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs’. This can be done both ‘through individual or collective petition to (those) directly in charge... or through various types of actions... that are meant to mobilise public opinion’ (Hirschman, 1970: 30). Voice then represents a form of bargaining; an attempt to convince the leadership that they would be better served agreeing with the party membership. The final option is ‘loyalty’. Loyalty, for Hirschman, is used in relation to voice. As he puts it, ‘a member who wields (or thinks he wields) considerable power in an organization and is therefore convinced that he can get it “back on track” is likely to develop a strong affection for the organization in which he is powerful’ (Hirschman, 1970: 78). However, loyalty is different from blind faith, and it has its limits.

Another organisational consideration is the extent to which party leaders are restricted by their fellow political actors in parliament. Using coalition theory to calculate which parties might form governments with each other implicitly assumes that all representatives in each party will vote the same way. However, if parliamentarians in any co-operating party disagree with co-operation, this becomes a problem. Much in the same way that voters have to rely on what their elected representatives choose to do, so do party leaders. Legislators might find that supporting co-operation might negatively affect their local support, or their constituency party’s support, or they may simply be diametrically opposed to co-operation. The extent to which this influences the decisions that party leaders can take is crucial.

Together, the extent of divergent attitudes between various party strata and the extent to which this influences party strategy will determine the organisational incentives and obstacles to co-operation. Dunphy and Bale (2011) suggest that attention should be paid to organisational unity if success is to be made of co-operation in the arena of government. The same applies in other arenas too. If members and activists wish to challenge decisions to co-operate, and are able to influence party strategy as a consequence, this represents a potential obstacle to co-operation between parties.

2.4 Specifying the framework

The previous section sets out the range of considerations that might substantively affect the potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The aim in the chapter is to present an exploratory framework, to better understand why co-operation may or may not take place. Theoretical expectations can be presented and then analysed. So far, the following expectations that might be met before parties co-operate with each other can be put forward:

For co-operation to take place there should be an expectation...

1. ...that it improves the party's electoral position, either by means of vote-maximising or improving the chances of winning office.
2. ...that parties have compatible ideologies and policies.

The first expectation covers the electoral objectives of a political party: that they seek votes in order to win office. Pre-electorally, parties might co-operate in the hope of improving their share of seats, and in post-electoral co-operation parties might look to form coalitions or legislative arrangements in order to gain power (Debus, 2008, Golder, 2005). The second expectation covers both the ideological and policy objectives of a political party: that a party can implement policies compatible both with their instrumental objectives and their ideological disposition (Budge and Laver, 1986). This is not just a tick-box exercise of policy implementation, but also to what extent parties can preserve their ideological identity without being absorbed, either into government business, or another political party (Dunphy and Bale, 2011). Both expectations should be considered by parties simultaneously.

Such models of party elite behaviour, and subsequent expectations regarding co-operation, fall under rational choice understandings of party interaction. In this sense, arguments made in this thesis accept the rational choice argument that it is possible to model a theoretical understanding of party co-operation, from which descriptive and causal inferences can be made (Dowding, 2006: 28). It assumes a similar spatial theoretical model to that applied to party competition by Downs (1957). It also encompasses the rational choice theory applied to government formation by Riker (1962), Axelrod (1970), De Swann (1970) and others in recognising the primacy of party elites and their individual agency.

However, a pure rational choice model would only deliver a model of party behaviour devoid of any meaningful structural constraint. It would suggest that co-operation is a one-shot game without contributing factors or subsequent consequence, as opposed to rooted in a series of path dependencies and institutional factors. As such, on its own a rational choice model is in danger of underestimating the extent to which parties are multi-level organisations, influenced by their complex institutional history and ethos (Rye, 2015). Understandings of why co-operation takes place must also go beyond notions of power or spatial alignment that fit under the policy, office and votes trade-off (Muller and Strøm, 1999); they should also understand how each party's organisational and institutional context influences their party elites.

Whose interest is important in a party organisation? The thesis works from the assumption that political parties are stratarchical organisations ordinarily dominated by party elites. Those elites are dominant within their party, but also accountable to other levels of the party organisation to varying degrees (Koole, 1994). As Carty (2004: 21) argues:

Leadership in these parties is, to borrow Koole's term, vulnerable. It is at once both strong and fragile. Leaders have enormous command over the policy and parliamentary life of their parties and are relatively free to move in electorally opportunistic ways as they see fit. At the same time, they must satisfy the policy and electoral demands of their supporters and the career aspirations of their professional colleagues.

The key issue here is the extent to which party leaders can exercise 'authority' in their organisations. What really counts is not one's formal position but the informal authority one is granted (Bennister et al., 2015: 418). Their authority rests both on their skills and the environment in which they can exercise them. Their skills matter, such as their physical, emotional and managerial capability to bring about their interests and objectives. However, what is also important is being able to rely on the support of those institutions and environments that enable them to act.

Party leaders rely on their organisations to be able to act. Members and activists through their local parties provide a direct link between political parties and their voters. Their organisations provide the financial stability and security from which parties can contest elections, as well as the mobilisation of supporters and the local presence of their political parties in various local, regional and sub-national institutions. This importance of

organisations has been shown both comparatively, and specifically in the parties explored in this thesis (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005, Russell, 2005b, Samuels and Zucco, 2015).

Should the two parties decide to co-operate with each other in some form, the organisational literature suggests that the extent and direction of each party's organisational influence will affect the potential for co-operation. For example, Michel's 'iron law of oligarchy' would suggest that the grassroots might only minimally affect the party elite. However, if they have a greater effect, May's Law would suggest that this might lead a party in a different direction to that wished by their party elite. Four more expectations can thus be proposed.

For co-operation to take place there should be an expectation...

1. ...that a party's grassroots are likely only to have weak influence within a party organisation, or;
2. ...that if a party's grassroots have influence, they should not be more radical than their leaders.

It is also then an expectation that parties with stronger and/or more radical grassroots are less likely to engage in co-operation with other parties. In setting out these expectations, the framework stresses the importance of institutional and organisational considerations alongside more rational, agent-led theories. It maintains that the potential for co-operation relies on choices made by elite actors in political parties. This allows existing rational choice contributions to the comparative literature on party interaction to be incorporated. Second, it recognises that such choices are rooted in institutional contexts not entirely within elite actors' control. This allows for analysis of ideological, electoral and organisational effects on co-operation. As Strøm (1990: 574-575) argues, 'party leaders... are constrained by the organisational properties of their parties... [and] the institutional environment in which their parties operate'. It does not extend as far as solely institutionalist, in that it still recognises the primacy of elite party actors (Hindmoor, 2011). A visual aid to this process is illustrated in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Party behaviour and continual interaction

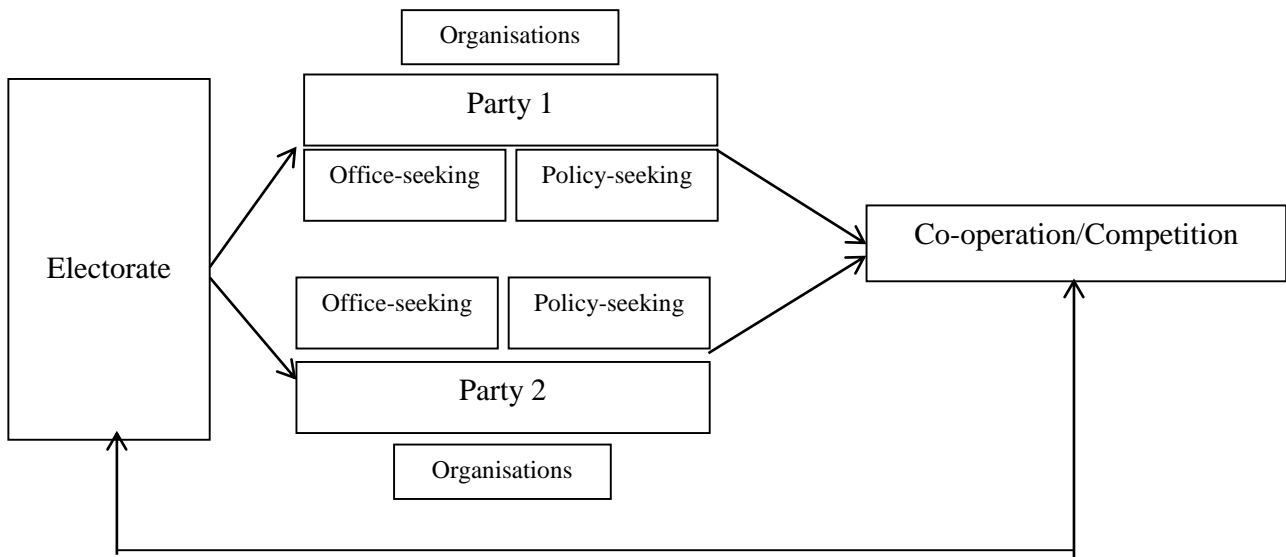


Figure 2.1 demonstrates the different influences that affect political parties and the choices they make, and the effect this has on whether parties co-operate or compete. It is important to consider the interactions between these incentives and obstacles. Sometimes, they might not be in conflict. A policy that two parties can sincerely and comfortably agree on, that at the same time wins votes and satisfies the grassroots, does not require much of a trade-off.

However, that this happens all of the time is unlikely. In the context of party competition and co-operation, this has consequences. Co-operation might have electoral benefits for parties in that it improves their office-seeking objectives, but it might mean sacrificing certain policies, or aggravating members and activists of their organisation. This is particularly interesting in Britain, where governments enjoy a lot more control over the policy process than oppositions. Co-operation to win office thus brings with it policy incentives and obstacles: without co-operation a party might not be in government to implement a policy, but with co-operation they will likely need to compromise on certain things to satisfy another party's objectives.

Although they are presented with equal weighting in Figure 1, these trade-offs are not fixed, and are subject to some degrees of structural and agential effect. The extent to which party

elites value some objectives over others will influence the extent to which different incentives and obstacles affect party behaviour and the potential for co-operation, but so will the institutional and structural constraints upon them.⁹ The trade-offs between different incentives and obstacles to co-operation will also have different effects over time. As Strøm (1990: 573) argues in relation to competition, ‘it is a question of how steeply parties discount future benefits’. For example, co-operation might help one or more parties win office, but government incumbency might bring with it costs at a later stage. In particular, those costs might be greater as a specific consequence of co-operation. For example, the Liberal Democrats lost heavily, both electorally and organisationally, between 2010 and 2015 due to co-operation with the Conservatives (Johnson, 2014, Johnson and Middleton, 2016).

Similarly, co-operation itself will require different actions and commitments over time. For instance, two parties entering into a form of co-operation might require a certain level of policy compatibility or compromise. However, to sustain it over time is a different matter. Over a period of time, such as a parliamentary session, a coalition or legislative agreement will be tested by the policies it agrees during its formation, but also by its response to current events. These may be events that political parties have prepared for, or events that are unforeseen. For example, a conservative party openly willing to use military force and a liberal party more hesitant might respond differently to calls for intervention in a foreign country. A social democratic party and a conservative party might respond differently to a major banking crisis. These are issues which might not test parties at the start of a period of co-operation, but could do so later on.

It is from this position that this thesis considers the concept of co-operation, and why it might or might not happen. As noted above, it is an exploratory and speculative framework. Testable hypotheses are not the explicit aim: it is one case study aimed as much at analysing the contemporary nature of interaction between Labour and the Liberal Democrats as it is building a theory. As Gunther and Diamond (2003) argue, whilst frameworks might speak of ideal ‘typologies’, parties do not conform to such specific expectations. This framework will

⁹ The continuing debate between structure and agency is discussed further in the specific chapter on leadership.

serve to provide a foundation of co-operation and competition between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, and hopefully inform analysis of each party.

2.5 Conclusion

Co-operation is something often talked about, promoted and referenced both in academic literature and in British politics more broadly. However, discussion of it as a concept rarely goes beyond individual situations and types. This chapter has provided a more detailed conceptual overview of co-operation and its potential in aiding understanding party interaction. In doing so, it has recognised the importance but also the limits of focusing only on post-electoral coalitions and their potential. There are a variety of types of co-operation open to parties in different contexts, and this chapter has presented a diverse framework from which to understand them.

This chapter has also provided an explanatory element from which to understand party co-operation. It offers three conclusions. First, co-operation relies on there being compatible interests to be jointly pursued. Most of the incentives to co-operation in this chapter relate to it being a helpful means to other ends of political competition, such as achieving office or defeating a greater opponent. Politics remains primarily competitive, and parties will look to co-operate if it provides means to other ends. Second, even in those circumstances, co-operation is dependent upon a range of incentives and obstacles. Electoral, ideological and organisational considerations affect the decisions made by leaders in political parties. Finally, if co-operation between parties is difficult to achieve because it relies on a balance of various incentives and obstacles, it is ultimately difficult because it relies on there being a balance in more than one party. As noted above in a tentative and broad definition of co-operation, it relies on parties recognising that their interests cannot necessarily be achieved alone. As will be discussed throughout this thesis, this recognition can be a difficult task for political parties in Britain.

Alongside the already theoretically dense and empirically tested notions of party competition, party co-operation has now received some more attention. This chapter has hopefully shown the many different facets and forms of co-operation that are possible between political parties. Presented in this way, co-operation can hopefully be better understood alongside the incentives and obstacles that promote or inhibit it, and allow a broader discussion of its relationship with party competition and interaction.

Chapter 3: The party system and Labour-Liberal Democrat interaction

This chapter examines Labour and the Liberal Democrat parties' previous interaction in more detail. This is related to the broader UK party system in which parties compete and co-operate. How this has developed over time is important for understanding how parties interact, and how this might affect the potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The UK party system has long been classified as two-party (Duverger, 1954, Mair, 2009, Quinn, 2013, Sartori, 1976). In fact, this classification has largely rested on one period of the twentieth century, 1945 to 1970. Cast that period aside, and we arrive at very different understandings about what the UK party system actually looks like (Bogdanor, 2004). This chapter sets out the evolution of the party system, and where this leaves the potential for Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation.

Following the 2010 general election, the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties discussed policy areas and potential distribution of offices, and how that might be translated into an agreement spanning a full parliamentary term. Despite predictions that it would not happen, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats formed a coalition government (Bale, 2011b, Dunleavy, 2010). Ahead of the 2015 general election, a hung parliament and subsequent coalition negotiations were widely predicted (Hanretty et al., 2015). The 2017 general election resulted in a hung parliament, and a formal agreement between the Conservatives and the Democratic Unionist Party. The multi-level nature of the UK party system has also led to greater co-operation between parties at local and sub-national levels (Bennie and Clark, 2003, Lynch, 2007).

This period of increased attention on co-operation is not the result of a one-off election, but instead the culmination of change in the party system (Curtice, 2010). The underlying argument in this chapter is that changes in the party system have contributed to more active consideration of co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. This is not to say that they are either necessary or sufficient, but that changes in the underlying party system have affected each party's coalition potential, the potential for single-party government, and the reasons why each party might contemplate competition or co-operation. As such, it is necessary to take a longer term approach to the UK party system. First, the chapter introduces party system theory and demonstrates that the two-party system that characterises British politics from 1945 to 1970 has mistakenly characterised as the norm before and ever since.

Second, it looks at the nature of competition and co-operation between parties in Britain, and how this has changed over time. Finally, it assesses the party system after 2010, and where this leaves the potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. Throughout, the chapter will apply the framework to other examples of co-operation.¹⁰

3.1 Understanding party systems and party interaction

The very notion of a party system implies the existence of a plurality of parties (Bardi and Mair, 2008, Sartori, 1976). There have been two broad approaches to how systems might be understood. The first is to look at the number of parties that make up the system. A system in this sense is little more than the description of the combination of its combined parts (Bardi and Mair, 2008). Therefore, if there are two main parties that exist in a system then we have a two party system or three parties in a three party system, and so on. The distinction in this case often becomes between two party systems and multi-party systems (i.e., more than two parties) (Duverger, 1954). Blondel (1968) later added the distinction of the ‘two-and-a-half party system’ to account for smaller parties.

Blondel’s argument suggests that some parties count more than others in a party system. How parties are ‘counted’ within a system depends on what is measured. The most widely articulated numerical method of ‘counting’ was provided by Laakso and Taagepera (1979), who developed a formula for counting the ‘effective number of parties’ in a system. Parties can be measured by their influence in the electoral arena (share of the popular vote) (ENEP) or by their influence in the parliamentary arena (share of parliamentary seats won) (ENPP). The perfectly equal two-party system, in their measure, will have an effective number of 2.0. If a dominant party were to win 60 per cent of the vote in an election, and the other 40 per cent, the effective number using share of the popular vote would be 1.6 (Flinders, 2005: 68-

¹⁰ For two reasons, this will be a limited application. First, there is not the time and space to look at each case in-depth. Second, to adequately analyse each case requires quantitative data and qualitative data, such as that utilised with regard to Labour and the Liberal Democrats in this PhD study, which is otherwise not available.

69). Three equal parties would generate an effective number of 3.0, and so on. How this plays out in the UK party system will be shown later in this chapter.

What this approach lacks, however, is any real sense of the interactions between parties within a system. The second approach views a party system as precisely that: a *system*, as opposed to a *set* of parties. Sartori’s framework of party systems dominates this particular approach. He argues that:

The concept of system is meaningless – for purposes of scientific inquiry – unless (i) the system displays properties that do not belong to a separate consideration of its component elements and (ii) the system results from, and consists of, the patterned interactions of its component parts, thereby implying that such interactions provide the boundaries, or at least the boundedness, of the system. . . . Parties make for a ‘system’, then, only when they are parts (in the plural); and a party system is precisely the system of interactions resulting from inter-party competition (Sartori, 1976: 3-4).

Sartori (1976) proposed a new framework of analysis based more on the nature of interaction within a party system, identifying four key types. These are shown in Table 3.1. Sartori suggested that parties only have ‘relevance’ in a system if they have ‘coalition potential’ (the ability to form part of a feasible coalition that could govern) or ‘blackmail potential’ (the ability to affect the behaviour of those parties that have coalition potential).

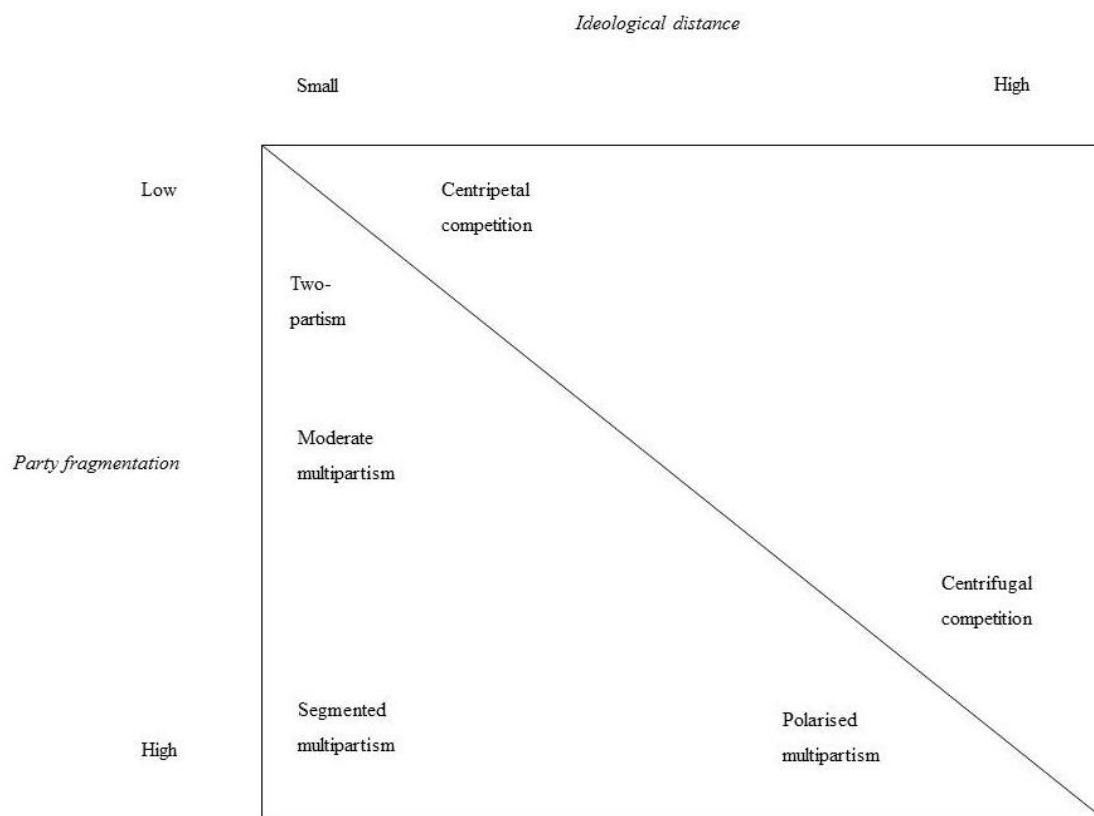
Table 3.1: Sartori’s four types of party system

Type	Number of ‘main’ parties	Nature of interaction	Competition or cooperation
Predominant party	1	One party government control for a significant period of time (three elections or more).	Competition (weak)
Two-party	2	Small ideological distance between centrist parties on a left-right scale. Alternating one party government.	Competition
Moderate pluralism	3-5	Small ideological distance between centrist parties on a left-right scale. At least three relevant parties, so coalitions generally obligatory. Single-party government still possible, but likely to be ‘feeble’.	Co-operation and competition
Polarised pluralism	5+	Large ideological distance across a wider spectrum. Coalition government due to fragmentation of party vote.	Co-operation and competition

Source: Sartori (1976).

The end of Sartori's quote provides his definition of a party system: that it is 'precisely the system of interactions resulting from inter-party competition'. However, a party system is not necessarily defined solely by competition. A party system is also defined by the extent to which parties co-operate with each other. Any definition of a party system therefore needs to also note within it the potential for co-operation as well as competition. Webb (2000: 1) addresses this, and argues that a party system is 'a particular pattern of competitive and cooperative interactions displayed by a given set of political parties'. Mair (2009: 287) similarly uses Sartori's understanding of a party system to define it as 'the system of interactions between political parties that results from their mutual competition or cooperation'.

Figure 3.1: Sartori's classification of party systems



Source: Sartori (1976: 292)

Key to Sartori's classification of party systems is the explicit focus on the interactions of political parties, and the relationship between the party system and the nature of interaction. The two key aspects are party fragmentation (i.e. the number of parties) and the ideological distance between the parties involved. He argued that systems with few parties tended to have small ideological differences, with centripetal competition. On the other hand, in systems with lots of parties, the ideological distance between political parties was likely to be or become particularly polarised, with centrifugal competition and parties vacating the centre. In Sartori's three types of party system that involve multiple 'main' parties¹¹, the two-party system is characterised by small ideological distance between parties and centripetal competition. Moderately pluralist systems exhibit similar characteristics, but with more parties (usually three to five) and slightly greater ideological distance, and polarised pluralist systems are characterised by a large number of parties and a large ideological distance across the system. Figure 3.1 shows Sartori's model in simplified form, mapping out the relationship between party fragmentation and ideological distance between parties, and the subsequent nature of centripetal or centrifugal competition.

Historically, Britain has been argued to be a 'two-party' system (Blondel, 1968, Duverger, 1954, Quinn, 2013, Sartori, 1976, Webb, 2000). This is based on the notion that only the two major parties within it (in the British context, the Labour and Conservative parties) will ever win enough votes or seats to govern. This was mostly the case in Britain between 1945 and 1970. During this period, Britain broadly matched the nature of competition identified by Sartori as typical within a two-party system. As well as having two-party competition in the electoral and parliamentary arena, in that no other party had coalition or blackmail potential¹², such competition was largely centripetal. While the Labour and Conservative parties still had electoral competition based on ideological differences between 1945 and 1970, at no point was this debate heavily polarised. Quinn (2013) argues that between 1945 and 1970, Britain's

¹¹ The predominant party system's key characteristic is the dominance of one 'main' party; it is thus not by the nature of competition or co-operation, but the lack of it.

¹² There are minor exceptions to this: Labour might have looked to rely on the Liberals between 1950 and 1951, and Labour also discussed co-operation with the Liberal Party following the 1964 general election. However, both are rare and small examples.

party system was a perfect example of the two-party framework, in which both parties sought to best match the wishes of the median voter.

The party system is therefore important for the potential for co-operation between political parties, in that it manipulates how parties interact (Sartori, 1986). A two-party system suggests intense zero-sum competition, with a winner-takes-all mentality for both parties (Mair, 1997). A multi-party system with more than five parties, what Sartori labels polarised pluralism, suggests that co-operation is required in order to win office and implement policy. Such systems also suggest a greater ideological distance between all of the parties. A more moderate form of pluralist party system suggests a mix of competition and co-operation. A winner-takes-all style of competition is still possible, but it is unlikely to be guaranteed, and smaller parties will threaten the likelihood of single-party government.

Mair (2009) argues that the UK party system has helped to maintain two-party competition. In UK general elections, while voters are theoretically free to choose between a large number of candidates from different parties for whichever reasons they might have and whichever preferences they wish to express, the democratic purpose is to convert those votes through the party system to choose a government. The UK is able to maintain two-party competition because the competition for government is so narrowly and restrictively structured. As Bardi and Mair (2008: 153) argue, 'it is the sheer embeddedness of the British 'two-party system' which facilitates the long-term survival of two particular parties' and subsequent two-party competition.

However, the period from 1945 to 1970 represents just one phase of the UK party system. It is not the case that Britain has always epitomised a competitive party system with no co-operation. As Clarke (2010) argues, 'the idea that Britons are constitutionally inured against coalitions is manifestly not true'. In one paragraph, Butler (1978b: 112) summarised the conventional wisdom of British politics and then the inadequacy of it.

Single-party government in the British system is the norm. Politicians and writers on politics assume that, in all but exceptional circumstances, one party will have a Parliamentary majority and will conduct the nation's affairs. In fact clear-cut single-party government has been much less prevalent than many would suppose. The years from 1945 to 1974 have coloured contemporary thinking but, even with their inclusion, governments relying on a majority drawn from a single party have held office for less than half the twentieth century.

Only by reviewing the evolution of the party system over a longer period time can the potential for co-operation for Labour and the Liberal Democrats be reviewed and analysed. This also allows for analysis of what Smith (1989) labels the ‘core’ of a party system. If there have been underlying changes to the party system, this contributes to the potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. Finally, it allows analysis of parties themselves, and developments in their history which have incentivised or constrained co-operation. To be clear, this chapter is focusing on the national party system. It adopts Peter Mair’s (2009) argument that local and sub-national politics represent related but different party systems from national politics. As such, this chapter uses local and sub-national political events where appropriate for context or for understanding Labour-Liberal Democrat interaction, but its focus remains the national party system. The next section analyses evolution of the party system, focusing on pre-1945, 1945-1970 and 1970 to the present day.¹³

3.2 Party system evolution

3.2.1 Pre-1945: multi-party politics

The early period of the 20th century was characterised by multi-party politics. The Liberal and Conservative parties were the largest parties in the system, with the Liberal Unionist, Labour and Irish parties also involved. Theoretically, a combination of multi-party politics and a single member simple plurality electoral system provides incentives for pre-electoral co-operation, so that votes are not wasted when translated into seats (Golder, 2005, Strøm et al., 1994). Indeed, the Conservative and Liberal Unionist parties had been involved in an electoral pact from 1886 until their formal merger in 1912. Bogdanor (2004: 718) argues that during this period there was a ‘multi-party but two bloc system’.

This period saw the beginnings of the Labour Party, and subsequently a relationship between Labour and the Liberal parties. Between 1874 and 1910 there were ‘Lib-Lab’ MPs: they were

¹³ One can go back in time and point to the Fox and North government in 1782, Grenville’s ‘Ministry of All the Talents’ in 1806, the Earl of Aberdeen’s government in 1852, and indeed the Home Rule crisis government of 1885 as examples of deviations from two-party politics. However, to maintain a contribution to a thesis on contemporary party co-operation, this chapter will focus instead on party system evolution from the period surrounding the Labour Party’s inception.

some of the first working class representatives in parliament, taking the Liberal whip whilst being able to speak freely on issues relating to labour and employment (Hudson, 2003). They only began to fade away following the formation of the Labour Representative Committee in 1900, formally re-named as the Labour Party in 1906. The formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 resulted in fifteen candidates and two MPs in the 1900 election, followed by 29 MPs in 1906, 40 MPs in January 1910 and 42 MPs in December 1910. By 1910, most of the Lib-Lab MPs had moved to the Labour Party (Liberal History Group, 2010). Labour's success during this period was in part due to the secret electoral pact signed by Liberal Chief Whip Herbert Gladstone and Labour Representation Committee secretary Ramsay Macdonald. The Liberals agreed not to contest around 50 seats where Labour had a better chance of defeating the Conservative candidate. Alongside office-seeking motivations for co-operation, the two parties also agreed on areas of ideology and policy. During this time, Gladstone argued that he saw 'no material line of difference' between the two parties on key aspects of policy (Powell, 1986: 383), and Labour was influenced by the social liberals of the day as much as it was the socialists (Diamond and Kenny, 2010).

The pact was an immediate electoral success for the Labour Party, with 24 of their 29 MPs winning in the 1906 general election unopposed by the Liberal Party. Whilst the Liberals won a comfortable parliamentary majority, this was as much due to divisions within the Unionist coalition rather than any huge revival of support for the Liberal Party (Otte, 2011: 82). Indeed, the Liberals appeared content to avoid any specific announcements ahead of the election, preferring to allow the Unionists to divide themselves over tariff reform, education and welfare. Meanwhile, the 1906 general election gave Labour legitimacy in parliament, and the 29 MPs went on to form the Labour Party, distinct from the Liberal government.

The Liberal Party continued to implicitly assist and accommodate the rise of the Labour Party, setting up a Royal Commission on Electoral Systems in 1908, and passing the 1913 Trade Union Act to allow trade unions to maintain a political fund, from which payments could be made to a political party (Bogdanor, 2004). The more that the Liberals adjusted their policies and positions to accommodate Labour, the more they succeeded only in emphasising the differences between their respective parties' approaches to politics (Powell, 1986). In particular, it emphasised the Liberals' inability to represent the working class vote, and Labour's increasing ability to do so.

Although 1906 saw the election of a Liberal government with a large majority, the 1906-1914 period ultimately witnessed the start of the long term decline of the Liberal Party and the breakdown of the relationship between the Liberal and Labour parties. Hudson (2003) argues that the failure of the Liberal Party to boost the number of Lib-Lab MPs was its ultimate failure, and the subsequent inability to represent working class interests allowed the Labour Party to replace it as the main opposition to the Conservative Party in British politics. McKibbin (1974) echoes these sentiments, and also suggests that the Liberal-Labour alliance was dependent upon a working arrangement that was slowly disappearing, as the Liberals failed to represent the working class.

The Liberals won the most seats in both general elections in 1910, although only by a handful of seats ahead of the Conservatives in each case. They relied on the Labour and Irish Parliamentary parties to govern, but there were no coalitions. Both Labour and the Irish Parliamentary Party were committed to remaining outside government. Both feared losing their identity, and being swallowed up by the larger Liberal Party (Otte, 2011). Not only was it not a governing coalition, but nor was it a formal parliamentary co-operative arrangement. Boston and Bullock (2012) write of recent New Zealand politics as evidence of coalition theory inadequately accounting for the diversity of governing arrangements, but UK party politics in the early 20th century would also be an appropriate case study.

The governments throughout the First World War were a mixture of political truces and coalitions, led by Herbert Asquith and David Lloyd George. For the latter period of the war, Lloyd George led the country but Asquith still had control of the Liberal Party organisation. Following on from the Gladstone-Macdonald pact fifteen years earlier, the Conservatives and Coalition Liberals went into the 1918 general election in an electoral pact following the end of the war. Asquith's Liberals were heavily defeated, and the election resulted in a continuation of the Conservative-Liberal coalition. Conservative rebellions forced Lloyd George's resignation in 1922, and both the Liberals and Lloyd George's National Liberals performed very badly in the subsequent general election. The period also marked the end of coalition for some time. As Otte (2011: 98) argues, 'in October 1922, the coalition died with a whimper. No one mourned its passing; no one missed it afterwards; no one demanded its return. The notion of coalition government in peacetime, indeed remained discredited'. The period also saw the weakening of the Liberal Party to the extent that they no longer commanded a primary position in British party politics after 1922. While they continued to have influence for brief periods in hung parliaments in 1924 and 1929-1931, they appeared powerless to

influence the agenda to such an extent as to revive their fortunes. However, Marquand (1978: 72-73) credits the Liberal Party during the period for ensuring their continued existence by finding the right balance between staying in government and being in opposition.

The divide between Labour and the Liberals also increased during the period after World War One. Prior to 1914, both parties co-operated in the legislative and electoral arenas, but after 1918 they were divided by greater ideological differences. In 1918, the Labour Party changed its constitution. Whilst there is strong disagreement about whether the 1918 constitution committed the party to a programme of socialism (see Bogdanor, 1981, Cole, 1948, McKibbin, 1974, McKibbin, 2010), it is widely accepted that the Labour Party was moving away from the idea of the 'progressive alliance' to a focus on a broader response to capitalism, and that their view was becoming increasingly different to the Liberals. The difference was somewhat mitigated by the Liberals' own ideological shift to a more New Liberal position (see Green, 1895, Hobhouse, 1911). Nonetheless, the two parties appeared further apart than they were previously.

There was also a greater sense of hostility between party elites. In 1924, MacDonald 'reverted again and again to his dislike of the Liberals', claiming the 'feeling against the liberals was general in the party' (Bogdanor, 1981: 137). Similarly, Henderson declared to the Labour Party Conference in 1918 that 'as long as he ever lived he should never be a member of any other government, whatever its colour, unless Labour was in control' (Bogdanor, 1981: 137). Electoral strategy coincided with Henderson's declaration when the National Executive Committee decided that the party should contest all seats in the future, ending the electoral pact that had previously existed (McKibbin, 1974: 112-113).

During the period 1918-1931 the Liberals were unable to present themselves as representing the newly-franchised working class, and Labour opted to compete with the Liberal Party instead of co-operate, and then ultimately to replace them as the anti-Conservative party in British politics (McKibbin, 1974: 112-123). The period did, however, see increased co-operation between Labour and the Co-operative Party. In 1927, an agreement was reached, which became known as the Cheltenham Agreement, in which Co-operative Party candidates would run under the Labour banner, and work in tandem with them during elections (Redvaldsen, 2010). This formed part of a broader agreement between the two parties ahead of the 1929 general election, including consultation on each party's manifesto, and shared stages at party events in constituencies across the country. Labour had attempted to forge

some form of alliance with the Co-operative Union before the Co-operative Party was formed at the end of the First World War, both on tactical and ideological grounds (McKibbin, 1974: 43). Tactically, any electoral support that the Co-operative Party won would be primarily at Labour's expense. Ideologically, the co-operative movement was argued to stand alongside the labour movement in advancing the working-class cause. While Labour hoped that the Co-operative Party would eventually be assimilated into their organisation (Cole, 1948), the two have remained separate entities that nonetheless co-operate strongly with each other, with 25 Labour and Co-operative Party MPs in parliament at the time of writing.

Going into the 1930s, British politics was defined by intra-party and inter-party conflict and disagreement. Labour Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald's 1929 government faced economic turmoil, and there were significant disagreements in the Cabinet. Macdonald joined the Conservatives, Liberals and National Liberals in a National Government, which subsequently easily won the 1931 general election. Labour, now split from Ramsay Macdonald, saw their vote and seat share collapse, winning just 52 seats. The vast majority of parliamentary support for the government came from the Conservatives (470 MPs) rather than the National Liberals (35 MPs), Liberals (33 MPs) or Macdonald's National Labour (13 MPs). Nonetheless, Macdonald remained Prime Minister: the government's majority was arguably as much his as it was the Conservatives' (Marquand, 1978). Those in Labour opposing Macdonald saw co-operation with the Conservatives as a betrayal. While at the beginning of the government, it was a genuine coalition, it increasingly became a Conservative government of which Macdonald played a reduced part. Macdonald was eventually replaced by Stanley Baldwin.

The 1935 general election brought about another majority for the National Government, albeit reduced as Labour recovered under Clement Attlee's leadership. There were bitter disputes between the parties over economic affairs, and eventually foreign affairs ahead of World War Two. Labour strongly opposed Baldwin's replacement, Neville Chamberlain. In 1940, following the outbreak of war Labour refused to join the government under Chamberlain, and eventually agreed to join Churchill's government in May 1940. Taylor (1978: 74) argues that the 1940-1945 government was more than just a successfully united coalition, but a government 'in the unique position of commanding the almost unanimous allegiance of both parliament and country'. Unlike many other examples discussed in this chapter, party interest was potentially subservient to national interest, given the overwhelming priority of defeating Germany. However, party interest was still there. Labour strengthened its position by becoming a genuine governing alternative to the Conservatives, and while the Conservatives

were briefly weakened in the 1945 general election, they quickly recovered. Nonetheless, it was a successful act of co-operation between two distinct political parties.

The period prior to 1945 shows that the British party system is not necessarily defined solely by competition over co-operation. In this period, parties engaged in governing coalitions, informal legislative agreements and electoral pacts. It was in various parties' interests to co-operate as well as compete. However, by the end of the period the party system was beginning to take the shape that it would assume for the next fifty years: a two-party system of Labour and Conservative party competition centred around socio-economic issues (Bogdanor, 2004, Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). The 1929 general election marked the first election with universal suffrage, as women over the age of 21 achieved the vote. Following the universalisation of suffrage, Lipset and Rokkan (1967: 50) suggest that 'the party systems of the 1960s [across Europe] reflect with few significant exceptions the cleavage structure of the 1920s'. In essence, the party system in Britain had 'frozen'. The increasing politicisation of the industrial working class and the resulting political debate on economic issues, barring times of great political turbulence between 1929 and 1945, created the conditions for a two-party system and primarily competitive party politics which was to define the following period.

3.2.2 1945-1970: two-party competition

In Sartori's classification of party systems (see Table 3.1 and Figure 3.1), he argues that two-party politics should be characterised by three conditions. First, competition should be based on moderate ideological distance between a centre-left party and a centre-right party. Second, it should be a zero-sum game where the winner takes all and governs alone, and the winner changes on a somewhat regular basis. This satisfies the office-seeking requirement of political parties: that they look to govern with as few partners as possible. Third, the winner should change on a regular basis (at least every three elections) so that competition remains and does not get reduced to a predominant party system. In practice, no system will perfectly conform to every element of a classification, but it provides a useful means of understanding a party system.

From 1945 to 1970, British politics reasonably characterised Sartori's notion of a two-party system, although the same party (the Conservatives) won a majority in three consecutive general elections between 1951 and 1964. It was, however, winner-takes-all. The incentive to govern alone is clear: the winning party has a majority in the House of Commons, dependent

only on its own party's MPs to support its governmental programme. Ideally, the only obstacle will be the opposing dominant party, who will do all it can to gain power back at the next general election, and subsequently govern alone. Following World War II, between the general elections of 1945 and 1970, Britain only had single party government, with Labour in power for 12 years and the Conservatives for 13. Table 3.2 shows general election results between 1945 and 2015, along with the share of the vote and seats for the Labour and Conservative parties, and the Laakso-Taagepera index for the 'effective number of parties' in the party system (both electoral and parliamentary). As the Table 3.2 shows, the effective number of parliamentary parties remained very stable between 1945 and 1970, and while the effective number of electoral parties was larger, it never exceeded 2.5.

For part of this period, the Liberals have been argued to be marginal in British politics to the extent of being irrelevant (Ware, 1996: 148).¹⁴ This is not to say that Britain was a two-party system during this period in any literal sense of the term, or that it was characterised solely by competition. The Liberal Party contested over one hundred parliamentary seats at each election, winning a small number of them, and during this time various forms of inter-party co-operation were discussed between parties. Winston Churchill continued to seek an anti-socialist alliance with the Liberals, fostering what became known as the Woolton-Teviot agreement in 1947, which merged the National Liberals with the Conservative Party at the constituency level (Butler, 1978a: 95).

Pressure for Conservative-Liberal co-operation continued throughout the 1950s and 1960s, with a Cabinet post offered to Clement Davies following the 1951 general election, and some Conservative candidates continued to stand with 'Liberal' in their title (Butler, 1978a). While there was no great enthusiasm in the Labour Party for increased co-operation between Labour and the Liberals during this period, following the 1964 general election, there were public utterances that co-operation might be necessary to ensure governmental stability. Liberal leader Jo Grimond argued that 'if you are living on a small majority it is common sense... to approach the Liberals... with proposals for active co-operation' (Butler, 1978a: 100).

¹⁴ Ware particularly refers to the 1950s. Whilst in 1951, it can be argued that the Liberals deprived Labour of a majority in the House of Commons, this was precisely because of their irrelevance – the votes that the party lost from the 1950 general election largely went to the Conservatives rather than to Labour.

However, these were small exceptions in an era largely dominated by the two main parties. The lowest combined vote share for Labour and the Conservatives was 87.4 per cent (in 1964) and the minimum seat share 94.7 per cent (in 1945). Although the Liberals achieved 11.2 per cent of the vote in 1964, this was a high compared with a low of 2.5 per cent in 1951.

While the two-party system was largely maintained during this period, it is worth noting the extent to which intra-party organisation played a part. The two parties that arguably dominated the party system, as noted in various points throughout this chapter and thesis, are broad churches, to the extent that they themselves encompassed other parties or names under their banner. Thus, the Conservatives' electoral results during this period include those standing under the Scottish Unionist banner in Scotland, as well as National Liberal associations, and Labour's electoral results include those with Co-operative Party associations. Whilst the period 1945-1970 was broadly defined by two-party politics, it was not defined solely by competition. In contrast to Bogdanor's (2004) argument that prior to World War One British politics was multi-party but two bloc, during the period 1945-1970 British politics had multiple blocs, but under the banner of two parties.

The incentives for these alliances, as in the previous periods, were multi-faceted. Both Labour and the Conservatives saw electoral gain through their associations with these smaller parties, shoring up important support in particular areas of the country. There was also an ideological connection. Churchill saw co-operation with the various guises of Liberals throughout the period both as a means of ensuring an anti-socialist pact, but also to express his distaste for certain wings of the Conservative parliamentary party (Charmley, 2011). For Labour, by this point their co-operation with the Co-operative Party had become long established, and there was no reason to end it.

Table 3.2 – UK general election results since 1945

	Conservative		Labour		Lib. Dem.		Others		Laakso/Taagepera		Lab. + Con.	
	Vote %	Seats N	Vote %	Seats N	Vote %	Seats N	Vote %	Seats N	ENEP N	ENPP N	Vote %	Seats N
1945	39.8	213	48.3	393	9.1	12	2.7	22	2.5	2.1	87.6	94.7
1949	43.5	299	46.1	315	9.1	9	1.3	2	2.4	2.1	89.6	98.1
1951	48.0	321	48.8	295	2.5	6	0.7	3	2.1	2.1	96.8	98.6
1955	49.7	345	46.4	277	2.7	6	1.1	2	2.2	2.0	96.1	98.7
1959	49.4	365	43.8	258	5.9	6	0.9	1	2.3	2.0	93.2	98.9
1964	43.4	304	44.1	317	11.2	9	1.3	0	2.5	2.1	87.4	98.4
1966	41.9	253	47.9	363	8.5	12	1.7	2	2.4	2.0	89.7	97.8
1970	46.4	330	43.0	287	7.5	6	3.1	7	2.5	2.1	89.4	97.9
1974(F)	37.8	297	37.1	301	19.3	14	5.8	23	3.1	2.3	74.9	94.2
1974(O)	35.8	277	39.2	319	18.3	13	6.7	26	3.2	2.3	75.0	93.7
1979	43.9	339	37.0	269	13.8	11	5.3	16	2.9	2.1	80.9	95.6
1983	42.4	397	27.6	209	25.4	23	4.6	21	3.5	2.1	70.0	93.2
1987	42.3	376	30.8	229	22.6	22	4.4	23	3.3	2.2	73.1	92.9
1992	41.9	336	34.4	271	17.8	20	5.8	24	3.0	2.3	76.3	93.3
1997	30.7	165	43.3	419	16.8	46	9.3	29	3.2	2.1	74.0	88.5
2001	31.7	166	40.7	412	18.3	52	9.4	29	3.3	2.2	72.4	87.7
2005	32.4	198	35.2	355	22.1	62	10.4	31	3.6	2.5	67.6	85.6
2010	36.1	306	29.0	258	23.0	57	11.9	29	3.7	2.6	65.1	86.8
2015	36.9	331	30.4	232	7.9	8	24.8	79	3.9	2.5	67.3	86.6
2017	42.4	318	40.0	262	7.4	12	10.2	58	2.8	2.5	82.4	89.2

Notes: ‘Lib. Dem.’ refers to the Liberal Party for the period 1945-1979, the SDP-Liberal alliance in 1983 and 1987, and the Liberal Democrats from 1992 onwards. ‘Others’ refers to all parties other than the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats. ‘Laakso/Taagepera’ refers to the Laakso and Taagepera (1979) index to measure the effective number of (electoral/parliamentary) parties in a party system.

Sources: Electoral Commission, Webb (2000), and Quinn (2013).

The various pacts and agreements between the National Liberals and the Conservatives constituted an ‘anti-Labour’ politics that ran through the entire period (Charmley, 2011: 133). In the early years of this period it did not amount to a serious challenge to Labour. They were able to govern between 1945 and 1950 without the support of Liberal MPs, and no serious thought was given to Labour-Liberal co-operation at this time. A stronger case for co-operation could be made between Labour and the Liberals following the 1964 general election, despite similar parliamentary arithmetic to that in 1950 (Butler, 1978a). The country was facing greater economic pressure in 1964, and the support of the nine Liberal MPs could have been very useful to the Labour whips.

However, electoral support for Labour never fell to such a point that leader Harold Wilson felt it necessary to pursue any co-operation, telling his party conference in 1965:

I hope that others will feel able to support these measures which we put forward... if they can we shall welcome their support. If they cannot, we shall have to go on without them (quoted in Butler, 1978a: 101)

Discounting Wilson’s confidence for one moment, Labour’s electoral position was still fragile. The Conservatives made gains in local elections in 1965 which placed doubts in the Wilson team, and there was also the fear that the Liberals would suffer heavy defeats in any early election (Short, 1989). Nonetheless, Labour’s decisive victory in the 1966 general election suggests their public confidence was well placed. For a short period of time, British politics was largely characterised by two-party adversarial competition.

3.2.3 1974-2010: latent moderate pluralism?

During this period, the two-party system weakened to the extent that by 2010 it is possible to suggest that the ‘core’ of the party system had changed, with subsequent effects for the potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The change in the party system was particularly evident in the electoral arena, but also the case to a lesser extent in the parliamentary arena. First, it is worth noting the events following the February 1974 general election up until the 1979 general election, as this provides a sudden end to the notion of two-party politics in the electoral arena. The Liberals won 12 per cent of the vote, and despite winning only 14 seats, had the opportunity to entertain the idea of co-operation (in government or in the legislature), as neither Labour (301 seats) or the Conservatives (297

seats) had a majority in the House of Commons. Conservative Party leader Edward Heath tried to persuade the Liberals to form a coalition, but the prospect of forming a government which would still be a minority (311 seats, with 318 required for a majority) was not very appealing. Added to this, the Liberals were not as ideologically aligned with the Conservatives as they had been in the period before and after 1945.¹⁵ Put together, there were few incentives to co-operation between the two. Neither however, were there great incentives for Labour-Liberal co-operation. They too would not satisfy the office-seeking requirements for a coalition.

In the end, Labour leader Harold Wilson repeated his strategy from 1964, governing as a minority for a short space of time, before going to the electorate again, this time in October 1974. Whilst Labour won a majority, it was wafer thin, and would soon be eroded through by-elections by the time that Wilson stepped down and James Callaghan became leader. In March 1977, his government faced a vote of no-confidence, and he negotiated a deal with the Liberal leader David Steel. David Steel spent the days before the negotiations with Callaghan consulting party members and activists, getting their thoughts on any arrangement; Callaghan did not consult the party organisation at all, only informing the Cabinet on the morning of the pact's announcement (Hazell and Paun, 2009). In the pact itself, Steel gained only limited and vague concessions on economic matters, and struggled to gain even those on anything else.

Labour could rely on the support of the 13 Liberal MPs on any no-confidence motion, and the Liberals would be consulted on economic and devolutionary matters (Charmley, 2011). A free parliamentary vote would also be given on reform of the voting system, although this was almost certain to come to nothing, given that the majority of Labour and Conservative MPs opposed electoral reform. For Labour, the incentives for the pact were clear. They remained in government, and were able to carry on without fear of a vote of no-confidence and a general election that they were not confident of winning. At the same time, they had those reassurances without giving any great ground on policy. The Liberals' incentives were less clear, but the ultimate incentives seemed to be to experience government. Ultimately, the pact began to splinter when the Liberals struggled in by-elections, and found that they were

¹⁵ Although not necessarily closer to an increasingly left-wing Labour Party, either.

burdened by the unpopularity of government without enjoying any of the spoils. Steel (1980: 153) himself noted that this was the pact's 'most obvious defect... that the failure and unpopularity of the Labour government rubbed off on us'. The pact ended in July 1978. Despite the Liberals' difficulties, it did show that pacts and parliamentary co-operation can last if the conditions are right and the key actors are willing (Kirkup, 2016).

The 1979 general election brought about what would become eighteen years of majority Conservative government. Former Labour cabinet members Roy Jenkins, David Owen, Shirley Williams and Bill Rodgers left Labour to form the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in 1981, citing disagreements on European policy and defence, as well as the splits emerging in the party over internal party democracy as reasons for their departure. It is notable that what became known as the 'Gang of Four' formed their own new party as opposed to joining up with the Liberals. Crewe and King (1995) highlight the immediate problem that most Labour Party members would have simply stayed put if their only option was to join the Liberals. The party would eventually merge with the Liberal Party to form the Social and Liberal Democrats, and later the Liberal Democrats.

Following a difficult start to the merger, the Liberal Democrats began to build pockets of support in certain areas of the country, winning council seats, councils and eventually going on to win 46 seats at the 1997 general election. During the 1990s, Labour and the Liberal Democrats worked together across a range of issues. A Scottish Parliament, Welsh and London assemblies were created as a result, alongside electoral reform for European Parliament elections, and the hereditary peers in the House of Lords were all but abolished. This was not just a product of co-operation during Labour's time in government after 1997, when the Joint Consultative Committee was established, but of years of debate in opposition under the leadership of Robin Cook and Robert Maclennan (Sherlock and Lawson, 2007). Similar co-operation was to be found in Scotland with a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition in the Scottish Parliament, and to some extent in Wales, where Labour governed with the Liberal Democrats in the Welsh Assembly between 1999 and 2003. The coalition in Scotland lasted two terms (1999-2003 and 2003-2007), and changed the electoral system in Scottish local government, as well as making significant changes in health and education policy.

This period of increased co-operation between the two parties had office-seeking and policy-seeking incentives. First, Tony Blair, Paddy Ashdown and others in both parties saw the electoral opportunities that co-operation could bring. Both parties heavily benefitted from

tactical voting in the 1997 general election (Evans, 1999, Herrmann et al., 2015), although evidence that either party explicitly encouraged it is lacking. It is clear though that the party leaders were relaxed about it: Tony Blair told backbench Labour MP Chris Mullin that putting Liberal Democrat MPs onto Cabinet committees was an effort to stop them forming an anti-Labour bloc with the Conservatives. In particular, Blair noted that ‘it makes it easier for Liberal voters to switch to us in the West Country, and if we lose a few votes to the Liberals in places like Richmond, so what’ (Mullin, 2010: 257).

Second, both parties were also ideologically aligned to the extent that there was very little on which they disagreed with regard to policy (Sassoon, 1997). As will be shown in Chapter Four, there were strong ideological overlaps between Labour’s ‘Third Way’ and social liberalism. However, the electoral benefits for Labour were strongly overridden by their large majority: they simply did not need the Liberal Democrats. Both party leaders also faced strong organisational obstacles. Labour’s support was heavily dependent upon Tony Blair and Robin Cook to confront scepticism and outright opposition in its ranks, whilst Paddy Ashdown could only drag the Liberal Democrats so far from equidistance before MPs and party activists gave up their support (Brack, 2007). Following the replacement of Paddy Ashdown as leader by Charles Kennedy in 1999, the Liberal Democrats more explicitly opposed the Labour government.

Co-operation at the party level never went further than encouraging tactical voting, and joint committees that influenced the Labour government’s policy. The Liberal Democrats assumed a role of ‘constructive opposition’. Leader Paddy Ashdown (1997) told his annual party conference that the Liberal Democrats’ relationship with Labour would comprise of a mix of co-operation and opposition, saying that they would provide:

‘constructive criticism, cajoling and, if necessary, vigorously opposing where the government is wrong, but working with them where we agree and where it’s in the national interest... where we shall co-operate we will do so wholeheartedly. Where we must oppose, we will do so unflinchingly’.

At the same annual conference, two Labour Ministers addressed Liberal Democrat fringe meetings (Joyce, 1999). However, the Liberal Democrats were always on the outside of government, and nor did co-operation ever reach any more substantial legislative understanding. Co-operation between the two parties was that of ‘competitive allies in a spirit

of *vive la difference*' (Pimlott, 1996). While the two parties had many policy objectives in common, co-operation did not aid Labour's office-seeking objectives, and the Liberal Democrats appeared to reap electoral benefit from being in opposition to Labour (Meadowcroft, 2000). Organisational obstacles also played a key part in Liberal Democrat opposition to greater co-operation with Labour (Brack, 2007).

The various events of the period also had an effect on the party system. Table 3.2 shows a clear and steady increase in the effective number of electoral parties (ENEP) in this period, averaging 2.4 in the period 1945-1970 and 3.3 in the period 1974-2010. The increase in the effective number of parliamentary parties (ENPP) is less pronounced, increasing from 2.1 in the period 1945-1970 to 2.3 in the period 1974-2010. The primary reason for such a difference between ENEP and ENPP is the distorting effect of the first-past-the-post electoral system (Webb, 2000), which continually rewards parties with concentrated areas of support, at the expense of those with more widely geographically spread support. This is highlighted further by the distortion between vote share and seat share enjoyed by Labour and the Conservatives. Between 1945 and 1970, the average distortion between the combined Labour and Conservative vote share and seat share was 6.7 per cent. Between 1974 and 2010, this rose to 18.3 per cent.

The period 1974-2010 thus shows a changing pattern of electoral competition in Britain. In the February 1974 general election, the Liberal Party's share of the vote rose to 19.3 per cent, culminating in a hung parliament. Although it fell back in 1979 (to 13.8 per cent), it rose above 20 per cent in 1983 and 1987 with the Liberal/SDP alliance, never going lower than the 16.8 per cent the Liberal Democrats achieved in 1997. In 2010, the Liberal Democrats achieved 23.0 per cent of the vote. Such a rise for the Liberals, SDP and now the Liberal Democrats inevitably damaged the Conservatives' and Labour's combined vote share between 1974 and 2010, only once going above 80 per cent (in 1979), reaching a post-war low of 65.1 per cent in 2010. The changing pattern of national elections in Britain also affected constituency contests. Ninety three per cent of constituency contests were primarily fought between Labour and the Conservatives in 1964; this was just 67 per cent in 1992 (Webb, 2000: 9). Such a shift in the pattern of competition dates very clearly back from February 1974. This period did not only see the advance of the Liberal (Democrats), but also the Scottish and Welsh Nationalists, and other small national parties such as the Green Party, UK Independence Party and the British National Party gained support in a small number of

constituencies. Between 1945 and 1970, the ‘other’ parties averaged 1.6 per cent of the vote. Between 1974 and 2010, this rose to 7.4 per cent.

The period 1945-1970 was dominated by class structure and social cleavage. Since that period, various commentators have noted the weakening of such cleavages, alongside the emergence of new issues that generate new political alignments (Heath et al., 1991, Heath et al., 1985). Whilst class remains a key indicator of voting and political activity (Evans, 1999), there has been a clear decline in class voting since the first key studies into class and voting in the British context in 1964 (Alford, 1964). As well as a clear downward trend in class alignment, similar arguments can be made about partisan alignment. Whilst in 1964, 81 per cent of respondents in the British Election Study said they identified with either the Conservative or Labour parties, this was down to 62 per cent in 2010 (Denver et al., 2012: 71). Again, while partisan alignment remains important, and more people still identify with a political party than do not, fewer people do and do so less strongly than before (Crewe and Thomson, 1999).

Inglehart (1990) in particular has argued that attitudes towards social morality and class have changed to the extent that the ‘post-materialist’ cleavage is now important in determining political attitudes. Instead of such strong focus on class and social structures, the post-material cleavage focuses more on ‘quality of life’ issues, such as the environment, racial and gender equality, and identity politics. Together, they amount to issues not so strictly confined to two-party competitive politics (King, 1993, Webb, 2000).

The extent to which the post-materialist cleavage has heavily influenced voting attitudes in Britain is questionable. Much more attention has been paid to the notions of ‘valence issues’ and ‘performance politics’. Valence theory asserts that there are issues where there is little public disagreement, and people will support the party best able to deliver on such issues (Clarke et al., 2009).¹⁶ For instance, most voters want to see a prosperous economy and a functioning health care system. What is most important in these issues is not the particular ideological stances of a political party, but the competence with which they are perceived to

¹⁶ The extent to which this stands up in light of the EU-referendum or US presidential election remains to be seen.

manage the issue (Butler and Stokes, 1974). More recently, this argument has been developed into the notion of ‘performance politics’. This has been most strongly developed by Clarke et al. (2004, 2009), who suggest that voters are primarily concerned with parties’ competence and ability to govern, rather than ideological attitudes to particular issues.

However prior to 2010, despite the various indicators that two-partism was declining in Britain, the first-past-the-post electoral system continued to manufacture legislative majorities. Since 1974, although the combined Labour and Conservative vote share has never gone higher than the 80.7 per cent won by both in 1979, the combined seat share has never gone lower than the 85.6 per cent won in 2005. Webb (2000: 5) argued after the 1997 general election that ‘there is now a two-party system in the national legislative arena, but a multi-party system in the national electoral arena’. This point is crucial. To characterise Britain’s party system as ‘two-party’ during the period 1974-2010 is inaccurate. Even during this period, Labour had to rely on the Liberal Party support to maintain its period in office (1977-1978), and the Conservatives relied on the support of the Ulster Unionist Party during the latter years of John Major’s government between 1992 and 1997.

Were it not for the single member simple plurality electoral system, a more appropriate label might be Sartori’s category of ‘moderate pluralism’ (Webb, 2000: 13-15). It accounts for the increased number of effective electoral parties, whilst still retaining the small ideological distance between them based on centripetal competition (Sartori, 1976: 178-179). However, given that Britain still has the first-past-the-post electoral system¹⁷, Webb notes that the British party system instead should be labelled ‘latent moderate pluralism’, to account for the retention of largely two-party politics in the legislative arena. This echoes the argument that Britain’s party system reflects ‘suppressed multi-partism’, with suppression ensured by the electoral system (Smith, 1989: 162-163). Even alone in the parliamentary arena, the label of two-partism is inappropriate, as during this period the governing party did not change on a regular basis. The Conservatives won four consecutive general elections between 1979 and 1997, and Labour won three consecutive general elections between 1997 and 2010. This low

¹⁷ The probability of electoral reform in the national parliament is small following the rejection of the Alternative Vote (AV) system in a referendum in 2011, but the continuing disproportionate nature of electoral results might bring about a debate again in the future.

level of competition makes two-partism an inaccurate description. The term ‘alternating predominance’ has been helpfully used to characterise the parliamentary arena between 1974 and 2010 (Mair, 2009, Quinn, 2013). However in 2010, even the first-past-the-post electoral system could not maintain single-party majority government in Westminster – a key tenet of two-party electoral competition. The next section discusses the party system during this period, and the effect on Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation.

3.2.4 Post-2010

The 2010 general election brought about the first hung parliament since February 1974, and the first coalition government at Westminster since 1945. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats formed a coalition government, dividing cabinet positions roughly reflecting the percentage of seats each party won in the election. This was done in spite of the electoral system, which still manufactured a much greater share of seats for the Conservatives and Labour than their share of the vote indicated. Applying coalition theory to the 2010 general election, the only possible coalition government that could satisfy office and policy-seeking priorities was the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition that eventually followed.

However, despite such evidence to the contrary, most academic and media commentary did not predict a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition. Polling continued to suggest that the Conservatives would be the largest party, but the potential for them to work together with the Liberal Democrats and form a coalition was deemed unlikely (see Dunleavy, 2010).

What this period means for Labour and the Liberal Democrats, and the specific potential for them to co-operate in the future, is covered in depth throughout the rest of this thesis.

However, this period also had significant consequences for the British party system.

Considered in isolation, the 2010 general election suggests that the word ‘latent’ can be removed from Webb’s characterisation of the British party system in 2000 as ‘latent moderate pluralism’. The two-party system which has long been undermined in the electoral arena has now been undermined in the parliamentary arena as well. However, this is just one general election and parliament, and whether or not it changes the ‘core’ of the party system is yet to be determined.

The core refers to those features that have been essential for the way in which the system has functioned and, as a corollary, which appear most resistant to change. Three features belong to the idea of the core, although clearly there is an extent of overlap involved: 1. the party or parties that over a substantial period have been in leading positions; 2. those parties that have been especially influential for the functioning of the system; 3. the particular pattern of party alignments, especially the coalitional line-up, that has evolved (Smith, 1989: 161).

Looking exclusively at Smith's (1989) definition of the core, between 1974 and 2010, the British party system remained largely unchanged. The Labour and Conservative parties were in the leading positions for the entirety of the period. While there was a change pattern of party alignments, such as the Lib-Lab pact in 1977-1978, and the threat to the Labour Party posed by the Liberal-SDP Alliance, the coalitional line-up remained unchanged. Prior to 2010, a combination of latent moderate pluralism and alternating predominance made up the 'core' of the UK party system.

However, this is not sufficient to explain the extent to which party competition and co-operation has altered during the period. Whilst until 2010, the Liberal Democrats did not have sufficient coalition potential to actually enter government, their coalition potential still gained, to the extent that the Labour Party actively considered coalition before the 1997 general election and, as noted earlier, maintained an unusually co-operative relationship with them afterwards with the establishment of a joint cabinet committee (Webb, 2000: 11). Alongside this, UKIP came second in the national elections to the European Parliament in 2009, and won them in 2014. The introduction of devolution to the individual nations of the UK has also led to smaller parties gaining legitimacy in sub-national government. The Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru, Liberal Democrats, Greens and the Northern Irish parties have all now governed at least at a sub-national level in Britain, and gained greater control over the governmental process. In local government, between 1979 and 2010 the percentage of hung local authorities doubled (Wilson and Game, 2011).¹⁸ While this evolution might not have

¹⁸ However, this has not led to a big increase in coalitions and greater co-operation at the local level (Kassim et al., 2012).

changed the ‘core’ of the party system on its own, it has hastened the potential for its change in the future.

Table 3.3: Classification of degrees of structural change

Degree of structural change	Nature of change
Temporary fluctuations	Short-term variations in support for individual parties which have no long-lasting effects on the core structure
Restricted change	Little change to the leading parties and their roles in government and coalition formation
General change	Changing lead parties and relationship between them, without representing a complete change in electoral support and party competition.
Transformation	Replacement of most or all of the distinguishable features of the core structure. Change in the leading parties and their roles in government and coalition formation, e.g. a leading party going into a steep and seemingly irreversible decline.

Source: Smith (1989: 166-167).

To analyse the long-term nature of any party system change, Smith (see Table 3.3) suggests a period of three general elections to identify any trends; anything less than that, according to Smith, is a ‘temporary fluctuation’. Nonetheless, the 2010 general election does not represent a one-off election where the Labour and Conservative parties won a reduced share of the vote, and one or more minor parties won an increased share. Instead, the 2010 general election represents the culmination of declining two-party competition and increased multi-party competition in the electoral arena (Mair, 2009), and now realised in the parliamentary arena. The period 1970-2010 represents a restricted change, from the two-partism to latent moderate pluralism. The period 2010-2017 represents a temporary fluctuation towards a manifest moderate pluralism. It might not represent more than a temporary fluctuation. As Sartori (1976: 178-179) argues, ‘the major distinguishing trait of moderate pluralism is coalition government... [and] that no party generally attains the absolute majority’. Following the 2010 parliament, the Conservatives won a majority in the 2015 general election, but it was very small. The 2017 general election resulted in a hung parliament.

Irrespective of whether or not the change represents a different name on Sartori’s schema, it still has implications for how parties interact, and whether they look to compete or co-operate. Albeit sometimes with different electoral systems, the decline in two-partism has led to the emergence of smaller parties and, in places, coalition politics throughout sub-national and

local government, involving a wide range of political parties across the various governing institutions in Britain. In part due to constitutional reforms, and in part due to changing voting behaviour, party interaction is different within different systems within Britain (Dunleavy, 2005, Flinders, 2005). Scotland now has a powerful government and parliament, which has experienced both single-party and coalition government. Both Wales and Northern Ireland have devolved administrations with different patterns of party interaction to Westminster, and proportional representation in the European Parliament has awarded greater representation to smaller parties. While this is not uncommon in parliamentary democracies, it has possibly served to undermine the two-party structures of the Westminster system (Mair, 2009). Irrespective of the causal element, the 2010 general election and parliament showed that multi-party politics and more pluralistic interaction is possible at the national level too.

The 2015 general election might suggest that coalition politics in Westminster was a one-off. The Liberal Democrats were heavily punished for their participation in coalition, and the Conservatives won an outright majority. However, while the Liberal Democrats were heavily punished, this was not a return to two-party politics. Together, the two main parties' combined vote share increased by just 2.2 per cent between 2010 and 2015. Even accounting for the Liberal Democrat collapse, smaller parties still performed well in the 2015 general election. UKIP and the Greens together won over 15 per cent of the vote, and the Scottish National Party won 56 out of 59 seats in Scotland. As Table 3.2 shows, the effective number of electoral parties was at its highest point in the post-war period, and the effective number of parliamentary parties as broadly at the same level as it was in 2005 and 2010. As Curtice (2015: 40) argues, 'the UK may have narrowly avoided having another hung Parliament this time around, but it could still well find itself at continued risk of one occurring in future, even if single-member plurality remains in place'.

This was the case in 2017. However, it is a complicated picture. Two-party politics returned in some form, with the Conservative and Labour parties getting their highest collective vote share since the 1970 general election. Nonetheless, the Scottish National Party still comfortably won the most seats in Scotland, and the Liberal Democrats maintained its small but important presence, leaving the Conservatives reliant on the DUP to pass key legislation.

The changing nature of the party system during this period has potentially important implications for how political parties interact. The long-term trend away from two-partism to moderate pluralism suggests that parties should contemplate co-operation more than they have

previously. For Labour, if governing alone is no longer possible, governing with another party should be preferable to not governing at all (at least in theory). As will be discussed in Chapter Five, Labour's currently perilous electoral position makes this argument even stronger. For the Liberal Democrats, it provides an opportunity to have greater coalition potential than previously. However, this long-term trend is mitigated by the Liberal Democrats' woeful electoral experience after the 2010 general election. Their electoral results throughout the 2010 parliament and eventually in the 2015 general election represent a warning to any smaller party about entering into co-operation with a larger party. On the other hand, it suggests for Labour that attacking the smaller party that you might need on side one day is potentially poorly considered. At the very least, this period suggests that the nature of competition and co-operation between political parties remains a key consideration for political parties and researchers alike.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter has shown the nature of competition and co-operation between political parties, within the context of the broader party system. While the framework set out in Chapter Two cannot be applied in great detail, there is some scope for comment here.

The beginning of the 20th century brought with it a significant electoral pact between the Labour and Liberal parties. Both parties saw the electoral benefit of defeating the Conservatives, and both parties were reasonably ideologically aligned, to the extent that there had been 'Lib-Lab' MPs prior to the Labour Party's formation. However, Labour and the Liberals did not enter into coalition, which demonstrates that merely using coalition theory as a proxy for understanding the nature of party interaction is insufficient. This period also shows the importance of ideology and identity, as both parties adopted different approaches to capitalism and the role of the state. Labour also became less reliant on the Liberals, and co-operation became less appealing. The two parties no longer had as convergent interests.

British politics post-1945 was largely dominated by two-party competition. This was further enshrined by the electoral system. Throughout the 20th century, but especially since 1974, the electoral system has inhibited co-operation between political parties. While voting behaviour would not be the same under a more proportional system, the first past the post system exaggerated the Labour and Conservative parties' support to freeze out the more thinly and

broadly supported Liberal Party. Even if the support for minor parties continues, the electoral system is still a significant inhibitor on the potential for co-operation between political parties.

Nonetheless, at various points during this period there were fragile majorities, and following 1974 a hung parliament too. Again, despite the lack of coalitions, party co-operation was still a consideration. In particular, the role of parties in parliament was important. The Lib-Lab pact kept the Labour Party in power until 1979 and gave the Liberals access to government. This co-operation also showed the importance of individual agency of party elites. Callaghan and Steel were crucial in maintaining an otherwise difficult parliamentary agreement (Kirkup, 2016).

This chapter has shown that the notion of Britain as the embodiment of a two-party system is inaccurate. While the two-party system persisted for a period of the 20th century, away from then it has not existed or it has only existed in the national parliamentary arena. The hung parliament following the 2010 general election and the small majority for the Conservatives following the 2015 general election suggests that multi-party interaction is not going away from British politics anytime soon. The 2017 general election might present a reversal of this trend. However, there has been somewhat of an English-dominance to this discussion. The Scottish National Party continue to dominate in Scotland, albeit to a lesser extent, and the Conservatives are now reliant on the Democratic Unionist Party, as well as their own divided parliamentary party. Following the quite dramatic changes in party support during the 2017 general election campaign, it is too early to reach authoritative conclusions about the long-term impact on the party system.

More broadly, this chapter has sought to show the necessity of a broader understanding of party co-operation. As Quinn (2013: 398) argues:

Classifications of party systems are more useful when they focus on the structure, direction and intensity of competition rather than numbers of parties. Overemphasis on the number of parties in Britain has distracted attention from the more important story of weaker major-party competition in recent decades.

The nature of a party system is important to understand the broader interaction between political parties. In a perfect two-party system, there is every incentive to compete and little incentive to co-operate. The changing of the UK party system towards latent moderate

pluralism, and decreasingly latent at that, suggests that there are more reasons for parties to consider co-operation alongside competition. Parties are not necessarily closed off to this idea: the dominance of the Conservatives after 1979 led Labour to question many of the centralised, winner-takes-all elements of the British political system (Webb, 2000). While single majority governments have been the norm since 1945, the main reason for this has been the first past the post electoral system, which has ensured continued single party governance in Westminster. As Bardi and Mair (2008: 153) argue, 'it is the sheer embeddedness of the British 'two-party system' which facilitates the long-term survival of two particular parties'. However, even the electoral system is now struggling to maintain single-party government in British politics.

This chapter has shown that the broader nature of party interaction is different now to the classic period of two-partism, 1945 to 1970. This does not mean that the ground is immediately fertile for greater co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The substantive chapters in the rest of this thesis demonstrate the many different incentives and obstacles that both parties must consider.

Chapter 4: Ideology, policy and its effect on Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation

At various points in their histories, the Labour and Liberal (Democrat) parties have been described as having broadly compatible ideological goals and commitments (Clarke, 1978, Leaman, 1998, Marquand, 1991), often under the label of ‘progressivism’ (Joyce, 1999). Such assertions continue to be made, with recent analyses of both parties reflecting that Labour and the Liberal Democrats have more ideological and policy incentives to co-operate than compete (Diamond and Kenny, 2012, Sloman, 2014). However, aspects of both parties’ ideologies remain further apart than certain accounts suggest, and the idea that both parties share ideology and policy programmes that will necessarily facilitate co-operation is too simplistic. This chapter assesses the nature of ideology and policy in each party, and to what extent they provide incentives and obstacles to co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

How ideological and policy considerations affect the potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats reflects the trade-offs between ‘policy, office and votes’ highlighted by Muller and Strøm (1999). Axelrod (1970) and De Swaan’s (1970) stress the importance of policy proximity between political parties for co-operation to take place. Similarly, theories of party competition stress the incentives for political parties to accurately and competently represent their voters’ policy preferences (Butler and Stokes, 1974, Clarke et al., 2009, Whiteley et al., 2013). However, this does not necessarily indicate that ideology and policy matter as much as other incentives and obstacles to co-operation. Lees et al. (2010) argue that ideological convergence might be a necessary but not sufficient incentive for co-operation, as other more pressing problems need to be overcome. Dunphy and Bale (2011) highlight the difficulties for smaller parties in delivering policies when co-operating with others. However, it often remains the only credible option open to smaller parties to achieve ideology or policy influence in the first place.

This chapter explores these issues in the context of Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The first section focuses on the ideological compatibility between each party through a historical analysis of each party’s ideology. The second section analyses the policy compatibility of each party, examined within the spatial and valence structures of party competition. This is done through qualitative analysis of manifestos, policy documents and speeches for the 2015

general election campaign, and quantitative analysis of manifesto data coded by the Manifesto Project on Political Representation (MARPOR) to provide a longer term perspective. The third section updates this to provide a contemporary analysis of each party's policy platform following the 2015 general election. The chapter argues that the two parties share many common ideological principles and objectives, and when this is translated into policy, there are few obstacles to co-operation. However, the sheer lack of co-operation between the two parties over time and the continued hostility to each other suggests that ideological and policy factors ultimately need to be considered alongside other more important incentives and obstacles to co-operation.

4.1 Ideology, social democracy and liberalism

Political parties are not solely electoral competitors: however loosely held, parties are bound together by common ideas and principles (Shaw, 2007). A commonly used¹⁹ definition of ideology is as follows:

An ideology is a set of ideas by which... [people] posit, explain and justify the ends and means of organized social action, irrespective of whether such action aims to preserve, amend, uproot or rebuild a given social order (Seliger, 1976: 14).

This forms a useful starting point, and permits study of the broader ideologies of liberalism, socialism and conservatism. Alexander (2015: 982) similarly argues that an ideology is 'a view about what ought to be thought, said and done about politics'. Freedon (1996: 140) defines ideologies as 'combinations of political concepts'. Griffiths (2014: 24-29) adds that ideologies are a series of 'concepts, values, aspirations and even aversions'. Ideologies can thus encompass a party's ideas, policies and attitudes (Webb, 2000). Together, they demonstrate the way ideology helps us understand political parties' approaches to the individual, society and the state. This chapter analyses Labour and the Liberal Democrats' ideologies in this context. How do they prioritise the individual and the collective? How are

¹⁹ See Alexander (2015) and Freedon (1996).

liberty, fraternity and equality understood in both parties? How do they conceive of the state and market? How do they understand Britain in relation to other recent phenomenon, such as the environment and the European Union?

As it is central to this chapter's arguments, it is important to set out a definition of the ideologies primarily associated with each party. Debates surrounding the ideological trajectory of the Labour Party are largely intertwined with social democracy, despite an often complicated relationship between the two (Diamond and Kenny, 2012). While all ideologies are fluid (Griffiths, 2014), this is especially true of social democracy, which stands as one of the most reappraised ideologies in British politics (Randall and Sloam, 2009).²⁰ Social democracy combines elements of socialism and liberalism, and looks to 'reconcile socialism with liberal politics and capitalist society' (Padgett and Paterson, 1991: 1-2). Randall and Sloam (2009: 94) similarly argue that social democracy is a 'hybrid ideological tradition which draws upon both socialism and liberalism. It is pragmatic... views human nature in positive terms, with individuals ultimately being virtuous, moral, fraternal and co-operative'. From the very outset the Labour Party was committed to social change implemented through reform initiated within parliament (Joyce, 1999, Wickham-Jones, 1996).

In particular, unlike other socialist counterparts in western democracies the British labour movement in the early 20th century was not dominated by class struggle (Shaw, 1994). For many in the Labour Party, democracy had changed the rules of class struggle identified by Marxist thought (Bernstein, 1961, Sassoon, 1999). Crosland (1956) argued that economic prosperity, state power and trade union had challenged and ameliorated the abuses that capitalism generated, and socialism should recognise this. Social democracy in Britain thus lies firmly rooted in the reformist tradition of socialism, with an aim to offer universal health and education coverage, access to housing, and welfare to care for those deemed in need. All should be funded through general taxation to promote a more equal society.

²⁰ Stedman-Jones (1983: 243) similarly points out that Labour's ideological history is best understood in terms of a 'number of discontinuous conjunctures which enabled it to achieve particular and specific forms of success at rather widely separated points of time, rather than as a continuous evolutionary movement'.

British social democracy has long been influenced by the ‘Fabian’ tradition, geared heavily towards government planning, public ownership, ethical socialism and organised labour with its roots in the trade union movement (Foote, 1997, Jones, 1996). While Labour has never sought the radical overhaul of capitalism in the same way that other socialist traditions might, they have still been willing to promote equality at the expense of certain individual economic freedoms. Indeed, the social democratic argument is that it is only in a more equal society that individual freedom is worth having, in order to maximise the life chances and individual autonomy of as many people as possible (Crosland, 1956).

As such, social democracy promotes a positive and collective form of freedom and an evolutionary form of social change and equality. In particular, equality has formed the core of social democracy. Crick (1984: 158) argues that ‘equality is the value basic to any imaginable or feasible kind of socialism’, and the same has generally applied to British social democracy (Shaw, 2007). The broader concept of equality is supported universally across Labour’s social democratic tradition: ‘this belief in social equality, which has been the strongest ethical inspiration of virtually every socialist doctrine, still remains the most characteristic feature of socialist thought today’ (Crosland, 1956: 87). More recently, Tony Blair (2000) told Labour Party conference that ‘we know the danger that in a changing world new forms of inequality and social exclusion are created... our central belief [is] that every single child deserves an equal chance’. Prior to the 2015 general election, in a speech referencing ‘equal’, ‘equality’ or ‘inequality’ 31 times, Ed Miliband (2014) said, ‘The principle of equality: an ethical view about the equal worth of every citizen. This is the foundation of my commitment to equality too. Whoever you are, wherever you come from, you are of equal worth’.

The Liberal Democrats are often understood as split between two faces of liberalism: social liberalism and economic liberalism (Hickson, 2009). In this argument, classical liberals articulated ideas of negative freedom: liberalism is not about what the state can do for people, but how the state should be deliberately limited in its activity and reach. This debate was particularly pressing at the turn of the twentieth century, when liberals promoted free trade and property rights at the expense of greater state spending, particularly state spending on the military. Individual liberty was paramount. Social liberals, or ‘New Liberals’ (Green, 1881, Hobhouse, 1911), supported more positive interpretations of freedom: people are only free if they are in a position to prosper. Indeed, Hobhouse (1911: 71) defended the state as not only not in conflict ‘with the true principle of personal liberty, but [as] necessary to its effective realisation’. The social liberals were responding to the inequality that was resulting from the

transformation of the economy following the industrial revolution. They argued that liberalism could still provide the economic benefits of individual freedom and rights while also addressing the inequality that it generated.

So while liberals do not neglect equality, they place a different emphasis on equality from social democracy. British liberalism opposes vast inequality in that it undermines liberty if society promotes extreme wealth and poverty. However, freedom for the liberal must also include the freedom to fail, and egalitarian principles contradict this fundamental liberal principle (Rasmussen, 1965). A good example is of the Liberal William Beveridge's distinction between a welfare state and a welfare society. Indeed, he was unhappy that some of his welfare proposals were implemented primarily by the state and not by voluntary agencies. Beveridge would go on to strongly criticise the 1945 Labour government for their state-driven agenda for welfare (Harrop, 2012).

The two ideological strands of liberalism that developed at the turn of the twentieth century continue to sit alongside each other in the Liberal Democrats today. In 2004, some on the supposed economically liberal wing of the Liberal Democrats published *The Orange Book: reclaiming liberalism* (Laws and Marshall, 2004). In 2007, the social liberals responded with *Reinventing the State* (Brack et al., 2007). The debate is an important one and is addressed throughout this chapter, but the distinctions between economic and social liberalism within the party today can often be overstated. Indeed, not many members of the Liberal Democrats would eschew the 'social liberal' tag. This point was addressed particularly by former Liberal Democrat MP David Howarth (2007), in a chapter published in *Reinventing the State*. In it, he argues that those who might be defined as classically or economically liberal do not disagree about the ends of liberalism. Social liberalism remains the end goal of those involved with *The Orange Book*.²¹ As an example, take David Laws, joint editor of *The Orange Book*, and former Liberal Democrat MP and Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Laws is often regarded as the ultimate economic liberal in the Liberal Democrats, to the extent that in 2012 he felt the need to echo Hayek's (1960) *The Constitution of Liberty* postscript: 'why I am not a

²¹ Indeed, some of the writers in *The Orange Book* also wrote chapters for *Reinventing the State*, including former Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg.

conservative’, and stress that he was a not a Tory, but a Liberal (Chorley, 2012). Yet Laws was and remains one of the strongest supporters of state intervention in early years education, calling for money to be spent particularly in disadvantaged areas, and in government led the introduction of free school meals for all children.

The lack of division between social and economic liberals in the party today is further highlighted by the number of issues that do not fit into the debate. Social and economic liberals largely agreed on individual freedoms such as civil liberties and sexual minority rights, or broader issues such as the environment, the European Union or constitutional reform. The ends of liberals are not so much the issue. As Howarth argues, ‘the political goals of liberalism are always more important than any particular method of achieving them’ (Howarth, 2007). Where means matter is the extent to which the state plays a role in achieving the liberal’s objectives. In this, social liberals take a more positive view of the state than economic liberals, but both are still more suspicious of the state than social democrats.

There are areas of compatibility between each party’s ideologies. Social democracy embodies elements both of socialism and liberalism, and social liberalism incorporates aspects of social democracy through its defence of the state and equality. Nonetheless, there remain differences: while liberalism has generally had some sense of common good, its primary focus has been on individual liberty, freedom, human rationality and on limiting collectivism (Freedon, 1999). Social democracy, on the other hand, has largely focused on more collective prescriptions for individuals and societies. Where it has focused on individuals, it has done so in the context of their social environment. At the very least, there is a tension between the two ideologies.

4.1.1 Ideological traditions

It is clear so far that both parties’ ideologies are part of ideological traditions. The idea of *tradition* denotes the ‘background against which individuals come to adopt an initial web of beliefs’ (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010: 78). In other words, traditions are important to consider when analysing a party’s ideology. As Cronin (2004: 7) argues, parties have ‘encompassing beliefs and cultures within which specific politics and strategic emphases took shape and which provided the overall framework for policy and strategy’. Shaw’s (2007) detailed analysis of Labour’s social democracy focuses on the social democratic ‘tradition’. Randall (2003: 20) argues that ‘it is among the institutions, mechanisms, processes and actors of the

party that ideological changes are initiated, alternatives considered, policy statements drafted, amended and voted upon’.

Much of both party’s history and traditions are rooted in competitive and adversarial politics. For example, former Liberal leader Jo Grimond’s ultimate objective was not co-operation but competition. As he stated in 1958:

The long-term objective is clear: to replace the Labour Party as the progressive wing of politics in this country: to sweep in not only Liberals, but Liberal-Socialists and Liberal-Tories. It is certain that in the sixties a fresh tide will flow with new ideas... I say to you that has got to be a Liberal tide (quote cited from Jones, 2011: 20).

The same commitment to tribal unity appeared in Wilson too. For all his attributes as a modernising reformer when Prime Minister, he would not have threatened party unity to co-operate with the Liberal Party (Dutton, 2006). Indeed, at many points throughout the 20th century, Labour and the various iterations of the Liberal Democrats have had sufficiently similar ideological positions to incentivise co-operation, yet it has not happened. It has yet to be seen with Labour and the Liberal Democrats that a shared ideological or policy platform can overcome the majoritarian, competitive and adversarial system within which they or their predecessors have operated for over one hundred years.

This suggests other incentives and obstacles to co-operation, which will be considered later in this thesis, but also highlights the importance of context and tradition when considering ideology. Indeed, former Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown thought that tribalism was the first obstacle to co-operation. Highlighting three phases of Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation, he argued that phase one would see ‘the climate of hostility and tribalism’ between the two parties replaced by ‘goodwill and the presumption of co-operation’ (Ashdown, 2001: 297). Phases two and three would see co-operation in government and some form of institutional realignment. They never really got past phase one.

Marquand (1991) argues that this dimension of Labour’s tradition - its tribalism - has prevented it from engaging with other parties and progressive co-operation. In particular, he argues that Labour, unlike other social democratic parties in Europe, has been dominated by trade unionism in a manner that prevents anything other than tribal competitiveness.

Above all, its [Labour's] ethos – the symbols, rituals, shared memories and unwritten understandings, which have shaped the life of the party and given it its unmistakable identity – had been saturated with the ethos of trade unionism... it has helped to shape the structure of British politics and the assumptions of British politicians... (Marquand, 1991: 17)

He makes this point in *The Progressive Dilemma*, as part of a broader argument that Labour and Britain's 20th century would have been better served by adopting a blended ideology of social democracy and New Liberalism. This point is heavily criticised by Fielding and McHugh (2003: 146), who argue that even Marquand's 'social democratic perspective is just like any other: self-interested, partial and subject to variation over time'. For them, to present a case for Labour as a progressive party unfettered by tribalism is to argue for a history as hoped rather than a history as seen.

To what extent has Labour embodied this non-liberal social democratic history more recently? Shaw (2007) analyses whether or not New Labour embodied the 'soul' of the Labour tradition. In doing so, he identified two dimensions of Labourite ideology: redistributive social democracy and ethical socialism. The first is characterised by equality and collectivism, and the second by fellowship and the public service ethos. The second dimension in particular is a separate tradition from the Liberal Democrats. Shaw concludes that Labour, to some extent, disowned the second characterisation, and tentatively argues that New Labour comprise both social democracy and social liberalism. Hennessey (2004, quoted in Shaw, 2007) argues that 'when it comes to fraternity, New Labour is pretty well tone deaf'.

As Kitschelt (1994: 299) argues, in times of electoral decline social democratic parties 'need to identify a new balance between liberty, equality and community'. The early period of the New Labour government did this; it is less clear that Labour, New or otherwise, has since. Beech and Hickson (2014) rightly define New Labour as the 'politics of paradox'. Between 1997 and 2010, New Labour preserved and promoted individual rights in a manner compatible with liberalism, yet also often prioritised security over liberty. Both the Blair and Brown governments increased the surveillance powers of the state. New Labour was also actively communitarian, working with different faith communities, highlighting patriotic values and promoting responsibilities alongside rights in relation to welfare, law and order and the state. 'New Labour contained elements that were simultaneously metropolitan liberal and communitarian; patriotic and internationalist; Fabian and devolutionist; followers of

economic liberalism in the financial sector and tax-and-spend social democrats' (Beech and Hickson, 2014: 84).

Of course, the Liberal Democrats are part of an ideological tradition too. Despite being officially constituted in 1988, the party is rooted in the foundations of the British political system. Steed (1996: 79) argues that the Liberal Democrats' principles are rooted in the 'intertwined traditions of social liberalism and social democracy', with a commitment to decentralisation of power and individual rights and liberties. However, it is doubtful that the Liberal Democrats are as wedded to tribal loyalties as Labour. Dutton (2006) argues that Grimond and Ashdown as Liberal leaders have underestimated the tribalism that continues to distance Britain's political parties. For every senior figure in the Labour Party that was open to co-operation there were others much more hostile.

Former Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg (2015a) considers this a pressing question for Britain's party system.

Is it possible to have the kind of politics that I believe in of reason, of pluralism, of give and take in a system which discriminates very, very heavily against those kinds of compromises, where every compromise is shouted down as a betrayal?

The evidence for smaller parties, comparatively or in Britain, suggests that it is not (Duch et al., 2015, Dunphy and Bale, 2011, Johnson and Middleton, 2016). Ideologically, it highlights what many Labour supporters and former Liberal Democrat supporters see as a 'betrayal' by the Liberal Democrats when they joined the Conservatives in coalition between 2010 and 2015 (Cutts and Russell, 2015).

Marquand (1991: 235) argued that the Liberal Democrats 'are more open to new currents of thought and feelings' and that is applicable today. For instance, Labour are extremely unlikely to co-operate in any sustained fashion with the Conservatives.²² As will be shown later in this chapter, the two parties do not have such huge differences to policy, but instead their

²² Save for referendum campaigns when they are on the same side, such as in the Scottish independence referendum or, to some extent, the campaign to remain in the European Union.

ideologies and histories are rooted in different ideas and approaches to politics to the extent that co-operation between the two would be almost unthinkable for any Labour politician. As one Labour MP tweeted last year, ‘you Tories never understand how much we hate you. Many Labour MPs motivated to get into politics to stop you’ (Perkins, 2015). The two parties’ different approaches to party interaction reflect different ideologies, and present an obstacle to co-operation between the two. The electoral consequences of this ‘temporary progressivism’ are discussed elsewhere in this thesis, but it has consequences for ideological and policy agreement too. It suggests that while ideological and policy convergence is important, and necessary for co-operation to take place, it is context dependent.

Diamond and Kenny (2012: 11) argue that ‘progressive politics has advanced most powerfully when liberalism and labourism have been in fruitful dialogue’, and they may be right, but this is because it was appropriate for fruitful dialogue at that moment in time. In short, the argument that progressivism is temporary and tribalism is eternal has yet to be defeated in the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. Robinson (2012: 28-29) rightly argues that Labour-Liberal co-operation in the 1970s was based on attempts to moderate the ideological divide in British politics rather than unite shared histories in both parties. It may be the case that co-operation based on practical responses to problems, such as ideological divide or perceived electoral necessity, might be manageable but that more entrenched co-operation based on shared principles and ideologies is harder to achieve and sustain.

4.2 Ideological dimensions since 1945

Having established broad definitions and characteristics of the main ideologies associated with Labour and the Liberal Democrats, we can try and map out where each party has located themselves on ideological dimensions over time. This is done using data from the Manifesto Project on Political Representation (MARPOR) (formerly known as the Comparative Manifestos Project). The MARPOR dataset consists of political documents, usually manifestos, coded by placing ‘quasi-sentences’ into 56 attitude categories. The number of sentences in each category is then reported in percentage form. As such, the MARPOR dataset uses measures of salience to generate a spatial measure, based on the idea that the more a party emphasises a particular position in its manifesto, the more we can place that party at a particular place on a scale (Lowe et al., 2011). The MARPOR dataset thus allows us

to analyse where parties place themselves on policy issues or ideological dimensions over time.

The MARPOR group develop their own ‘RILE’ (left/right) scale based on the percentages of quasi-sentences in each category, but criticism has been made of their scaling methods. In particular, seemingly irrelevant sentences in a manifesto can heavily change the value assigned to a party’s position (Lowe et al., 2011, Prosser, 2014). This chapter uses a two-dimensional scale developed by Prosser (2014), which maps policy positions on a comparable economic left-right scale and a social liberal-conservative scale using a uniform methodology. This is argued to be preferable to self-selecting policy scales, to allow comparison with different contexts and times as appropriate. The categories included in each dimension are shown in the Appendix. This builds on methodological work by Lowe et al. (2011), and is different from the MARPOR scales in two ways. First, the scales are constructed based on the number of sentences, not the percentages. This reduces measurement problems when comparing manifestos of radically varying lengths. Second, the scales are initially constructed using a logit-scaling method. This still uses the salience method to position parties on a scale, but argues that repeated emphasis of a position reduces its impact. For example, if a party had zero sentences in favour of nationalisation and then had one sentence in favour, this is argued to be a bigger change than if a party had ninety nine sentences in favour of nationalisation and then had one hundred in favour. The increase is one sentence in both cases, but the logit-scaling method credits less emphasis to the latter increase. In short, the marginal effect of one more sentence decreases depending on the amount that has already been said on the issue (Lowe et al., 2011: 130). In practice, this means that the logit-scaling method often leads to more centrally distributed policy scales, rather than more polarised scales often generated by the additive scales used by Kim and Fording (1998), and others.

From this point, the same additive scale is used as the MARPOR RILE scale: the total number of right quasi-sentences minus the total number of left quasi-sentences; or the total number of conservative quasi-sentences minus the total number of liberal quasi-sentences.²³ The scales

²³ Finally, 0.5 is also added to each scale. This is because the log of 0 is undefined, and so any scale with 0 quasi-sentences would be incalculable. It is a small number, and only makes minimal changes to any scale.

cannot eliminate coding error, and this should be taken into account when interpreting results. The ‘score’ that is produced for each manifesto is meaningful only when compared to others ‘scores’ – zero should not be taken as any measure of centrist position. Instead, the scale provides a means of comparison between cases and time: for the left/right scale, the higher the score, the more right-wing a manifesto scores; for the liberal/conservative scale, the higher the score, the more conservative a manifesto scores.

Figure 4.1 presents the ideological changes in the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties’ economic position since 1945.²⁴ The more that economically right-wing themes outnumber left-wing themes, the more positive the manifesto score, and the further economically right wing the party is deemed to be. Between 1945 and 1966, Labour are to the left of the Conservatives, although they are further part in elections such as 1950 and 1964 and closer in elections such as 1955 and 1966. In 1970, the two parties adopt very similar overall positions, before Labour veered left in the February 1974 general election, when Tony Benn played a key role in putting together Labour’s manifesto. Following that period, a larger gulf appears between the two parties, with Labour staying left in the 1980s and early 1990s and the Conservatives staying right, before the two parties converged in 1997, and stayed reasonably similar distances from each other between then and 2015. This is a pattern largely in agreement with non-manifesto analysis of each party’s ideological change during these periods: Labour and Conservatives were two parties on either sides of the a mixed economy ‘consensus’ until 1979, followed by Thatcherite and Labour disagreements in the 1980s, and then Labour’s move back to the centre in the 1990s (Webb, 2000).

²⁴ Until 2015. Data from the 2017 manifestos is not yet available.

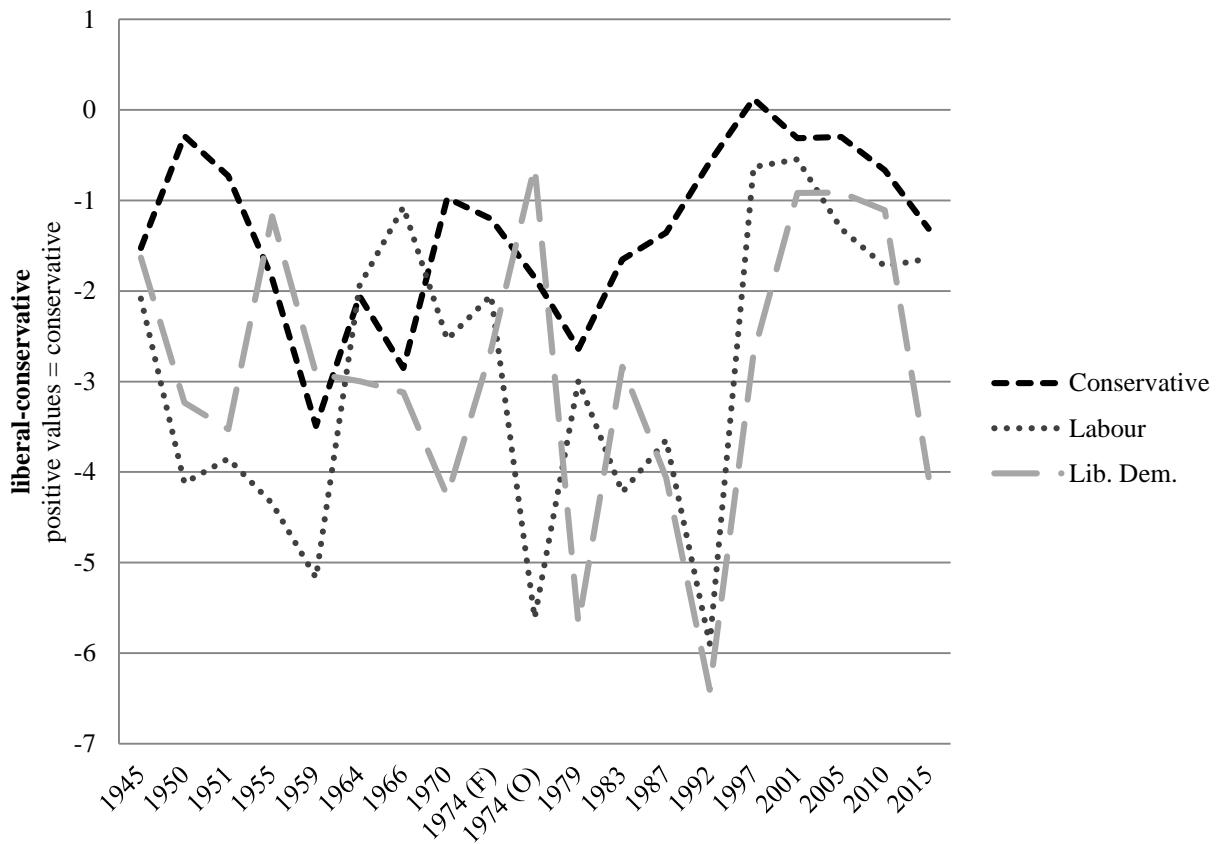
Figure 4.1: Economic left-right position of Labour, Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives, 1945-2015



Note: 'Lib. Dem.' refers to the Liberal Party from 1945-1987 and the Liberal Democrats from 1992-2015. The SDP are not included in analysis here.

The long-term Liberal Democrat (and Liberal Party before it) trend is gradually leftwards between 1945 and 2015. During the 1950s, the Liberals occupied a position economically to the right of the Conservatives. Since then however, they have generally occupied a space between Labour and the Conservatives, and since 1992 they have been much closer to Labour than the Conservatives. There is one exception: in 2010, the Liberal Democrats were closer towards the Conservatives, and this supports arguments that the Liberal Democrats shifted rightward between 1997 and 2010 (Bale, 2011b, Evans and Sanderson-Nash, 2011).

Figure 4.2: Social liberal/conservative position of Labour, Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives, 1945-2015



Note: 'Lib. Dem.' refers to the Liberal Party from 1945-1987 and the Liberal Democrats from 1992-2015. The SDP are not included in analysis here.

Figure 4.2 presents the ideological changes in the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties' social position since 1945. Here, there are a lot more stark changes between election years. In part, this may be due to greater changing contexts relating to home affairs and human rights, and subsequent effects on party policy positions. For the most part, Labour adopts a more socially liberal approach than the Conservatives, but for significant periods the two parties are much closer together. Particularly, the years in which Labour adopts more socially conservative positions coincides with periods when they are in government (see 1964-1966 and 1997-2010, although see October 1974 as an exception to this argument). The Liberal and Liberal Democrats' position also changes starkly over time, but between 1987 and 2010 the two parties adopt reasonably similar overall positions. However, in 2015 the Liberal Democrats adopt comfortably the most liberal position.

On both scales, throughout the last seventy years, Labour and the Liberal Democrats have been closer to each other, and this is particularly the case since the 1970s. Again, this accords with analysis of the Labour and Liberal/Liberal Democrat parties during this period. During the late 1970s, the Lib-Lab pact brought together the two parties. During the 1980s the two parties (with the Liberals joining with the SDP) competed to be the main challenger to the Conservatives, and in the 1990s Paddy Ashdown publicly aligned the Liberal Democrats closer to Labour than the Conservatives.

However, the Liberal Democrats are not so distant from the Conservatives at various points in this period too. Prior to 1970, the Liberals were economically closer to the Conservatives than to Labour, supporting efforts by Churchill and others to secure an anti-socialist alliance. Even after then, it is only between 1997 and 2005 that the Liberal Democrats are economically both close to Labour and distant from the Conservatives. Socially, the Liberal Democrats are quite often apart from both parties, not just the Conservatives. While there is a large gulf between the social positions of the Conservatives and Liberals/Liberal Democrats in the late 1980s and 1990s, the current trend in Conservative positioning seems to be increasingly liberal. Indeed, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats had very few disagreements on social issues during their period in coalition between 2010 and 2015, save for disagreements on the Draft Communications Data bill (aka the Snooper's Charter). The trends in ideological positions since 1945 provide few obstacles to Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation, but they do not appear to continually obstruct Conservative-Liberal Democrat co-operation, either.

4.3 Policy outcomes and debates

The previous section shows that there are considerable overlaps between Labour and the Liberal Democrats' ideology and policy platforms. However, while manifesto scales provide a very useful means of historical and contemporary comparison, they cannot give a detailed insight into party's policy positions. They provide a snapshot of the official ideas presented by a party to the public. However, such a snapshot does not adequately cover the debates and potential disagreements within and across parties over a period of time. This section analyses these in more detail. Labour's last period in government between 1997 and 2010 dictates much of its current ideological debate. Prior to it, Labour's modernisation under Neil Kinnock and John Smith in the 1980s and 1990s and continued further by Tony Blair took Labour away from the left towards a more New Liberal outlook. In a speech to the Fabian Society in

1995, he argued that ‘the ethical basis of socialism... based on a moral assertion that individuals are interdependent... is the only one that has stood the test of time’ (Blair, 1995: 12). The Liberal Democrats were now a single entity following the merger of the SDP and Liberal Party in 1988. Accordingly, understanding both parties ideological character, and subsequently any incentives or obstacles to co-operation, requires consideration of each party’s policy positions within different contexts. This section looks at the period 1997-2010, and subsequent sections will consider 2010-2015, and the current situation following the 2015 general election.

4.3.1 1997-2010

While ‘New’ Labour maintained an active and social democratic welfare state (Giddens, 1998), they were operating in a stronger market-driven policy environment than any other Labour government (Gamble, 2009). Heffernan (2001) argues that the 1997 Labour government predominantly stayed in this Thatcherite paradigm. However, Randall and Sloam (2009) defend New Labour as continuing the British social democratic tradition, Bevir (2005: 63) argues that New Labour was social democratic in its ‘ideals of social justice, citizenship and community’, and Freedon (1999) labels New Labour’s ideology as something between liberalism, socialism and conservatism. While the New Labour governments promoted the market as the primary means of economic growth, this was done partially to establish a reputation for economic prudence, and once this was established record amounts were spent on education and health.

Blair’s reification of socialism (Bevir, 2000) evoked the Hobhouse and Green brand of New Liberalism, seeking to distribute resources fairly within capitalism (Holmes, 2007, Marquand, 1997). Indeed, his speech on the 50th anniversary of the 1945 Labour government is notable for its praise of Liberals and liberalism alike (Blair, 1995). As he told the Labour Party Conference following the 1997 general election, ‘my heroes aren’t just Ernie Bevin, Nye Bevan and Attlee. They are also Keynes, Beveridge, Lloyd George’ (Blair, 1997). The following year, he argued that there was ‘no necessary conflict’ between a market economy and social justice, and that Labour and the Liberal Democrats should work together to unite ‘the great streams of left-of-centre thought – democratic socialism and liberalism – whose divorce this century did so much to weaken progressive politics across the West’ (Blair, 1998: 1). Liberal Democrat opposition to the original ideas of the third way espoused by Blair was

minimal (Jones, 2011). Particularly during the early years of the New Labour era, the two parties shared much in common. Marr (1998: 21) proclaimed that New Labour's Third Way was the 'revival of liberalism inside a Labour body'. Beer (2001) argues that New Labour (in its first term, at least) brought together the Labour Party and liberalism. Certainly during the New Labour period, much of the party's thought was congruent with the Liberal Democrats. As Webb (2000: 103) argues, at the beginning of New Labour's period in office there was little doubt 'that New Labour and the Liberal Democrats share virtually identical positions on things like the appropriate roles of state and market, the need for state action... and so on'.

However, this was only the case during the early years of New Labour. For many within the Liberal Democrats, the alignment with Labour became too strong and the party was in danger of losing its identity as a consequence (Meadowcroft, 2000). This was put into sharper focus following the release of *The Orange Book*, which promoted a more continental liberal individualist approach (Laws and Marshall, 2004). As shown above, while the book is not as controversial a challenge to Liberal Democrat thought as has been claimed, the key point here is that it makes a much more sustained attack on social democracy and social liberalism than it does conservatism and economic liberalism (Sanderson-Nash, 2012). Laws later suggested the book was an attempt to 'make clear the distinction between a Labour philosophy and set of aspirations and a Labour one' (Jones, 2011: 195). The publication coincided with a distinct hardening of attitudes towards the Labour government (Russell et al., 2007), and further publications followed which suggested that the contemporary liberalism that the Liberal Democrats should defend had much more in common with conservatism than had previously been argued by the party (see Margo, 2007, Astle and Bell, 2008).

This is not to suggest that the publication of *The Orange Book* now makes the Liberal Democrats a classically liberal party. Indeed, some of the chief writers in *The Orange Book* have argued that 'freedom is curbed by poverty and inherited disadvantage, which is why liberals have been concerned about these issues for more than a century' (Astle et al., 2006: 144). Nonetheless, the publication of *The Orange Book* and the change in ideological direction of the Liberal Democrats has had important negative implications for co-operation with Labour (Beech and Hickson, 2014). The greater space for economically liberal ideas in the Liberal Democrats, alongside the professionalisation of the policy-making process, helped to facilitate positive coalition talks with the Conservatives following the 2010 general election (Bale, 2011b, Evans and Sanderson-Nash, 2011). Many of the writers in *The Orange Book*

served as ministers in the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, and some of the broader ideas noted in the book were realised in policy terms by that government.

As New Labour went on, the two parties increasingly disagreed on areas of policy (Cowley and Stuart, 2009), in a fashion that arguably exposed differing ideological viewpoints. In particular, the two parties appeared to have different views of the individual, the state and society. One example that sets out the difference is in Berlin's conception of liberty and freedom. As Berlin (1969: 31) notes:

Freedom... entails not simply the absence of frustration... but the absence of obstacles to possible choices and activities... such freedom ultimately depends not on whether I wish to walk at all, or how far, but how many doors are open, how open they are [and] upon their relative importance in my life.

The approach to the state marks a key area where Labour and the Liberal Democrats' ideologies have different roots. No serious member of either party has ever endorsed a completely owned economy, nor on the other hand an entirely minimal state. Instead, it is a matter of degree, and the degrees matter. Grayson (2007: 37) argues of the state that 'Liberals are suspicious of it, while there is little evidence of social democrats fearing it at all'. Where the Liberal Democrats supported state intervention, it was in a decentralising fashion. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the Liberal Democrats continued to advance the idea of 'community politics', not just for electoral gain, but as a genuine attempt to decentralise the power of the state. This was in contrast to a greater willingness by the 1997-2010 Labour governments to use the central power of the state. In government, Labour introduced tax credits in attempt to make work more financially rewarding, as well as setting targets to reduce and eliminate child poverty. While not matching the nationalisation records of previous Labour governments, New Labour was still willing to nationalise or part-nationalise failing private organisations (for example, Halifax Bank of Scotland, Railtrack, Lloyds and Northern Rock).

However, Grayson's (2007) argument by extension that Liberal Democrats doubt and distrust the state more than Labour has contradicting evidence, too. In recent years Labour have happily adopted a more economically liberal approach to the state, while the Liberal Democrats have freely supported state expansion. In office, New Labour sought to broadly maintain the capitalist economy while in office. They restricted borrowing only to fund

investment, made the Bank of England independent, sought to part-privatise Royal Mail, funded health and education investment through private finance while bringing greater competition into the public services sector. Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats in opposition supported higher general taxation to fund investment in education, supported higher taxation for high earners, opposed university tuition fees, and they called for Northern Rock to be nationalised before Labour actually did it. Both parties were happy to change their policies to match the economic context; it is not necessarily the case that either party eschewed their ideologies in doing so.

Differing approaches to home affairs and international policy suggested that Labour and the Liberal Democrats still had different approaches to not just the individual and the state, but also contemporary phenomenon, such as terrorism, the environment and the European Union. While at the end of New Labour's period in office, David Miliband (2008) urged a fusion between the 'social democratic commitment to social justice through collective action and radical liberal commitment to individual freedom in a market economy', other social liberal figures felt that Labour was continuing to draw 'from the deep, poisoned well of its Fabian tradition' (Collins and Reeves, 2008). In particular, they argued that Labour had 'tested, often to destruction, the idea that a bigger, higher-spending state can deliver a better society'. Their argument was stark: 'liberalise or die'.

Throughout Labour's period in government between 1997 and 2010, more marked disagreement was often found on non-economic issues. Following the attack on the World Trade Center in September 2001, the Liberal Democrats supported the Labour government in deploying troops in Afghanistan, but were much more critical than the Conservatives in opposition. Most notably, they opposed invading Iraq in 2003. While their opposition was rooted more in internationalism and support for United Nations resolutions than an ethical opposition to war, it remains the most highlighted disagreement between the two parties' leaderships to date (Philip, 2009, Russell, 2009). The events of September 2001 also began a long process of disagreement between Labour and the Liberal Democrats on issues surrounding civil liberties and state intervention in personal freedoms. This was quickly apparent, with Charles Kennedy telling Liberal Democrat conference in 2001:

We do nothing to protect [democracy]... if we abandon, in the name of security, the very principles which the terrorists seek to destroy – liberty, democracy, diversity... cracking down on civil liberties carries a price... wherever civil liberties are lost, tread with care. Tread with care (Kennedy, 2001).

For New Labour the focus was often more on security, communitarianism and solidarity. In 2001, Labour introduced DNA retention of anybody charged with an offence. This was extended in 2003 to anybody arrested for most offences. Anti-terror legislation was introduced that (potentially unintentionally) occasionally prohibited journalists from photographing police in public places. A database of children's identity information was accessible to a wide range of public bodies. A National Identity Register was introduced, with a plan to then introduce identity cards eventually shelved. Anti-social behaviour orders were introduced for children and young adults who disrupted communities. Detention of people suspected of terrorist offences was introduced, and extensions to this were proposed but voted down in parliament. People suspected of terrorist offences could also be put under house arrest through 'control orders'. Finally, demonstrations close to Parliament were outlawed.²⁵ In all cases, Labour deemed either security or community solidarity to be more important than individual liberty and freedoms.

The Liberal Democrats opposed Labour on most of these issues, and their opposition was such that when they launched their 2010 general election manifesto, Nick Clegg claimed that 'the division between the Lib Dems and Labour on civil liberties is as wide today as it was at the height of Blair's authoritarian populism' (Stratton and Wintour, 2010). Liberal Democrat negotiators during the coalition talks following the 2010 general election also identified the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives as in agreement against Labour's policies on civil liberties and freedoms (Laws, 2010). Indeed, the eventual Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition agreement agreed to 'implement a full programme of measures to reverse the substantial erosion of civil liberties under the Labour Government and roll back state intrusion' (Cameron and Clegg, 2010).

²⁵ For a comprehensive summary of Labour's policies in these areas, see Klug (2010).

As with economic matters, there are counters to the arguments above. While Labour did extend the powers of the state to interfere with personal freedoms, it also granted rights and freedoms to many different sections of society. Minority groups gained much stronger rights and representation in Britain between 1997 and 2010. Labour abolished Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act, which banned councils from ‘intentionally promoting’ homosexuality. During their third term they introduced civil partnerships, which allowed same-sex relationships to be recognised in law. They also introduced more liberal immigration rules, and made a concerted effort to decouple race from the debate on immigration (Ford, 2008). The Labour governments also protected groups, such as the disabled, from discrimination in the workplace, and the Equality Act sought to ensure fair rights for everybody in and out of the workplace. They devolved power to Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and regions within England. They developed strong and ambitious targets and policies on climate change, and introduced human rights and freedom of information legislation, often strongly opposed by the Conservative Party.

Alongside this, many within Labour ranks opposed the policies implemented by the Blair and Brown governments. This was most notably the case with the Iraq invasion, where 139 Labour MPs rebelled against the government, but there were also significant Labour rebellions on identity cards and detention of terror suspects. Ed Miliband later argued that Labour in government had been ‘too draconian on aspects of our civil liberties’ (Hundal, 2010). The distinctions between the two parties are not as clear as ‘liberal’ and ‘illiberal’: elements of Labour’s policies prioritised the communitarian stand of New Labour thinking, but others adopted a more sincerely liberal approach.

4.3.2 2010-2015

This period provided a very different set of circumstances for both parties. Labour was out of national office for the first time in thirteen years, and the Liberal Democrats in it for the first time in their current form. Labour elected Ed Miliband as its leader, who distanced himself from the New Labour governments; though by nowhere near to the same extent as Jeremy Corbyn. The Liberal Democrats joined the Conservatives in coalition government, and supported policies that reduced the size of state, as well as cutting direct taxation (while still raising indirect taxation). This section examines each party’s policy programme at the 2015 general election, focusing particularly on issues salient to the public and issues commonly

associated with both parties. This is done for three (related) reasons. First, an election marks a set period in time where each party has to present an articulated and organised platform to the electorate. As noted earlier in this chapter, the ideological debates within a party are important, but the practical outcome is a party's policy. Second, a general election provides a series of policy documents, manifestos and speeches that can be utilised for analysis. Third, policy programmes are not just an insulated product of a particular period, but a transient product of a party's longer term ideological and political commitments (Harrop and Lee, 2015, Randall and Sloam, 2009). Together, they suggest that analysing policies is both useful and practical in helping to understanding the broader potential for party co-operation.

Table 4.1: Most salient issues for voters at the 2015 general election

<i>Issue</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Economy	52
Immigration	51
Health	45
Housing	27
Welfare	26
Education	16
Europe	16
Tax	10
Pensions	9
Environment	8
Crime	7
Family life	7
Transport	3

Note: Respondents were asked to list up to three issues most important to them.

Source: YouGov polling (2015), 27-28 April 2015.

The economy, immigration and health were comfortably the most important issues to the electorate at the 2015 general election, with all other issues comfortably behind them in terms of voter salience (see Table 4.1). The economy and the National Health Service are both valence issues, as the public broadly knows what it wants, and is more likely to support parties it thinks competent on them. The extent to which immigration is a valence issue is debatable. For most voters, immigration is something they want reduced. However, evidence suggests more mixed views amongst Labour supporters, and Liberal Democrats supporters are less likely to be hostile to immigration (Johnson and Rodger, 2015). Table 4.2 sets out areas of policy agreement and disagreement between Labour and the Liberal Democrats on the most

salient issues with the electorate at the 2015 general election, based on analysis of manifestos, speeches and policy documents. On the economy, regularly one of the most salient issues in British politics, the two parties agreed much more than they disagreed. Both parties adopted a similar approach to fiscal policy: they were committed to reducing the deficit and eventually the public debt, but not in as extensive a fashion as the Conservatives. Indeed, much of the party's agreement on policy was in opposition to the Conservatives. Both parties supported scrapping the spare room subsidy, and neither supported the welfare cuts proposed and now being enacted by the Conservatives in government. Instead both parties wanted to raise taxes on the wealthy, including a 'mansion tax' on properties worth over two million pounds. There were differences: the parties disagreed on certain elements of taxation, such as the general threshold for paying income tax, and the threshold for the earners to pay the highest rate of income tax. However, as shown in Table 4.2, at the 2015 general election the two parties shared much ground on economic policy. Certainly, they shared a similar enough platform to facilitate a governmental programme.

The same can be said for immigration policy. Both parties were operating in an environment that saw increasing support for anti-immigration policies and parties (Ford and Goodwin, 2014, Johnson and Rodger, 2015). Both parties adopted broadly similar policies in this regard: they supported the restriction of benefits for EU immigrants. However, both parties adopted policies more liberal on immigration than the Conservatives or UKIP. For example, both parties supported removing international students from immigration figures. Again, they were differences: Labour wanted more action on foreign labour and language skills, but these were small issues that would have been unlikely to be a significant obstacle to co-operation.

Table 4.2: Salient issues at the 2015 general election, and Labour/Liberal Democrat agreement

	<i>Policy agreement</i>	<i>Policy disagreement</i>
Economy	<p>Both parties adopted a broadly similar fiscal policy. Both committed themselves to reducing the deficit and eventually debt, but in a manner that maintained investment in public services. Neither party supported the £12bn cuts in the welfare budget promised by the Conservatives.</p> <p>Both parties supported a ‘mansion tax’ on properties valued at more than £2mn pounds.</p> <p>Both parties supported scrapping the spare room subsidy (the ‘bedroom tax’).</p> <p>Both parties supported a long term investment plan in infrastructure.</p> <p>Both parties supported extension of the European Union single market, and European Union trade agreements with international partners.</p> <p>Both parties supported increases to the National Minimum Wage, based on advice from the Low Pay Commission,</p> <p>Both parties supported the reduction and regulation of zero hours contracts.</p> <p>Both parties supported increases in the state pension, alongside means-testing benefits for wealthy pensioners.</p> <p>Both parties supported higher taxation for wealthy earners or land</p>	<p>Labour would abolish the married couples’ tax allowance. The Liberal Democrats were unclear on this.</p> <p>Labour would retain the automatic deduction of political subscriptions from trade union members’ pay. The Liberal Democrats were unclear on this.</p> <p>Labour supported the restoration of the 50p top rate of tax for those earning over £150,000. The Liberal Democrats opposed this.</p> <p>The Liberal Democrats supported raising the personal tax allowance to £12,500. Labour did not support this.</p>

	owners.	
	Both parties supported competitive business taxes, with particular priority for small and medium sized companies.	
Immigration	Both parties broadly supported immigration that benefitted the economy, tourism and society. Both parties supported restrictions on benefits for immigrants. Both parties looked to address voters' economic concerns over immigration by focusing on the exploitation of foreign labour. Both parties supported removing foreign students from migration figures.	Labour supported language tests for immigrants working in the public sector. The Liberal Democrats did not have a policy on this. Labour focused much more on the economic exploitation of immigrant labour than the Liberal Democrats'.
Health	Both parties wanted spending on the NHS to rise in in real terms. Both parties wanted much more integration of health and social care policy. Both parties supported increased investment in research. Both parties supported increased investment and attention on mental healthcare.	Labour supported the repeal of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 (England) delivered by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government. The Liberal Democrats strongly rejected this. The Liberal Democrats supported devolving more budgets to local communities. Labour did not support this. Labour wanted to guarantee the right to a GP appointment within 48 hours. The Liberal Democrats did not support this.

Sources: Policy documents, speeches 2015 general election manifestos, Harrop and Lee (2015).

More disagreement was to be found at the 2015 general election on health and social care policy. As at most general elections, Labour messaging was that the Conservatives were destroying the National Health Service, ably supported by the Liberal Democrats (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2015). The debates were particularly divisive, with Labour promising to repeal the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition's Health and Social Care Act (England), the main health policy enacted in the 2010 parliament. One Labour MP and former Shadow Health Minister told me about the divisions between the two parties on this during the 2010-2015 parliament:

I remember speaking to one Lib Dem MP, and I said... that they had an opportunity to build bridges with Labour if they used their position in the coalition to stop Andrew Lansley's NHS legislation... If they're serious about realigning the centre left in British politics... this would be critical to the prospects of that happening... a shared agenda on certain issues, and it was dismissed out of hand, and I think that was a big mistake (Reed, 2016).

However, this was tempered by agreement on funding for mental health and the integration of health and social care policy, although even this was still a potentially divisive issue. This has continued since the 2015 general election. The Labour Shadow Minister for Mental Health attacked the Liberal Democrat MP responsible for Mental Health during the 2010-2015 parliament, tweeting 'until 8 months ago u were the Minister for #mentalhealth. What did you do about this during ur 2.5yrs' (Berger, 2016). Harrop and Lee (2015) conclude that while the rhetoric was damaging, a shared health care policy programme was achievable by the two parties.

The data in Table 4.2 suggests that at the 2015 general election, the two parties agreed on enough areas of policy salient to the public that a governing programme could have been reached reasonably comfortably. However, analysis of each party's policy programme also needs to take into account policy issues and areas salient within each party. As a means of achieving equality through the state Labour have long prioritised health (already shown in Table 4.2) and education policy, while the Liberal Democrats have been associated with education, the environment, Europe and constitutional reform (Brack, 1996, Grayson, 2007). While these are not quantitative measures of salience, they are supported by data shown in Chapter Six: each party's grassroots highlighted each of these issues as salient within their party (see Appendix 2). The nature of policy agreement and disagreement on these salient

issues will also be important for understanding the policy incentives and obstacles to co-operation.

Table 4.3 sets out areas of policy agreement and disagreement between Labour and the Liberal Democrats at the 2015 general election on the most salient issues within each party, based on manifestos, speeches and policy documents. Again, there is a great deal of agreement between the two parties. On education, both supported the extension of free childcare and that teachers should hold a professional qualification. Disagreements on education were a matter of budgetary concerns rather than actual policy disagreement. On the environment and climate change, both parties agreed on most issues, and disagreements reflected differences in nuance and emphasis. However one significant difference was the Liberal Democrats' opposition to Labour's plan to freeze energy prices between 2015 and 2017. They saw this as a damaging intervention in the market, and both parties campaigned heavily on this during the 2010 parliament. On the European Union, both parties strongly supported Britain's continued membership, and both opposed the Conservatives' plan to hold a referendum on European Union membership unless there was significant treaty change.²⁶ Finally on constitutional affairs, both parties continued a long-held mix of agreement and disagreement. Both supported an elected House of Lords, extended devolution, votes for 16 and 17 year olds and party funding reform. However on these issues, there is often agreement on the need for reform, but disagreement on practical implementation. On the voting system, the parties disagree on the voting system for Westminster and English local elections, and on party funding reform any agreement on regulation is weakened by disagreement over issues such as trade union donations to the Labour Party.

Of course, some issues are more salient to one party than another. Both parties prioritise education, and there is nothing to suggest there would have been significant disagreement there. Indeed, former Shadow Education Secretary Stephen Twigg (2016) told me of his support for the Liberal Democrats' pupil premium policy. The environment is arguably an issue of more pressing importance to the Liberal Democrats. They made it an issue of

²⁶ However, as discussed in the leadership chapter, the Liberal Democrats would likely have accepted a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union had another Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition followed the 2015 general election.

Table 4.3: The extent of Labour/Liberal Democrat agreement on issues important to each party

	<i>Policy agreement</i>	<i>Policy disagreement</i>
Education	<p>Both parties supported Ofsted inspecting academies.</p> <p>Both parties wanted it to be mandatory for teachers to be qualified.</p> <p>Both parties supported extending free childcare.</p> <p>Both parties supported extending pastoral care and lessons in schools, including extended sex and relationship education.</p>	<p>The Liberal Democrat supported protecting the education budget in real terms. Labour would not guarantee this.</p> <p>The Liberal Democrats supported free meals for all primary school children. Labour did not support this.</p> <p>Labour did not guarantee to continue the Liberal Democrat supported Pupil Premium for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.</p>
Environment/climate change	<p>Both parties supported long-term decarbonisation targets, including a commitment to renewable energy investment.</p> <p>Both parties supported nuclear power as an energy source.</p> <p>Both parties supported European Union targets on reducing greenhouse gas emissions.</p> <p>Both parties wanted to extend the Green Investment Bank's funding.</p> <p>Both parties supported greater investment in flood defences.</p> <p>Both parties supported comprehensive, long-term</p>	<p>Labour wanted to freeze energy prices from 2015 to 2017. The Liberal Democrats strongly opposed this.</p> <p>The Liberal Democrats wanted to push the European Union targets on reducing greenhouse gas emissions further than Labour.</p> <p>Both parties offered different targets in relation to renewable energy use and energy saving.</p> <p>Labour wanted to permit the Green Investment Bank to borrow to invest. The Liberal Democrats did not advocate this.</p>

	reviews into climate change and planning for its impact. Both parties supported greater regulation of the energy market.	
European Union	Both parties strongly supported Britain's continued membership of the European Union. Both parties supported a referendum should more power be transferred to the European Union. Neither party supported the Conservatives' plan to hold a referendum on European Union membership after the 2015 general election.	
Constitutional affairs	Both parties supported greater devolution to Scotland, Wales and English cities and regions. Both parties supported an elected House of Lords. Both parties supported lowering the voting age to 16. Both parties supported political party funding reform.	The Liberal Democrats supported the Single Transferable Vote to be used in Westminster elections. Labour did not mention electoral reform in its manifesto. The Liberal Democrats also supported the Single Transferable Vote to be used in local elections in England. Labour did not mention electoral reform in its manifesto.

Sources: Policy documents, speeches 2015 general election manifestos, Harrop and Lee (2015).

distinction between themselves and the two major parties, and would likely have pushed for control of the Department of Energy and Climate Change in a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition. However, Labour leader Ed Miliband was a respected Energy and Climate Change Secretary between 2008 and 2010, and any disagreements would likely be budgetary rather than principled.

The European Union was a key issue for both parties in that they would be united against the Conservatives. Constitutional affairs have always been much more important to the Liberal Democrats than Labour, but while this might have been an issue that damaged the potential for co-operation between the two in 2010, it was unlikely to do so in 2015. Electoral reform was still a salient issue for the Liberal Democrats, but the decisive rejection of the Alternative Vote in a referendum in 2011 made this an unrealistic proposition for the Liberal Democrats to pursue after the 2015 general election.

As with issues salient to the electorate, the data in Table 4.3 suggests that at the 2015 general election the two parties agreed on enough areas of policy salient to them both to suggest that a governing agreement could easily have been reached. As Harrop and Lee (2015: 2) summarise in their analysis of Labour and Liberal Democrat policy overlap, ‘there is significant common ground between Labour and the Liberal Democrats which offers scope for negotiation and potential agreement... that could form a realistic and comprehensive agenda for government’. This echoes Sassoon’s (1997: 12) comments prior to the 1997 general election, where he argued that the ‘differences between the two parties are... minimal. In fact there is less disparity between them than... is normally the case between any two different parties’. In summary, for issues salient to the electorate and salient to each party, there is little to suggest that there would have been significant policy to obstacles to co-operation following the 2015 general election.

4.3.3 Post-2015

The previous section has shown that had electoral circumstances allowed, co-operation in government between Labour and the Liberal Democrats after the 2015 general election would not have been greatly hindered by policy matters. However, both parties suffered heavy electoral defeats at the 2015 general election, now have new leaderships and arguably new

policy and ideological directions. This section outlines the ideological and policy incentives and obstacles to co-operation between the two parties after the 2015 general election.

Successive Labour leaders have sought to appeal to a broad base of voters that includes former Conservative supporters, albeit with varying degrees of success. Jeremy Corbyn won the Labour leadership election in September 2015, and his re-election as leader in 2016, on a platform of opposition to 'austerity-lite and Conservative-lite'. In particular, he has focused more on non-voters rather than Conservatives. He has said little that directly responds to the reasons outlined by academics for Labour's defeat in the 2015 general election, that they were seen as incompetent on the salient issues of the economy, immigration and leadership (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2015, Denver, 2015), and he purposefully rejects many of the ideological platforms argued not just by more economically liberal voices in Labour (see Diamond and Kenny, 2010, Diamond and Kenny, 2012, Philpott, 2011), but also the more communitarian based politics of New Labour (Geary and Pabst, 2015).

How much Corbyn's leadership will challenge Labour's ideological and policy platform is still open to debate. The party's formal policy positions are not a huge change from Ed Miliband's. However, Corbyn's ideological positions are certainly a challenge to much of Labour's dominant thinking in recent years (Russell, 2016). Even if his thinking resembles the Tribune Group thinking from the 1970s, Corbyn joined the Campaign Group faction following his election in 1983, supporting the Bennite wing of the Labour Parliamentary Party. In parts, it is a rejection of revisionist thinking more in line with Ralph Miliband *Parliamentary Socialism* (1972). So far, Jeremy Corbyn has repeated Ed Miliband's pledge to re-nationalise the railways as private contracts come up for renewal, opposed welfare cuts imposed by the Conservative government, and opposed military action in Syria. He has continued his criticism of western democracies' foreign policy, justified Russian intervention in Syria, and also maintained his long-standing opposition to the independent nuclear deterrent (albeit with caveats relating to state investment in the communities that build the deterrent, and during the 2017 general election campaign he publicly defended party policy to maintain the deterrent). Together, along with Jeremy Corbyn's history on the fringes of the Parliamentary Labour Party, they imply a very different approach to the Labour leadership compared with Ed Miliband and those before him.

Following the Liberal Democrat defeat in the 2015 general election, Nick Clegg stepped down as leader and was replaced by Tim Farron. He named a largely new team to shadow government ministers and departments, but this was due more to their heavily depleted number in the House of Commons. He made opposing Britain's exit from the European Union, the environment, support for refugees, civil liberties and LGBT-rights the party's priorities, but largely struggled to get recognition for these. While he is generally regarded to be on the 'yellow' wing of the party, he did not move the party far from its previous positions. Indeed, Nick Clegg was their spokesperson for Europe and issues surrounding Britain's membership of the European Union. He also insisted that he would only enter into a future Westminster coalition (with any party) if there was a guarantee of electoral reform (Eaton, 2015b).

Tim Farron resigned after the 2017 general election, having struggled to reconcile his personal evangelical Christian faith and his public liberalism. Vince Cable became Liberal Democrat leader, with no other candidate standing. Like Farron, Cable is often grouped in the left wing of the party. Yet he wrote a chapter in *The Orange Book* (Laws and Marshall, 2004), and he was a willing (if critical) participant in the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government of 2010-2015.

The vote to leave the European Union in June 2016 also changes matters. Theresa May's Conservative Party is more socially conservative than David Cameron's on issues of immigration, and the current manner of implementing Britain's exit from the European Union is in direct contrast to the Liberal Democrats fervent support for EU membership. While Labour also support leaving the European Union and have largely backed the government, Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union Keir Starmer has offered different rhetoric with regard to single market membership and the rights of European citizens. Depending on circumstances, predominantly public opinion, there is potential for Labour and the Liberal Democrats' respective policies on exiting the European Union to converge.

Analysing each party's contemporary policy platform is no easy task, primarily because many of Corbyn's ideological positions are not just different from the Liberal Democrats, but also the vast majority of Labour's parliamentary party. There are some areas of greater agreement with Corbyn as Labour leader: the two parties are closer on abolishing the independent

nuclear deterrent. Both parties broadly opposed leaving the European Union, but Jeremy Corbyn has appeared much more accepting of the result than Tim Farron or Vince Cable. Corbyn is also much more supportive of state intervention in the economy than the Liberal Democrats, and much less supportive of intervention in foreign affairs. For example, Tim Farron and the majority of his parliamentary party supported intervention in Syria in 2015, while Jeremy Corbyn opposed. Corbyn has argued that Labour must have a ‘serious debate about the powers of NATO’ and argued for NATO to ‘restrict its role’ in Eastern Europe (Hughes, 2015). On these and many other issues, Corbyn’s ideological positions are currently closer to the Green Party than they are to the Liberal Democrats or the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Together, the current debates within the Labour Party pose a greater obstacle to co-operation with the Liberal Democrats than previously. Following the ideological debates and changes in the Labour Party in the 1980s and 1990s, Joyce (1999: 267-268) concluded that there ‘were a number of ideas... common to both parties [that] all progressives could accept’. The changes since the 2010, 2015 and 2017 general elections signal a Labour Party policy platform that is less convinced than the 1997-2010 Labour governments by the ‘economic liberal assumption that markets are a better mechanism for the allocation of goods and services’ (Beech and Hickson, 2014). If this view persists in the Labour Party, it presents an ideological and policy obstacle to co-operation with the Liberal Democrats. Much will depend on how long Corbyn or those with his positions occupy the Labour Party leadership. As of yet, Corbyn has presented a very different ideological position, but has offered little substantial policy change. A good example of this is in Labour’s response to the referendum on European Union membership: Corbyn has promised to support leaving the European Union, but much stronger opposition to the government has come from Keir Starmer, Labour’s Shadow Secretary of State for Britain Exiting the European Union. Should the two parties be in a position to co-operate then it is not yet certain that Corbyn’s positions will be dominant in Labour.

Aside from the two parties’ leaderships, others within Labour and the Liberal Democrats have called for more ideological and policy co-operation in light of the 2015 general election. An edited book published in 2016 argues for co-operation across centre-left parties (particular focus is on Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens) to generate ideas and policies that will help ‘build a progressive alliance within parliament’ (Nandy et al., 2016a). The book does not endorse mergers, and validates differences in each party. It features contributions

from prominent figures in the Labour, Liberal Democrat, and Green parties, including Tim Farron MP, Steve Reed MP, Norman Lamb MP, Lisa Nandy MP, Caroline Lucas MP and others. In doing so it has contributions from people both in the *Progress* tendency (Steve Reed MP) and the soft left (Lisa Nandy MP) of Labour, and in the Liberal Democrats contributions from both the ‘yellow’ (Tim Farron MP) and ‘orange’ (Norman Lamb MP) factions. The book complements calls already made by other Labour and Liberal Democrat figures for greater anti-Conservative co-operation ahead of the next general election (Cooper, 2016, Reed, 2015).

This project, particularly the breadth of contributors across both parties, confirms that there is still an ideological appetite for co-operation between the two parties. Alongside this, where figures in Labour and the Liberal Democrats have called for co-operation between the two parties, this has mostly been done in the name of ‘anti-Conservative’ co-operation. Vince Cable has voiced fears of a Conservative ‘one-party state’ (Cooper, 2016). Former Labour MP Jamie Reed (2015) has argued that ‘England is home to a strong progressive tradition that its two major progressive parties [Labour and the Liberal Democrats] should work to unite, not divide’. However, there remains opposition, even amongst those previously in favour of co-operation between the two parties. Lord Adonis, former SDP member and now Labour peer, and former strong proponent of Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation, told me:

I don’t see much in the way of co-operation in the future – the Lib Dems are simply too weak. They are weak, not just electorally but also weak in terms of ideas. The Liberals’ ideological position in the 1970s and 1980s was coherently between Labour and the Tories. They don’t have that now. In part, that’s a consequence of Labour’s moderates or right or whatever you want to call them. Blair outflanked the Lib Dems, and Labour’s moderates are to the right of the Lib Dems’ soft left. The task for Labour moderates, like Chuka Umunna, is to regain ideological ground in their own party, not to look at co-operation with the Liberal Democrats. It would be like seating yourself next to a corpse. They are not even the principal protest party now – UKIP and the Greens have that now (Adonis, 2016).

Broadly, the significant changes to both parties in light of the 2015 and 2017 general elections provide incentives to co-operation in that they have encouraged key figures in both parties to discuss co-operation more openly and more broadly than they did previously. However, there is little evidence yet that this will develop into something more substantial. Adonis’s

argument about the Liberal Democrats' electoral and ideological weakness could also be applied to the Labour Party, albeit to a lesser extent. Should the two parties somehow manage to achieve a parliamentary majority between them at the next general election, again there appears enough policy compatibility to facilitate co-operation, but whether such co-operation could endure is much more doubtful.

4.4 Conclusion

In response to the notion that Labour might need the Liberal Democrats' support in the future, Diamond and Kenny (2012: 8) argue that 'Labour can either pretend that such a scenario is simply unimaginable, or it can begin to assess what... centre-left [co-operation] might entail'. This chapter has outlined that if Labour wants to assess such an idea, they will find plenty of common ground between the two parties that provides no opposition to co-operation. This is the case firstly in ideological terms. Labour's acquiescence with social liberalism has been evident throughout the 20th century, and its socialism has always been in an evolutionary, reformist form. Even the Liberal Democrats' 'orange book' liberals have social liberalism as their primary objective (Howarth, 2007).

It is also the case in policy terms. While the Liberal Democrats joined the Conservatives in coalition between 2010 and 2015, they have long remained closer to Labour, and this is still the case today. The breadth and depth of calls by Liberal Democrat figures since the 2015 general election for increased 'anti-Conservative' co-operation with Labour is testament to that. Using both quantitative analysis of manifesto data since 1945 and qualitative analysis of each party's recent policy programmes, this chapter has shown that Labour and the Liberal Democrats are closer together on policy matters than either party is with the Conservatives. On the manifesto data, the Conservatives are also close to both parties, reflecting the convergence between the three parties in recent years (Green, 2015). However, based on the data there is little obstacle to Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation.

However, there are still ideological and policy differences between the two parties that represent an obstacle to co-operation. The two parties have different approaches to the individual, society and state, based on different interpretations of liberty, freedom and equality. In policy terms, this had led to different approaches to home affairs, security and foreign affairs, as well as different emphasis on public services, social security and the

environment. Both their ideological and policy differences are reflected in their histories. As shown in Chapter Three, both parties' previous interaction represents a mixture of competition and co-operation, but also a mixture of adversarial and tribal politics. Often, tribalism is a successful electoral and organisational strategy (Fielding and McHugh, 2003), and to co-operate with other parties is to risk fracture, dissent and loss of identity (Dunphy and Bale, 2011, Whiteley et al., 2006). It is something which has been more powerful than co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats so far in their history.

Each party's ideologies and policy programmes represent an incentive to co-operation in that there would have been little foreseen difficulty in forming a coalition or parliamentary agreement in recent years. This would have been the case in 2010 and 2015; however it would have been much more difficult following the 2017 general election. However, sustaining co-operation over a longer period of time, or advancing co-operation to the extent that the two parties represent a co-operative force against conservatism or the Conservative Party, would likely be much more difficult. As Robinson (2012: 28-29) argues, co-operation between Labour and the Liberals in the 1970s was based on pragmatic responses to specific electoral and ideological contexts, as opposed to a recognition of shared history and ideology. If co-operation is to take place between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, it is likely to take place on this basis again. Ideology and policy represent an incentive to co-operation, but only to a point. If the two parties have shared ideological and policy positions over a long period of time, it takes only a cursory glance at the lack of co-operation between the two parties to suggest that ideology and policy are not the most important considerations in determining co-operation. For example, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats were able to agree a policy programme to facilitate a coalition after the 2010 general election, but it was mainly the parliamentary arithmetic that provided the incentives to co-operate there (Bale, 2011b). The next chapter explores these electoral, office-seeking considerations.

Chapter 5: The electoral incentives and obstacles to Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation

This chapter addresses the electoral incentives and obstacles to co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, as well as analysing public opinion towards co-operation between the two. As shown earlier in the thesis, the hung parliament at the 2010 general election was a result of a long term process of party system change, and the relationship between political parties and their potential to co-operate with each other is therefore a more pressing issue. While the 2015 general election delivered a Conservative majority, it far from heralds a return to majoritarian politics solely contested by the Labour and Conservative parties. The recent 2017 general election provides further evidence of this. The range of results in a future general election that could generate a hung parliament is vast (Curtice, 2015), and the issue of the electoral incentives and obstacles to party co-operation remains an important question to be addressed.

This change has particular consequences for both Labour and the Liberal Democrats. For Labour, the long-term trend away from a two-party system in the electoral arena (Webb, 2000), and more recently in the parliamentary arena (Curtice, 2010, 2015), makes a majority Labour government a more questionable prospect. However, co-operation with other parties is not necessarily an easy option to overcome the problem. When Labour is defeated in a general election, the view that Labour should join with other centre-left parties in a broad ‘progressive alliance’ often gets more prominence. Indeed, the argument that Labour should consider co-operating with other parties received more attention now following Labour’s poor polling numbers in light of the 2015 general election (see Harrop, 2017).

However, the argument often neglects the complex reasons behind vote choice, focusing instead solely on negative attitudes towards the Conservative Party. From Labour’s perspective, Fielding and McHugh (2003) argue that any notion of a ‘progressive alliance’ is unlikely to provide a basis for electoral success, as it alienates other sections of Labour’s electorate. For the Liberal Democrats, a more pluralist party system should be to their electoral benefit. However, co-operation with Labour is in danger of defining the Liberal Democrats as predominantly anti-Conservative, which could lose them support in their (former) south west and south east heartlands. The prospect of coalition with an Ed Miliband

and Labour-led government has also been argued to have damaged the Liberal Democrats' electoral performance at the 2015 general election (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2015). On the other side of the political spectrum, co-operation with the Conservatives between 2010 and 2015 also severely damaged the party at the 2015 general election (Johnson and Middleton, 2016). If Labour are a rock and the Conservatives are a hard place, then the Liberal Democrats were certainly in the centre ground of British politics at the 2015 general election.

As shown in the theoretical framework, co-operation can take different forms. Most understandings of co-operation are post-electoral, through government or legislative co-operation (Boston and Bullock, 2012, Martin and Stevenson, 2001). However co-operation can also be pre-electoral, through electoral pacts and agreements, or the promotion of tactical voting (Fisher, 2004, Golder, 2005). In both forms, Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation will affect future voting behaviour. Votes are usually valued not intrinsically, but for their contribution to winning office (Strøm, 1990). On the one hand, co-operation between the two parties might increase the flow of votes to each party where they need them most: in constituencies where they have a realistic prospect of winning. On the other hand, co-operation might increase the flow of votes to other parties if it changes voters' perceptions of each party for the worse. The trade-off between winning some votes and losing others provide both electoral incentives and obstacles to co-operation, and how they balance out is important for both parties.

This chapter thus applies the electoral element of the thesis's theoretical framework: to what extent does co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrat improve each party's electoral prospects? Does co-operation increase the chances for both parties winning office? How might co-operation affect how each party competes elsewhere? First, the chapter outlines each party's current electoral position, as it is from this point that both parties will need to consider the potential for co-operation. Had the 2015 or 2017 general elections delivered a hung parliament and a majority in the House of Commons for a Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition, any analysis of co-operation would be very different. As it is, the two parties' electoral situations present a different context to work from. Second, the chapter analyses the incentives and obstacles to pre-electoral Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. Third, it analyses the incentives and obstacles to post-electoral Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. Throughout the chapter makes use of constituency election data, interviews with key Labour and Liberal Democrat figures, and secondary survey data from the British

Election Study, Hansard Society Audit of Political Engagement and a survey by YouGov ahead of the 2015 general election.²⁷

One of the central arguments presented in the theoretical framework is that co-operation and competition are complex concepts, not sufficiently reflected through individual forms of party interaction such as coalitions or electoral pacts. However, this means that it is difficult to measure through one dependent variable or a series of dependent variables. This is also further complicated by a lack of data on party co-operation in the UK, as long-running surveys within political science, such as the British Election Study, have understandably paid it little attention. Where they take an interest, it is usually solely on coalition, rather than the different forms of co-operation presented in Chapter Two. The approach here is thus to try and make the most of the data in a way that still satisfies the theoretical concepts discussed in Chapter Two. Where multivariate analysis is possible (see Table 5.6), the dependent variable is a binary variable indicating support (or not) for a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition after the 2015 general election. Qualitative data largely treats co-operation as a more open concept, acknowledging that it can incorporate other forms such as electoral pacts, and confidence and supply agreements.

The conclusions of this chapter show that the electoral incentives and obstacles differ depending on the nature of co-operation that might take place. With regard to pre-electoral co-operation, while there are some incentives it is a very risky strategy. A strong Liberal Democrat party weakens the chances of a Conservative majority, strengthening Labour's electoral prospects. Losing Labour-leaning supporters also cost the Liberal Democrats badly at the 2015 general election, and appears to have also hurt the Liberal Democrats in the 2017 general election (Fieldhouse and Prosser, 2017). However, for Labour, co-operation with a social and economic liberal party is likely to further alienate Labour's more socially conservative vote. For the Liberal Democrats, co-operation with a social democratic party that has recently failed to convince the electorate that it can be credible and competent in

²⁷ YouGov kindly provided the researcher with the dataset to allow more thorough analysis of public opinion to Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. The original YouGov report can be found at <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2015/04/24/ranking-coalitions/>.

government risks losing Conservative-leaning voters. For co-operation to be electorally beneficial to both parties requires strategic thinking and radical changes in their approaches to party competition, and there is little evidence of this taking place in either party.

The chapter also argues that should the parties be in a position to co-operate post-electorally, their own voters do not provide much of an incentive to co-operation. The best data relating to Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation stems from 2015. Very few Labour voters were enthusiastic about a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition at the 2015 general election, and one third even disapproved. While Liberal Democrat voters had broadly similar views to forming a Labour-Liberal Democrat or Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, they strongly favoured David Cameron as Prime Minister over Ed Miliband. However, if both parties need each other to govern in the future then coalition remains a likely prospect. Brought together, these conclusions show that there is potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats based on electoral concerns, but there are big risks too. Without a big change in each party's thinking, as well as addressing their own fundamental electoral issues, there are more reasons to be pessimistic at present.

5.1 Labour and the Liberal Democrats' electoral position

First, it is important to examine the precariousness of both parties' electoral position in light of the 2015 and 2017 general elections. Labour won 232 seats at the 2015 general election, 94 short of a majority. While the constituency boundaries and the electoral system particularly favoured Labour between 1997 and 2010, the balance shifted heavily in the Conservatives' favour between 2010 and 2015. For example, the Conservatives previously 'wasted' a lot of their votes on coming second to the Liberal Democrats in seats in the south west of England. Now, those votes have elected Conservative MPs. Meanwhile, Labour is 'wasting' votes coming in second place to the Scottish National Party in many seats in Scotland. The intricacies of the 2015 general election left fewer marginal seats than ever before (Curtice, 2015). For Labour to achieve a majority, they will need a swing of over 9 percentage points from the Conservatives, a fate not achieved by Labour since the 1997 general election. This is assuming that the electoral boundaries remain the same. While not certain, there is the potential for changes to voter registration and boundaries that will likely damage Labour's electoral prospects even further (Baston, 2014). However, Curtice's (2015: 39) analysis of the

current boundaries shows that any result between a Conservative lead in vote share of 5.8 percentage points over Labour and a Labour lead in vote share of 12.5 percentage points over the Conservatives will result in a hung parliament. While a Labour majority government looks difficult to achieve, a hung parliament might not be an unreasonable expectation.

Indeed, at the 2017 general election the Conservatives won 2.4 percentage points more votes than Labour, and there was a hung parliament. Labour won 262 seats. While this has been celebrated by many Labour commentators, and indeed is a far better result than many academics and analysts predicted (Fisher et al., 2017), Labour still comfortably lost the election. They have just four more seats than when Labour contested the 2010 general election with Gordon Brown as its leader.

This leaves Labour with a number of questions about its electoral prospects. Labour did not just lose the 2015 general election due to some intricate changes in constituency competition. Labour lost because voters did not trust them on the economy, which continued from the financial crisis in 2007. Indeed, Labour's more radical position on the economy under Miliband was a risky strategy. As one adviser to the Labour Shadow Cabinet and consultant to the manifesto team told me:

We were always going to lose a chunk of our 2010 vote to the Tories. If you remember our 2010 campaign, it was 'better the devil you know', 'let's not change course in the middle of a crisis', 'the Tories are a risk'. Now if you're a risk-averse... type of voter, what are you gonna do in 2015? You're not gonna vote Labour again, you're gonna vote Tory this time (private interview).

Alongside issues relating voters' perception of the economy, voters did not trust Labour's leadership, and they appeared out of touch on key issues such as immigration and welfare. Any efforts to widen Labour's electoral base between 2010 and 2015 failed. Labour won just three seats south of London at the 2015 general election. Bar one (Brighton Pavilion for the Greens), every other seat was won by the Conservative Party. Following the 2015 general election, Diamond and Radice (2015: xi) argued that the 'risk for the Labour Party, like social democratic parties across Europe, is further electoral defeat and, then inevitably, permanent irrelevance'.

Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party originally showed little cause for optimism in this regard. Noting that Labour lost due to incompetence and distrust on the key issues of the economy, welfare, immigration and leadership, Bale (2016: 1) argues:

It will not win an election five years later by being even less determined to balance the books, by being led by someone who looks and sounds even less prime ministerial, and by being seen as an even softer touch on welfare and immigration. Throw in being regarded as a danger to the defence of the realm and the security of its people, too, and you have a recipe for total and utter disaster.

Labour continue to trail the Conservatives on the economy, and Jeremy Corbyn continues to trail Theresa May on who would make the best prime minister (YouGov, 2017c, YouGov, 2017a). However, Labour and Corbyn closed the gap on both issues during the 2017 general election campaign. As in the Labour leadership elections of 2015 and 2016, Jeremy Corbyn showed his abilities as a campaigner. Using data from the British Election Study, Fieldhouse and Prosser (Fieldhouse and Prosser, 2017) find that Labour won most of the 'undecided' voters during the general election campaign. They also find that Labour performed best among 'Remain' voters, and did well with those that did not want a strong break with the European Union. Labour also benefitted from a stunted Conservative campaign, that spent time focusing on unpopular issues like specific health care taxes and fox hunting. Labour won 40 per cent of the vote at the 2017 general election, their best performance since 2001, and yet remain quite some way from winning a majority.

If Labour's electoral position provides reasons both for optimism and caution, the Liberal Democrats' electoral position provides reasons predominantly for despair. At the 2015 general election, they received just 7.9 per cent of the vote and won just 8 MPs, a drop from 23 per cent of the vote and 57 MPs at the 2010 general election.

In urban areas of northern England where they had built up support as the opposition to Labour in both local and Westminster elections, they were heavily beaten. Standing against the Conservatives in the south west of England, long-standing Liberal Democrat MPs were wiped out. In Scotland, along with Labour and the Conservatives, they lost heavily to the Scottish National Party (Johnson and Middleton, 2016: 63).

The Liberal Democrats, and their Liberal and SDP counterparts before them, have long struggled for electoral relevance. Between 1992 and 2010, the Liberal Democrats ruthlessly targeted constituencies, winning council seats, a majority on the council and subsequently the parliamentary seat (Cutts, 2014). It has been labelled the ‘snowball effect’ (Harrison, 2007), or ‘creeping Liberalism’ (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005). Following the 2010 general election, the Liberal Democrats won enough seats to have coalition potential, and following five days of negotiations with Labour and the Conservatives they joined the Conservatives in coalition.

It was electorally disastrous for them. With their previous voters, the Liberal Democrats were not perceived as competent in government, lost trust and failed to hold on to seats they had built support in over a long period of time (Cutts and Russell, 2015, Johnson and Middleton, 2016). The 2015 general election showed the weakness of the Liberal Democrat vote.

Since the referendum on Britain’s membership of the European Union, the Liberal Democrats have positioned themselves as the ‘voice of the 48 per cent’ that voted to remain. They performed reasonably impressively in council by-elections throughout 2016, gaining 29 seats (Labour lost 7 and the Conservatives lost 33 in the same period). They also gained the Richmond Park constituency from former Conservative MP Zac Goldsmith, the first time they have held the seat since 2010. However, their national poll ratings remained stubbornly low, and in the 2017 general election, they won just 12 seats (losing Richmond Park), and just 7.4 per cent of the vote. They lost 375 deposits, even more than they lost in the 2015 general election, compared with losing none in the 2010 general election.²⁸ Fieldhouse and Prosser (2017) show that the Liberal Democrats lost a share of their 2015 ‘Remain’ vote to Labour. Nonetheless, they survived and increased their share of seats, which was by no means guaranteed.

²⁸ A candidate loses their deposits if they poll fewer than five per cent in a constituency.

5.2 Theorising electoral incentives and obstacles to pre-electoral co-operation

Both Labour and the Liberal Democrats are therefore in a very difficult position. Prior to the 2015 general election, based on opinion polling and election forecasting, both held realistic hopes of entering government (Monk and Lambert, 2015). As it happened, they were both heavily beaten. Neither party was argued to have a chance of entering government in 2017, although Labour were not far away from having a chance at forming a government in a hung parliament. Both parties' electoral position has led some in Labour and the Liberal Democrats to suggest that co-operation might electorally benefit each other in the future (Cable, 2016, Reed, 2015). Strøm et al. (1994: 316) argue that the more disproportional the electoral system, the greater the incentive for pre-electoral pacts or alliances. On this basis, the UK would have many cases of pre-electoral co-operation to analyse. As it is, there have only been a small number in the last century (Wager, 2015). As shown in Chapter Three, this is partly due to the electoral system and party system. For periods of the twentieth century the UK political system embodied two-partism. With only two parties competing for office in a winner-takes-all system, even with a disproportionate electoral system there is little electoral incentive to co-operate (Golder, 2005). However, this has been gradually changing to the extent that there are more parties and different interactions throughout the UK.

The argument then is that disproportional electoral systems and multi-party competition provides electoral incentives for parties to co-operate (Golder, 2005). In the UK, as of 2015, there are 650 single-member districts brought together to form the legislative chamber.²⁹ If one section of the electorate, such as the right on a spatial dimension, is represented by one political party, and another, the left, is represented by two (or more) parties, the one party on the right will win more districts than the left parties as their votes will be split across them. The rational act would be for the left parties to form a pre-electoral pact, recognising that in some districts it would be much easier for one of them to win without the competition of the other. Short of that, each party could encourage tactical voting. As Fisher (2004: 157) defines it, a tactical voter is 'someone who votes for a party they believe is more likely to win than

²⁹ Only 632 (631, if the Speaker's current constituency is included) are relevant to the argument. Labour and the Liberal Democrats do not stand candidates in Northern Ireland.

their preferred party, to best influence who wins in the constituency'. Evidence from elections in Britain suggests that tactical voting is commonplace in general elections, and at the 2010 general election one in six voters voted tactically (Johnston and Pattie, 2011a). In certain constituencies, Labour or the Liberal Democrats could field a 'paper' candidate and put little or no resources into a seat in the hope of encouraging support for another party.

Applied in practice to British politics, the left/right spatial dimension example throws up a too simplistic problem. Although Labour and the Liberal Democrats have more in common than either party does with the Conservatives, they remain different entities with different priorities and platforms. However, there are also arguments that both parties have electoral incentives to consider co-operation. Both parties, though particularly the Liberal Democrats, benefitted from tactical voting by each party's supporters to defeat Conservative candidates in seats in the 1997 and 2001 general elections (Evans et al., 1998). Curtice and Steed (1997) estimate that tactical voting won the Liberal Democrats 14 seats in the 1997 general election, while more focused analysis of constituency results by Herrmann et al. (2015) estimates that 21 of the Liberal Democrats' victories in the 1997 general election were as a result of tactical voting, compared with 9 for Labour.

There are clear theoretical electoral incentives for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. However, it necessarily follows that co-operation is not an act without electoral consequence (Strøm, 1990): parties will look to co-operate in order to reap electoral benefit, but just as it is possible for there to be electoral benefits it is possible for there to be electoral costs too. It is a fanciful argument that you can get a plurality of soft left voters together to outvote the Conservatives in a majority of seats through some clever process of electoral strategy. Labour co-operating with the Liberal Democrats has the potential to win both parties votes that might help win seats from the Conservatives. It also has the potential to cause some of both parties' current or previous support to go elsewhere in opposition to the idea. In short, if Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation is to have electoral incentive it brings with it two key assumptions:

1. If there are sufficient Labour supporters in seats where the Liberal Democrats might defeat the Conservatives, and vice versa, this is an incentive to Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation.

2. If this outweighs the number of Labour and Liberal Democrats who, in opposition to co-operation, will desert the relevant party, this is an incentive to Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation.

Using a mixture of constituency election data over time, public opinion data and qualitative data from interviews from key party figures, we can develop a good understanding of the flow of vote in important constituencies, and how this might present incentives and obstacles to pre-electoral co-operation. To this end, Table 5.1 shows the number and makeup of seats where the Liberal Democrats are in competition with the Conservatives following the 2015 and 2017 general elections, as well as those where Labour and the Conservatives are in competition. This will highlight the potential areas where Labour or the Liberal Democrats might withdraw a candidate to further the electoral prospects of the other (and free up resources to spend in other constituencies).

Table 5.1: Seats showing the Conservative’s primary competitors, 2015 and 2017 general election

	<i>2015</i>	<i>2017</i>
N of seats where Conservatives and Liberal Democrats are primary competitors	50	37
(Conservative-Liberal Democrat)	46	29
(Liberal Democrat-Conservative)	4	8
N of seats where Labour vote exceeds either majority	18	15
N of seats where Conservatives and Labour are primary competitors	380	519
(Conservative-Labour)	207	273
(Labour-Conservative)	173	246
N of seats where Liberal Democrat vote exceeds either majority	31	54

Note: ‘Primary competitors’ is defined as those that finished in first or second place in the constituency.

Source: 2015 and 2017 British Election Study constituency dataset.

Following the 2017 general election, there are 37 seats where the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives are the primary competitors, down from 50 in 2015. Of those, 29 are Conservative-held and 8 Liberal Democrat-held. Meanwhile, there are 519 seats where the Conservatives and Labour are the primary competitors, up from 380 in 2015. Of those, 273 are Conservative-held and 246 Labour-held. The dominance of Labour-Conservative

competition in 2017 demonstrates not only the collapse of two now former third-parties: the Liberal Democrats in 2015, and UKIP in 2017.

As a starting point, this chapter focuses only on seats where the weaker (potential) co-operating party's constituency vote is higher than the winning party's majority. This is on the basis that it is only worth discussing those seats where the entire Labour or Liberal Democrat vote going to the other party would have enabled victory for the other party, or substantially strengthened its majority if the seat was already held by a Labour or Liberal Democrat candidate. This in itself is very unlikely, but highlights that any seat where the weaker party's vote would not generate a different result is not worth including in a discussion of seats for a potential pact. It also focuses on constituency results from the 2017 general election as a starting point. While focusing on the most recent election leaves this analysis vulnerable to shifts in public opinion and changes in constituency boundaries, it is where parties currently are and the basis from which they will operate. Focusing on 2017 provides a useful starting point from which to understand where Labour and the Liberal Democrats may co-operate in the future.

There are 53 seats where the Liberal Democrat vote is higher than the Conservative or Labour majority and 15 where the Labour vote is higher than the Conservative or Liberal Democrat majority. In total, it leaves 68 seats where an electoral pact might affect the result in the constituency. They do not represent a definite list of constituencies where Labour or the Liberal Democrat might withdraw a candidate, but instead that if either party is to consider co-operation with each other, there are a group of potential seats that might serve as a starting point. There remain incentives and obstacles beyond that, which are asymmetric in each party. The following section thus outlines the specific incentives and obstacles for each party in different anti-Conservative contexts.

5.3 Co-operation in Liberal Democrat-Conservative seats

This section sets out the incentives and obstacles to co-operation in Liberal Democrat-Conservative seats. Previous research has suggested that in the 1997 general election, the Liberal Democrats benefitted heavily from Labour-minded supporters switching their vote to the Liberal Democrats in seats where only they could realistically defeat the Conservatives (Evans et al., 1998, Herrmann et al., 2015, Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005: 157-160). However,

this was at a point where the two parties collectively opposed the Conservatives, to the extent that Russell and Fieldhouse (2005: 160) labelled it an ‘anti-Conservative’ alliance in key marginal seats. Since then, the two parties have diverged on a series of policy areas, and the Liberal Democrats have co-operated in government with the Conservatives. Indeed, data from the British Election Study shows that while in 1997, 60 per cent of voters thought the Liberal Democrats were closer to Labour than the Conservatives; just 34 per cent of voters thought the same in 2010.

However, it remains the case that there are a small number of constituencies where the Liberal Democrats are far better placed to defeat the Conservatives than Labour. Since the Liberal Democrats’ inception, their primary electoral competitors have been the Conservatives (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005). There are 15 seats where Labour withdrawing their candidate might significantly help this end. Table 5.2 shows these in more detail, outlining whether or not the Conservatives or Liberal Democrats are the incumbent party and Labour’s share of the vote in the constituency between 1997 and 2017. This is important, as it highlights the damaging effects of Labour’s increasing support between 2010 and 2017 on the Liberal Democrat vote share.

Following the 2010 general election, Labour targeted the Liberal Democrats as much as, if not more than, the Conservatives. As one of Ed Miliband’s former advisers outlined to me:

We knew of the 1.5 million Lib Dems who left Labour after Blair and Iraq, and they were there for the re-seizing after Blair left. Gordon [Brown] never really won them back... but Ed [Miliband] definitely tried to win them back, and we thought there were lots of Lib Dems in key seats... it was definitely a strategy of ours to pin it on the Lib Dems in the first couple of years to get the low-hanging Lib Dem fruit back to Labour (private interview).

Labour particularly focused on the Liberal Democrats’ ‘broken promises’ over tuition fees, spending cuts and the top rate of income tax (Eaton, 2014, Hurst, 2010a). In terms of winning votes, it was successful. Labour won many more votes in the 2015 general election from former Liberal Democrat voters than the Conservatives, and won as many votes from former Liberal Democrat voters as they did from former Conservative, Green and UKIP voters put together (Green and Prosser, 2015). It goes some way to explaining why Labour’s vote share

in England³⁰ increased by 3.6 percentage points at the 2015 general election, compared with an increase of just 1.4 percentage points in the Conservative vote share in England.

Table 5.2: Seats where Labour’s vote share exceeds the majority in a Conservative-Liberal Democrat constituency, 1997-2017

Constituency	<i>Incumbent</i>	<i>Lab</i> 97 (%)	<i>Lab</i> 01 (%)	<i>Lab</i> 05 (%)	<i>Lab</i> 10 (%)	<i>Lab</i> 15 (%)	<i>Lab</i> 17 (%)	<i>Majority</i> (%)
Cheadle	Cons	15.7	14.0	8.8	9.4	16.3	19.1	8.3
Cheltenham	Cons	10.1	12.0	11.4	5.1	7.3	9.5	4.5
Devon North	Cons	9.8	10.1	9.0	5.2	7.1	12.7	7.8
Hazel Grove	Cons	11.9	16.2	17.5	12.5	17.5	20.5	12.5
Lewes	Cons	10.6	7.3	9.0	5.0	9.9	11.2	10.2
Richmond Park	Cons	12.6	11.3	9.3	5.0	12.3	9.1	0.1
St Albans	Cons	42.0	45.4	34.3	17.6	23.3	23.0	10.7
St Ives	Cons	15.2	13.3	13.1	8.2	9.3	14.3	0.6
Bath	Lib Dem	16.4	15.7	14.8	6.9	13.2	14.7	11.5
Carshalton and Wallington	Lib Dem	23.9	18.4	17.2	8.7	15.0	18.4	2.7
Eastbourne	Lib Dem	12.5	13.3	10.9	5.8	7.8	8.1	2.8
Kingston and Surbiton	Lib Dem	23.0	8.8	13.2	9.3	14.5	14.8	6.6
Norfolk North	Lib Dem	25.1	13.3	9.2	5.8	10.2	9.9	6.7
Oxford West and Abingdon	Lib Dem	20.2	17.7	16.6	10.6	12.7	12.6	1.4
Westmorland and Lonsdale	Lib Dem	20.6	10.9	7.6	2.2	5.4	9.3	1.5
Average Labour vote share		18.0	15.2	13.5	7.8	12.1	13.8	

Source: Election results, British Election Study constituency dataset.

However, it also explains why the Conservatives gained more seats from the Liberal Democrats than Labour at the 2015 general election. Labour gained plenty of votes from the Liberal Democrats, and it helped win 12 seats from them in the 2015 general election. However, many of the votes that Labour gained from the Liberal Democrats were also in Liberal Democrat-Conservative marginals. Indeed, in those seats where the Liberal

³⁰ The focus here is only on England, as this is where the Liberal Democrat-Conservative seats are. There are no other seats where the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives are the primary competitors.

Democrats were fending off a Conservative challenge, more votes went from the Liberal Democrats to Labour than from the Liberal Democrats to the Conservatives (Green and Prosser, 2015). This is highlighted further in the constituencies listed in Table 5.2, where Labour's vote increased on average by 4.3 percentage points. This contrasts with an increase of 1.4 percentage points across Britain. Paradoxically, Labour's gain in Liberal Democrat votes was the Conservatives' gain in Liberal Democrat seats (Johnson and Middleton, 2016).

This played a part in helping the Conservatives win a majority in the House of Commons at the 2015 general election. Green and Prosser (2015) estimate that 2010 Liberal Democrat voters switching to Labour in 2015 cost the Liberal Democrats seven seats to the Conservatives' benefit. Labour putting forward a broader electoral appeal will help them tackle the Conservatives in constituencies where they have a local presence and strong organisation. However in other seats, Labour needs either to begin to win in seats it has never looked in contention, or recognise that another party is better placed to win (Green and Prosser, 2015). Electorally speaking, the latter is a much easier option, and presents a strong incentive to co-operation with the Liberal Democrats. If Labour supporters in Liberal Democrat-Conservative seats can be persuaded that the Liberal Democrats are a substantively better option than the Conservatives to the point that they will vote Liberal Democrat, then Labour's electoral prospects are improved. In short, a strong Liberal Democrat party electorally damages the Conservatives more than Labour. Labour's vote share in Conservative-Liberal Democrat seats increased further in the 2017 general election, with large Labour vote shares and wafer-thin Conservative majorities in seats like Richmond Park and St Ives.

A key issue that arises from this is the extent to which Labour can actually help rectify the Liberal Democrats' current weak position. That a strong Liberal Democrat party damages the Conservatives is one thing, but it only acts as an incentive to Labour-Liberal Democrat pre-electoral co-operation if Labour wants to do something about it, and is actually able to do something to make it happen. While the Liberal Democrats lost some seats to the Conservatives at the 2015 general election due to lost votes to Labour (Green and Prosser, 2015), this is not the only reason the Liberal Democrats lost. They lost mainly due to the electorate perceiving them as incompetent and untrustworthy (Johnson and Middleton, 2016).

How important are potentially switching Labour supporters to the Liberal Democrats defeating the Conservatives? Table 5.2 shows the average Labour vote share in key Liberal Democrat-Conservative seats. The increase between 2010 and 2017 supports Green and Prosser's (2015) argument regarding the extent to which voters went from the Liberal Democrats to Labour following 2010. However, whatever the presence of tactical voting by Labour supporters, the success or failure of the Liberal Democrats in the seats it has contested against the Conservatives has been primarily dependent on the Liberal Democrats' popularity on certain policy issues (Green and Hobolt, 2008), and local factors and contexts (Cutts, 2006, Cutts et al., 2010, Russell et al., 2001). While Labour supporters may have assisted the Liberal Democrats, they still remain small in number in these constituencies. The Liberal Democrats have previously proved at least equally adept at winning and holding on to votes from former Conservative supporters as they have Labour ones. There have been two key strands to this.

First, the Liberal Democrats have sought to develop a programme of policies distinctive from the left/right context. In short, the Liberal Democrats have claimed themselves to be 'not left nor right, but radical' (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005). As the electorate have become more instrumentally focused on competence on valence issues rather than left/right ideological differences (Clarke et al., 2009, Crewe and Denver, 1985), the Liberal Democrats have been able to gain support by being distinctive on key policy issues such as the Iraq invasion, education, Europe and the environment (Green and Hobolt, 2008).

Second, key to the Liberal Democrats' success against the Conservatives has been their personal incumbency and popularity. As Smith (2013) argues, prior to the 2015 general election one of the most difficult tasks in politics was to remove a sitting Liberal Democrat MP. Iain Dale (2014), Conservative candidate in the Liberal Democrat-Conservative marginal seat Norfolk North in 2005, remarked: 'every single house we went to... [delivered] the same message: "Well, we're really Conservatives but we're going to vote for that nice Mr Lamb [the Liberal Democrat MP]."... That's it, I know now I can't win'. The importance of local contexts and incumbency to the Liberal Democrats has now been well noted (Cutts, 2006, Cutts, 2014, Johnson, 2014, Smith, 2013). Building arguments from a series of interviews with Liberal Democrat MPs and party strategists, Russell and Fieldhouse (2005: 192-198) stress the importance of tailoring messages to individual constituencies. Tailoring the message in such a manner not only helps to stop the 'third-party squeeze' associated with first-past-

the-post elections in a two-party parliamentary system, but also allows the Liberal Democrats to challenge the Conservatives in some areas and Labour in others.

One Liberal Democrat MP told Russell and Fieldhouse (2005: 195) that ‘we would like to try to minimise the perception that we are closer to Labour than we are to the Tories’. This is because in a lot of seats where the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives are primary competitors, how Labour supporters vote matters a little, but it is not the main factor in influencing who wins the seat. As the new Liberal Democrat leader told me in 2016:

My constituency in particular, has been for a long time, pretty much since I stood in 1992, has been Lib Dem vs Conservative. [There were] a few Labour councillors, but they finally disappeared in the late 1990s, and they’ve never reappeared. Every [council] ward is Lib Dem vs Conservative... At general elections, there has always been a heavy degree of tactical voting, certainly when I first got elected in 1997 and the immediate following election, Labour was virtually reduced to deposit-losing levels, and that has remained a significant factor. At the last general election, we lost some of that tactical support. The Labour vote went up considerably, but it was still way way behind the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives (Cable, 2016).

Another former Liberal Democrat MP agrees, highlighting that while former Labour voters have been important for Liberal Democrat support, they left Labour not out of tactical considerations but a changing view of the Labour Party.

Our vote in 2010 had consisted of people who were Lib Dems, and enthusiastic about us for various reasons, both local and national... Quite a large number of working class voters who would have been Labour in the 60s and 70s and came over to us in the 80s and 90s and so forth, they didn’t greatly like the austerity, they didn’t like immigration. There was a new party that stands up for people who are not in the mainstream which was UKIP... people initially thought UKIP’s rise would damage the Tories but I was always nervous about the impact on us... so there was definitely a Labour vote, but that didn’t go up much in 2015, partly lack of enthusiasm across the country but they’d also been killed in our area (Laws, 2016b).

While those voters who moved back to Labour between 2010 and 2017 might have partially cost the Liberal Democrats at the 2017 general election, it was far from the only factor, and other considerations must be taken into account.

There are probably a few seats, including mine actually, which had we not seen some drift in the tactical vote would have been held, just about. But it wasn't the key factor. We basically lost the Conservatives, and they panicked a lot of voters. That was more important than the tactical vote (Cable, 2016).

I think what killed us was a lot of soft Lib Dem-Conservative-type voters, non-council house, working... aspirational voters who just did not like the idea of Ed Miliband, the SNP, and bought into the idea that their seat might decide the government. A bit of left splintering off, but not huge... the Labour vote didn't really go up... a large transfer of working class to UKIP and then this... late in the day switch [of people] who sort of voted Lib Dem without being very political... this time round bought the idea that they wanted the status quo to continue, and the best way for that was to vote Conservative. They definitely didn't want Ed Miliband and they certainly didn't want the SNP (Laws, 2016b).

This presents an obstacle to Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. Would co-operation with Labour turn away more Conservative-minded supporters than attract Labour-minded ones? For instance, prior to the 2005 general election, this fear was raised by many Liberal Democrat MPs, to the extent that then leader Charles Kennedy was forced to signal his opposition to governmental co-operation with Labour (Russell, 2005a).

Much of this will depend on the positions of Labour and the Liberal Democrats ahead of future general elections. For the Liberal Democrats, co-operation with a Labour Party winning over previous Conservative supporters, such as at the 1997 general election, presents less of an obstacle than co-operation with a Labour Party vacating centrist, valence politics. In 1997 and 2001, and to a lesser extent in 2005, Labour was able to win elections because it was more popular and perceived as more competent than the Conservatives (Johnston and Pattie, 2011b). However, the present position of the Labour Party is unlikely to be one amenable to many Conservative supporters (Diamond and Radice, 2015, O'Hara, 2015).

This is the key challenge for the Liberal Democrats, balancing a multitude of types of soft support. Labour and Liberal Democrat co-operation in Liberal Democrat-Conservative seats might well bring some Labour supporters back to the Liberal Democrats. Holding all other things constant, this is a clear incentive to co-operation. However, the flow of the vote outwards could be even greater. Why should a Conservative-leaning voter support the Liberal Democrats, if it makes a Labour-led government more likely? If a likely Labour-led

government is one that appears competent, trustworthy and aiming to govern in the hallowed centre ground, then to vote Liberal Democrat is perhaps less of a risk. However, when the potential outcome is a Labour government radically different to the Conservatives then the risks are much great. As Vince Cable told me:

The same kind of voters who were scared by the prospect of a Miliband-led government will be even more scared by Corbyn, and they may well continue to vote Conservative for reasons of fear (Cable, 2016).

Consideration should be given to how the Conservatives might react to such Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. During the 2015 general election campaign, the Conservatives strongly highlighted the prospect of an Ed Miliband-led government supported by the Scottish National Party. Various Conservative Party press releases highlighted ‘Nicola Sturgeon walking all over Ed Miliband’, ‘Ed Miliband is in the pocket of Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon has him on a leash’ (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2015: 172). Leading current and former Liberal Democrat MPs have spoken of how this ‘fear’ peddled by the Conservatives was very successful in former safe Liberal Democrat seats (Cable, 2015, Clegg, 2015b). Given the perceived success of such a campaign (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2015, Fielding, 2015), the Conservatives would likely campaign in the same fashion again. As one former Liberal Democrat MP told me:

What they [the Conservatives] don’t want to face are Lib Dem candidates who look moderate and sensible. What they [the Conservatives] would love to do is put us all in a box marked ‘Jeremy Corbyn’ and galvanise as large a number of voters against that proposition, which they would have no difficulty doing (Laws, 2016b).

The Conservatives tried this again during the 2017 general election campaign, warning of a ‘coalition of chaos’, but it appeared more difficult to convince voters that a Labour-led rainbow coalition was a likely outcome, given the opinion polls and expected comfortable victory. Nonetheless, it remains a problem for co-operation between the two parties. In short, there are potential electoral incentives for Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation in Liberal Democrat-Conservatives seats. However, there are potentially more risks and challenges at the present time.

5.4 Co-operation in Labour-Conservative seats

An electoral pact would also suggest a Liberal Democrat withdrawal in certain Labour-Conservative seats. If a pact is initiated alongside a clear and public statement of support for co-operation between the two, then Liberal Democrat supporters might be persuaded to move to Labour. Even without a pact, evidence continues to suggest that supporters of a party with no chance of winning in a constituency will tactically vote for a competitor they can still support (Johnston and Pattie, 2011a). All other things staying the same, a full transfer of support would lead to 31 gains for Labour over the Conservatives, and 23 Labour-held seats strengthened even further. At the 2017 general election, this would have prevented a Conservative majority, and would have made a Labour-led government a likely outcome.

Of course, this would not have happened. The average 2015 Liberal Democrat vote in the seats shown in Table 5.3 was 7.0 percentage points, and just 6.0 percentage points in those seats at the 2017 general election. This is down by 22.4 percentage points in the same seats at the 2010 general election. The collapse of the party's vote suggests that those people who still voted Liberal Democrat in the 2015 general election in those constituencies had a strong commitment to the party. Labour may have already won all of the Liberal Democrat supporters they could in the 2015 and 2017 general elections. This is supported by broader evidence of voting behaviour, which suggests that those with strong identification to a party are less likely to vote strategically in an election (Carvalho and Winters, 2014, Johnston and Pattie, 2011a). The question arises: why would those people vote Labour if the Liberal Democrat candidate stood down?

One response is: where else would they go? If the Liberal Democrats publicly declare that they are co-operating with Labour, then those supporters would arguably be more inclined to support Labour than another party. Even if only some of them change their vote to Labour, then Labour's electoral prospects might be improved. However, it is a very questionable strategy for so few votes. It is incredibly difficult to accurately anticipate shifts in support depending upon a withdrawing party's instruction (Gschwend and Hooghe, 2008).

Table 5.3: Seats where the Liberal Democrats' vote share exceeds the majority in a Conservative-Labour constituency, 2017 general election (%)

Constituency	<i>Incumbent</i>	<i>Majority (%)</i>	<i>Lib Dem 2015</i>	<i>Lib Dem 2017</i>	<i>10-17 (+/-)</i>
Aberconwy	Cons	2.0	4.6	2.9	-16.4
Bolton West	Cons	1.8	4.0	2.9	-14.3
Broxtowe	Cons	1.5	4.0	4.0	-12.9
Calder Valley	Cons	1.0	5.0	3.4	-21.8
Camborne and Redruth	Cons	3.3	12.4	6.1	-31.3
Chipping Barnet	Cons	0.6	4.5	5.4	-14.8
Cities of London and Westminster	Cons	8.1	7.0	11.1	-9.4
Colchester	Cons	10.6	27.5	17.0	-31.0
Finchley and Golders Green	Cons	3.2	3.3	6.6	-10.4
Hastings and Rye	Cons	0.7	3.2	3.4	-12.3
Hendon	Cons	2.0	2.2	3.8	-8.6
Middlesbrough South and Cleveland East	Cons	2.1	3.4	2.8	-13.1
Milton Keynes North	Cons	3.0	6.2	3.9	-18.2
Milton Keynes South	Cons	2.6	3.9	2.9	-14.8
Morecambe and Lunesdale	Cons	3.1	3.7	3.7	-9.6
Northampton North	Cons	2.0	3.6	2.5	-25.4
Northampton South	Cons	2.9	4.3	3.4	-16.0
Norwich North	Cons	1.1	4.3	3.2	-15.1
Preseli Pembrokeshire	Cons	0.8	1.9	2.6	-11.9
Pudsey	Cons	0.7	3.8	3.3	-17.5
Putney	Cons	3.3	6.3	11.6	-5.3
Reading West	Cons	5.6	4.9	5.9	-14.2
Southampton Itchen	Cons	0.1	3.6	3.0	-17.8
Southport	Cons	6.1	31.0	26.4	-23.2
St Austell and Newquay	Cons	20.6	24.0	21.5	-21.2
Telford	Cons	1.6	2.3	2.1	-13.4
Thurrock	Cons	0.7	1.3	1.6	-9.1
Truro and Falmouth	Cons	6.7	16.8	14.9	-25.9
Watford	Cons	3.6	18.1	9.1	-23.3
Wimbledon	Cons	10.9	12.7	14.5	-10.5

Source: 2015 and 2017 British Election Study constituency dataset.

Table 5.3 (continued): Seats where the Liberal Democrats' vote share exceeds the majority in a Labour-Conservative constituency, 2017 general election (%)

Constituency	<i>Incumbent</i>	<i>Majority (%)</i>	<i>Lib Dem 2015</i>	<i>Lib Dem 2017</i>	<i>10-17 (+/-)</i>
Ashfield	Lab	0.9	14.8	1.9	-31.4
Barrow and Furness	Lab	0.5	2.7	2.7	-7.3
Battersea	Lab	4.4	4.4	8.0	-6.7
Bedford	Lab	1.6	4.2	5.9	-14
Bishop Auckland	Lab	1.2	4.4	2.7	-19.6
Canterbury	Lab	0.3	11.6	8.0	-24.5
Colne Valley	Lab	1.5	6.0	4.1	-24.1
Crewe and Nantwich	Lab	0.1	2.8	2.4	-12.6
Derby North	Lab	4.1	8.6	4.6	-23.4
Dudley North	Lab	0.1	1.3	0.9	-9.6
High Peak	Lab	4.3	4.7	5.0	-16.8
Ipswich	Lab	1.6	2.9	2.3	-15.9
Keighley	Lab	0.5	2.7	2.4	-12.4
Kensington	Lab	0.1	5.6	12.2	-7.4
Newcastle-Under-Lyme	Lab	0.1	4.2	3.8	-15.8
Penistone and Stocksbridge	Lab	2.6	6.3	4.1	-17.0
Peterborough	Lab	1.3	3.8	3.3	-16.3
Portsmouth South	Lab	3.5	22.3	17.3	-28.6
Stockton South	Lab	1.6	2.6	1.8	-13.3
Stroud	Lab	1.1	3.4	3.2	-12.2
Warrington South	Lab	4.1	5.6	5.4	-22.1
Warwick and Leamington	Lab	2.2	5.0	5.2	-13.1
Average vote share			7.0	6.0	-22.4

Note: 'Average vote share' is across both sets of results in Table 5.3.

Source: 2015 and 2017 British Election Study constituency dataset.

Another obstacle to such co-operation for Labour is that by aligning themselves so strongly with the Liberal Democrats, they alienate other elements of their support. The electoral environment is rather different today than in other periods that Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation has been discussed. In the 1990s, Labour and the Liberal Democrats were often the only party available to any voters that did not want to support the Conservatives. Now, there are many other viable options: UKIP, the Green Party, the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru have all improved their vote and seat share at local, sub-national or national levels in recent years. Co-operation with the Liberal Democrats might win over some new voters, but it is a risky strategy that would likely alienate other Labour supporters too. Labour has recently failed to broaden its electoral appeal sufficiently while previously losing some of its support to UKIP (Ford and Goodwin, 2014, Roberts et al., 2014). This is not just a problem for Labour, but also social democratic parties across Europe. As Bale et al. (2009: 423) argue,

most parties end up ‘mixing and matching, boxing and coxing, in the hope that they can stay competitive without surrendering too many of their values and too much of their credibility’.

For the most part, the Liberal Democrats are not particularly competitive in the potential pact seats, although local parties might still have issues with withdrawing their candidate. There is very little chance of them winning most of these seats at the next general election. However, as is the case with Labour in Liberal Democrat-Conservative seats, it would be an admission of defeat in a manner rarely seen in British politics. For a party that claims to represent all corners of Britain, they would be withdrawing from seats across England (and one in Wales, in this table).

More specifically for the Liberal Democrats, it would potentially limit the Liberal Democrats’ scope as a political party. While co-operation with the Conservatives might be off the table in the short term due to the nature of electoral competition between the two, the Liberal Democrats have co-operated with the Conservatives in government. They defended their actions to the country, and while Tim Farron sought to slightly distance his party from the 2010 coalition government, and Vince Cable will likely attempt the same, both maintain that it was the right decision to join the Conservatives in coalition. It would be a decisive shift in rhetoric, strategy and identity to break with that past and align the Liberal Democrats with Labour against the Conservatives. This would not just be being anti-Conservative, which is a perfectly reasonable course of action for an independent political party, but would be a clear signal of support for Labour over the Conservatives. As one former Liberal Democrat MP told me:

I think that there are reasons why people go out and support the Lib Dems rather than voting Conservative or Labour. There have to be good reasons to join a small party rather than a large party. I never like the idea that we are pro- or anti- one of the big parties. We’re an independent party, we think that the differences between us are significant enough that we want to actually join a small party and fight our way through that much more difficult path (Laws, 2016b).

5.5 Pre-electoral considerations for both parties

This chapter has so far shown the different incentives and obstacles to pre-electoral co-operation for both parties in different electoral contexts. This section brings these arguments together. As outlined in the theoretical framework, co-operation has the potential to improve a

party's electoral position and subsequently the prospects of achieving office. However, it is very difficult to predict with confidence the benefits and costs of co-operation. In a party system with different electoral competition in different constituencies, trying to predict the flow of vote shares from one party to another becomes more complex. However, if parties can be confident that co-operation will lead to more votes being accurately converted into seats, they are more likely to pursue that electoral objective (Strøm, 1990: 588).

For Labour, co-operation with the Liberal Democrats might help prevent a Conservative majority, and potentially make a Labour-led coalition more likely. If the Liberal Democrats strengthen their position, this will be primarily at the expense of the Conservative seats, and at the same time Liberal Democrat-leaning supporters voting Labour in key Labour-Conservative seats could help Labour. Viewed in this context, co-operation is an appealing prospect. However the Liberal Democrats' electoral position is fundamentally weak following the 2015 and 2017 general elections, and they face a monumental battle to rebuild credibility both in their strongest areas and across the country (Cutts and Russell, 2015, Johnson and Middleton, 2016). One of Ed Miliband's former advisers thinks that co-operation is an unlikely strategy for Labour, but it might be short sighted for Labour not to think about it in the long term:

The game has changed... it's a historic dilemma. That [19]97 dilemma is one for the history books, not for the future. Which I do think could be short sighted. The Tories will have a rough two or three years... but I think the Lib Dems will be the beneficiaries of that... most places south of Birmingham and west of London wouldn't contemplate voting Labour. So the Lib Dems will pick up... [but] the prospects of understanding that logic are low... probably in the long term that's not right (private interview).

The Liberal Democrats' membership boost after the general election and local by-election victories in the south west of England and elsewhere suggests that there is room for them to begin to recover in their former heartlands (Cutts and Russell, 2015). In a small but important number of seats there are enough Labour voters to suggest that co-operation would yield electoral benefits. However, it is very much dependent upon context and there is a very fine balance between attracting Labour-leaning supporters and losing Conservative-leaning ones. The Liberal Democrats' electoral position remains primarily one in competition with the

Conservatives, and the party's proximity to Labour is always a problematic issue. This would likely be a much larger problem with a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour Party than at any other point in the last thirty years.

Given the perilous state of both parties' electoral position, they face huge challenges. Overcoming them has the potential to deliver greater electoral benefit than just co-operating with each other. Neither party will benefit by just retreating to ideas of a 'progressive alliance': the argument that if only every non-Conservative voted as they should has little going for it. People do not vote rationally, and even if they did there is little that is rational about assembling an anti-Conservative coalition devoid of any other purpose. Not being a Conservative is not a sufficient foundation for a winning coalition of political parties: co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats only has incentives if both parties address their individual challenges. For Labour, this means addressing their perceived incompetence on the economy and leadership, and their questionable judgement on immigration and welfare. For the Liberal Democrats, this means winning back support at a local level, and showing the section of voters in society who might back them in the future that it can be trusted to represent them again. If the more fundamental challenges of party competition are addressed by each party, then Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation might be a successful strategy to defeat the Conservatives in key seats and help both parties achieve office. If not, it is likely to further boost the chances of a third consecutive term in office for the Conservatives.

5.6 Incentives and obstacles to post-electoral co-operation

So far, this chapter has addressed the pre-electoral constituency-level considerations for Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. This is an important and often overlooked form of co-operation (Golder, 2005). However, it does not dismiss the importance of considering post-electoral co-operation, either in the form of coalitions or confidence and supply 'contract parliamentarianism' agreements, which remain a fundamental part of party co-operation (Bale and Bergman, 2006, Debus, 2008, Martin and Stevenson, 2001). This section addresses public opinion, both broadly and specifically the attitudes of Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters, to post-electoral co-operation generally and between the two parties. If co-operation is to aid each party's office-seeking intentions, then understanding public opinion is

fundamental to understanding the broader incentives and obstacles for each party. Do the electorate support co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats? Do they support co-operation between parties more broadly? Are Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters likely to support co-operation between the two parties?

While researchers bemoan the lack of attention paid to pre-electoral co-operation, both comparatively and in Britain (Golder, 2005, Wager, 2015), the increased level of attention on post-electoral co-operation in Britain since 2010 has fortunately provided more data on the subject. The annual Hansard Society Audit of Political Engagement tracks various attitudes to political issues, and focused a great deal on coalition government in their 2011 report. Their qualitative study yielded mixed responses to coalition. Many felt that coalition would help 'defuse extreme situations' that the country might face at any one time, while others argued that coalition would simply provide the governing parties with an easy excuse for not delivering on their manifesto (The Hansard Society, 2011: 27-28). Particularly amongst Liberal Democrat supporters, a strong argument was that coalition with the Conservatives was synonymous with 'betrayal'. This echoes arguments regarding the Liberal Democrats' loss of electoral support during the 2010 parliament (Dommett, 2013, Johnson and Middleton, 2016).

This qualitative research can also be complemented by quantitative data on attitudes to coalition government. Table 5.4 shows data from the 2015 British Election Study, and it shows that voters largely prefer single-party government. Just 8 per cent felt that coalition government is more effective than single-party government. Another issue is that parties need to be able to show to the electorate that they can deliver policies in coalition (Duch et al., 2015). Between 2010 and 2015, the Liberal Democrats failed to do this (Johnson and Middleton, 2016), and based on the responses in Table 5.4, voters do not think this is possible in coalition. Only 21 per cent felt that coalitions were more in tune with public opinion than single-party governments, and just 14 per cent felt parties can deliver policies in coalition. Nearly two thirds of voters agree that parties cannot deliver on promises in coalition. Finally, a key trade-off of being in office is that there are electoral benefits and costs that you receive at subsequent elections (Strøm, 1990). The data in Table 5.4 suggests that voters find this aspect of party competition harder in coalition; only 24 per cent said it was easier to attribute blame in coalitions than single-party government.

Table 5.4: Electorate's views on coalition government

	<i>Agree (%)</i>
Coalitions are more effective than single-party governments	8
Coalitions more in tune with the public than single-party governments	21
Parties can deliver on promises in coalition	14
It is easier to attribute blame in coalitions	24

N: 30027. Source: 2015 British Election Study

Brought together, the results in Table 5.4 suggest a distinct lack of support for coalition government. The electorate think that single-party government is more effective, that parties do not deliver on their promises in coalition, and that it is harder to distinguish between individual parties' policies. Alongside this, the Liberal Democrats' collapse at the 2015 general election might suggest an appetite to return to single-party government. However, while the Liberal Democrats suffered, this did not see a large upswing in the two main parties' share of the vote. Indeed, this increased by just 2.3 percentage points, while even after accounting for the Liberal Democrats' decline minor parties just did as well (Green et al., 2015). Green et al. (2015) go further to suggest that the likelihood of a hung parliament incentivised voters to support smaller parties, which increases the likelihood of coalitions in the future. While the public's attitude to it is hardly positive, it does not appear entirely dismissive of the idea as a form of government.

The 2017 general election was a marked difference in this regard.

With a combined 82.4 per cent share of the vote, the two main parties received their largest combined share of the vote since 1970... such trends were mirrored in a slump of public support for 'the others', with the share of the vote going to parties other than Labour or the Conservatives falling from thirty-two per cent in 2015 to just 17.5 per cent two years later (Heath and Goodwin, 2017).

Heath and Goodwin (2017) are sceptical that this temporary return to two-party politics will become permanent. Indeed, scepticism about any aspect of politics in the future is a wise course of action. However, while it was a marked rejection of minor parties in comparison to previous general elections, it did not yield a return to majoritarian politics.

The expected hung parliament ahead of the 2015 general election campaign facilitated some surveys that asked voters about their attitudes to different coalition outcomes that might happen.³¹ At this point, a hung parliament and a range of subsequent governmental outcomes was forecast by academics and commentators (Monk and Lambert, 2015). Table 5.5 sets out public opinion ahead of the 2015 general election to a range of different possible governmental outcomes. Firstly, there is a preference for majority government over coalition. The most popular responses from the list are a Conservative majority government, followed by a Labour majority government. This chimes with the data in Table 5.4, that single-party governments are preferred by voters. However if a coalition was to have formed after the 2015 general election, then the Liberal Democrats appear to be the preferred partner with voters. Following the two majority governments, the next preferences are for a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition or a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition. In contrast, when other minor parties like the SNP or UKIP were brought in, support fell sharply. This suggests that voters in 2015 credited the Liberal Democrats as a potentially moderating force on the two major parties.

Table 5.5: Support for outcomes ahead of the 2015 general election

	<i>Support (%)</i>
Majority Conservative government	48
Majority Labour government	45
Labour – Conservative coalition	24
Labour – Liberal Democrat coalition	37
Labour – SNP coalition	28
Labour – Liberal Democrat – SNP coalition	28
Conservative – Liberal Democrat coalition	42
Conservative – Liberal Democrat – UKIP coalition	28

Source: YouGov – 21 April 2015. N: 2060.

³¹ Errors in sampling and weighting meant that opinion polls did not accurately reflect public opinion ahead of the 2015 general election, and the data should be viewed in this context.

Using the full data from the YouGov survey on 21st April 2015 allows more detailed analysis of attitudes to Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition. The next part of this chapter runs a logistic regression model, questioning the predictors of attitudes to Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation ahead of the 2015 general election. If one party finds co-operation more appealing than another then this presents incentives and obstacles that should be examined. It also allows analysis of other predicting variables and their effect on support for co-operation between the two parties.

The main independent variables used here are whether people intended to vote (1) or not vote (0) Labour or Liberal Democrat in the 2015 general election. The same retrospective variables in regard to the 2010 general election are also used. Whether or not people intended to vote Conservative in 2015 is controlled for. As well as their expected opposition to coalition politics, it is expected that they will be negative about a coalition government not including the Conservatives. Given the 'progressive' label often attached to the Green Party, whether or not respondents intended to vote for them in 2015 is controlled for. The limits of the data does not allow attitudes to valence issues like the economy and immigration to be included, but whether or not respondents thought David Cameron or Ed Miliband would be the best Prime Minister is controlled for, along with socio-demographic variables.

What results should we expect of Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters? Anything other than a positive predictor would be very surprising, since both parties' supporters should want their party to be in government. However, there might be differences between the two parties. Liberal Democrat voters should be more supportive of coalition between the two, as the only realistic chance of the party experiencing government is with a larger party. The party has also conducted a more pluralistic approach to politics, spending the early stages of the 2010 coalition government prioritising coalition unity and co-operative government (McEnhill, 2015). However, some Liberal Democrat supporters might prefer a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition to a Labour-Liberal Democrat one. For Labour, the continued attempts to preserve the narrative of a two-party system in Britain suggest that while Labour voters might support a Labour-led coalition, they will be less supportive than Liberal Democrat voters (Green et al., 2015, Lees et al., 2010, Webb, 2000).

Table 5.6: Logistic regression predicting support for a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition following the 2015 general election

	β	Odds ratio (<i>eb</i>)
Labour voter (2015)	0.95***	2.59
Lib Dem voter (2015)	1.40***	4.05
Green voter (2015)	0.90**	2.46
Best PM – David Cameron	-0.75***	0.47
Best PM – Ed Miliband	0.36	1.43
Labour voter (2010)	0.66***	1.94
Lib Dem voter (2010)	1.23***	3.43
Age	-0.02***	0.98
Sex	0.23	1.26
Degree	0.31*	1.37
Income	0.03	1.03
Constant	-0.89**	0.41
		Nagelkerke R ² : 0.35
		-2 Log Likelihood: 1434.281

Bold figures denote significant effects: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Dependent variable: support for a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition or agreement.

Source: YouGov, 21 April 2015

N: 1821

Table 5.6 shows a logistic regression predicting support for coalition government.³² As expected, both Labour and Liberal Democrat voters at the 2015 general election were more likely to support a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition than non-Labour and non-Liberal Democrat voters, with large positive odds ratios reported. However, Liberal Democrat voters (odds ratio of 4.05) were more likely to support a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition than Labour voters (2.59). The same goes for both parties' 2010 voters, though again larger effects are found for the Liberal Democrats (3.43) than Labour (1.94). Other factors are also found to be significant. Green Party voters were more likely to support a Labour-Liberal Democrat

³² Results here are discussed in terms of odds ratios (*eb*). The odds ratio shows how changes in the independent variable influence the odds of an 'event' (Johnson and Rodger, 2015). Odds ratios higher than 1 show a positive relationship, and lower than 1 show a negative relationship. The further away from 1 an odds ratio is, the greater the effect of the independent variable.

coalition, highlighting some support from other elements of the ‘progressive alliance’.³³ Those who thought Ed Miliband would make the best Prime Minister after the 2015 general election were no more likely to support a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition, though a p value of .057 suggests there may be some evidence to support a relationship. Unsurprisingly, those who thought David Cameron would make the best Prime Minister were less likely. The younger a respondent, the more likely they were to support a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition after the 2015 general election, and those respondents with a degree were also more likely to support such a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition. A respondent’s sex or income had no effect.

Liberal Democrat voters are amenable to coalition with Labour. This is the case for those who voted Liberal Democrat in 2010 too, suggesting that even if the Liberal Democrats manage to regain some of their previous support they will still support co-operation with Labour. While Labour voters are not as supportive as Liberal Democrat voters, particularly those who supported Labour in 2010, the difference between them is not great. This is important. In spite of a better than expected performance in 2017, Labour still face electoral challenges that make winning a parliamentary majority a difficult prospect (Curtice, 2015, Diamond and Radice, 2015). As shown earlier in this chapter, they may need the Liberal Democrats to damage the Conservatives’ chances of victory in future elections. Beyond that, they need to at least contemplate co-operation with other parties to boost their own chances of winning office and implementing policy. While the depth of support for broader co-operation cannot be examined, based on this evidence, Labour voters are supportive of coalition with the Liberal Democrats.

5.7 Conclusion

Given that the expected outcome of the 2017 general election was a working Conservative majority, there was much less focus on either a Labour government, or any potential

³³ The opinions of Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru voters were not available.

outcomes resulting from a hung parliament, including Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. For example, the British Election Study asked no questions on coalition outcomes in its 2017 election waves. Nonetheless, some conclusions can be drawn.

Both parties are at a critical juncture. Both parties lost heavily in the 2015 general election, and prepared for the eventualities of a hung parliament after the 2015 general election only to find a Conservative majority government elected instead. Labour increased its vote share at the 2017 general election to its highest point since 2001, but still finds itself only on 262 seats. This chapter has shown that the electoral incentives and obstacles to co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats are wide-ranging. For both parties, co-operation might bring about an opportunity to prevent a Conservative majority government, and subsequently a potential Labour-Liberal Democrat or Labour-led government. Given that parties are primarily office-seeking, this provides a significant electoral incentive to co-operation. There are also individual incentives. Labour will be competing against a weakened Conservative Party if the Liberal Democrats are stronger. If the Liberal Democrats can count on the support of Labour supporters in Conservative-Liberal Democrat marginals then there is potential for the party's electoral prospects to significantly improve, which is crucial for the party's survival in the coming years.

However, the electoral obstacles are numerous too. In the short term, it is a huge move by Labour to change its position on the Liberal Democrats to one of open co-operation. Most Liberal Democrat supporters willing to tactically support Labour probably already voted Labour in the 2015 general election (Green and Prosser, 2015), and this appears to have been echoed in the 2017 general election (Fieldhouse and Prosser, 2017). To co-operate with the Liberal Democrats would be to spend political capital on a move that could achieve very little electoral benefit in Labour seats, or potentially backfire by haemorrhaging support to the Conservatives and other parties. The idea that a strong Liberal Democrat party might damage the Conservatives was never given any consideration by the Labour leadership between 2010 and 2017.

Prior to the 2017 general election, Labour was the biggest party of a divided centre-left political spectrum, and the Conservatives were able to utilise that to great effect in the 2015 general election (Diamond and Radice, 2015). Whether Labour can adequately translate its success in winning votes into seats in Westminster remains to be seen. However for now,

should the Liberal Democrats' electoral prospects not improve, the Conservatives will continue to be the beneficiaries of a weak opposition in the south west and south east areas of England (Curtice, 2012). Both Labour and the Liberal Democrats are struggling to regain electoral ground in Scotland. Labour must respond where it can to try and win back some of those seats and improve its own electoral prospects. However, there are some areas that are out of Labour's reach. Throwing a bone to the Liberal Democrats might ultimately be an advantage to Labour's cause.

For the Liberal Democrats, to co-operate with Labour would be to effectively abandon the idea that the Liberal Democrats are open to co-operation with the Conservatives. To co-operate with Labour could have an immediate and negative impact on some of its more Conservative-minded support, and would certainly not automatically heal the wounds of the 2010-2015 Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition for centre-left voters. However, given the perilous state of the Liberal Democrats' electoral position, co-operation with Labour could potentially improve their electoral position and subsequent coalition potential in future hung parliaments. Finally, public opinion toward potential co-operation at the 2015 general election showed that voters have a clear preference for majority governments over coalitions, but not to the extent that it has caused a return to two-party electoral politics (Green et al., 2015). While there was a much greater return to two-party politics in 2017, there are reasons to be sceptical that this is permanent (Heath and Goodwin, 2017). Both Labour and Liberal Democrat voters at the 2015 general election were more likely than others to support a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition.

The electoral incentives and obstacles to co-operation are numerous and complicated, and have a substantial impact on the broader decisions that political parties must make about co-operation. Ultimately, they form part of a process that must be considered alongside other incentives and obstacles to co-operation, such as a party's ideologies and policies, their organisations and their leaderships. The electoral and public opinion concerns here suggest that there are potential electoral benefits from co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, but big potential costs too. Each party focusing on addressing their individual electoral issues, while not completely closing the door to co-operation, might be the best course of action.

Chapter 6: The influence and attitudes of each party's members and activists on Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation

This chapter assesses the extent to which Labour and the Liberal Democrats' grassroots can influence the potential for the two parties to co-operate with each other, and what form this influence might take. Despite a declining activist and membership base for parties across Western democracies (van Biezen et al., 2012, van Biezen and Poguntke, 2014), local parties remain vital links between state and civil society, and members and activists are still able to represent citizens' interests when engaging in political activity (Clark, 2004, Scarrow and Gezgor, 2010). This is for a number of reasons. First, their activists and members provide a direct link between parties and voters, communicating national policy directly to the electorate through campaigning (Samuels and Zucco, 2015). Second, in Britain and elsewhere, political parties heavily rely on members' subscriptions and donations for financial stability and security. Finally, members and activists provide candidates for elections. Even where membership is falling, non-member volunteers still contribute to a party's local activism (Fisher et al., 2014, Mjelde, 2015). Specifically in the context of this thesis, the importance of members, activists and local parties to both Labour and the Liberal Democrats has also been shown (Cutts, 2014, Pemberton and Wickham-Jones, 2013).

It is clear that a party's organisation matters, and as the 'basic element' of a party's overall organisation (Duverger, 1954), the attitudes of a party's grassroots to its party's broader activity is important. Two broad questions are important in relation to the potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. First, to what extent do the grassroots have influence within each party's organisation? The greater their influence, the greater the extent they can affect the potential for co-operation between the two parties. Key texts on party organisational influence generally attribute only low levels of influence to a party's grassroots (Kirchheimer, 1966, McKenzie, 1955, Michels, (1915) 1959, Panebianco, 1988). However, their contribution to a party's electoral fortunes and campaigning (Fisher and Denver, 2009) suggests that parties cannot simply ignore them. Specific analysis of political parties in Britain also shows that the grassroots sometimes have the ability to embarrass a party or overturn a decision (Evans and Sanderson-Nash, 2011), and political party elites

often work with different levels of their party's organisation more than is often given credit for (Laffin and Shaw, 2007, Russell, 2005b).

Second, to what extent does a party's grassroots agree or disagree with their party elites on the issue of co-operation? If the Labour or Liberal Democrat grassroots appear to agree with their party elites on co-operation with each other, then they present little obstacle to co-operation. Almost amounting to a common wisdom, May (1973) suggests that party members and activists are more radical than party elites, and Webb and Bale (2014) draw similar conclusions in their study of Conservative Party activists. If this is the case with Labour and Liberal Democrat activists, then they might find co-operation disagreeable. However, Norris (1995) finds that members and activists are not the most radical stratum of a political party. Van Holsteyn et al. (2015) similarly find no evidence of a pattern of radicalism by party grassroots. The extent to which members and activists diverge from their party's elites is important.

This chapter applies the organisational element of the thesis's theoretical framework: to what extent can each party's grassroots influence their party's approach to co-operation, and to what extent do each party's grassroots' attitudes differ from their party's elites? Throughout, the chapter makes use of primary survey data of Labour and Liberal Democrat local party chairs, conducted ahead of the 2015 general election, when a hung parliament and subsequent Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation was a plausible outcome. While the sample is not representative of either party's members as a whole, nor does it necessarily reflect the attitudes of each party's grassroots in light of recent political events, it is the best obtainable data with the resources available. First, the chapter applies arguments from the comparative literature regarding the extent of grassroots influence to analysis of Labour and Liberal Democrats. This is done by analysing each party's formal and informal organisational structures, as well as analysing party activists' perceptions of influence within their party. Second, the chapter assesses opinion structures within each party's organisation, by measuring ideological radicalism, what the most important issues are in each party, and the importance of policy, office and vote-seeking theories to the grassroots. Third, the chapter analyses the attitudes of each party's activists to co-operation with each other and other parties. The chapter concludes by assessing the extent to which each party's grassroots is able to provide incentives or obstacles to co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

6.1 Organisational structures

6.1.1 Labour

This section outlines the extent of grassroots influence within Labour and the Liberal Democrats. Firstly, what influence do the grassroots have within the Labour Party? Labour members and activists have a range of opportunities to get involved and have influence in their party. They have rights and representation through their local Constituency Labour Party (CLP), which recruits and organises members in each parliamentary constituency in Britain (Webb, 2013),³⁴ and local branch parties. CLPs select delegates for annual conference, who vote on key policy issues and changes to the party's rulebook. CLPs are also represented by 6 delegates on the 33-strong National Executive Committee, which is responsible for party governance on a day to day basis. These parties, along with the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) and other affiliated groups, including trade unions and socialist societies, make up the organisational representation that attends annual conference.³⁵

Through their CLPs and branch parties, members also select candidates for elections to public office, and collectively the membership elects the party leader. Since 1993, parliamentary candidates have been selected by constituency Labour party members using one-member-one-vote (OMOV).³⁶ There is also now OMOV in place when electing the Labour Party leader, following changes introduced by former party leader Ed Miliband, or more accurately one-member/supporter-one-vote, as supporters can now pay a one-off fee to vote in a leadership election. Labour raised over £4 million from supporters joining to vote in the 2016 leadership election between Jeremy Corbyn and Owen Smith.³⁷ In an open contest for Labour leader³⁸, candidates for the leadership must have the backing of fifteen per cent of the parliamentary

³⁴ In Scotland, CLPs are organised according to Scottish Parliamentary constituency boundaries.

³⁵ The new Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has signalled changes to Labour's organisational structure to afford the grassroots more rights over candidate selection and policy. Until these changes are outlined in any detail, this chapter assumes the current structure for analysis.

³⁶ Previously, Labour has used an electoral college system, with certain levels of the party organisation having more votes and influence than others.

³⁷ When the window opened for supporters to join, Angela Eagle was also a candidate, but she withdrew to support Owen Smith.

³⁸ The contest between Jeremy Corbyn and Owen Smith in 2016 did not adhere to this rule, as Jeremy Corbyn was deemed not to be an ordinary candidate, but the sitting leader.

party, but during the previous two Labour leadership elections where this rule has applied it has, in practice, been bypassed. Both in 2010 (Diane Abbott) and in 2015 (Jeremy Corbyn), candidates unpopular in the parliamentary party have still been nominated to stand in order to ‘encourage debate’. In September 2015, Jeremy Corbyn was elected Labour leader by the party’s members and supporters, much to the chagrin of many of Labour MPs, including some who nominated him.

Members and activists can also join, or stand for election to join (in the case of the PLP), other affiliated organisations that afford them rights and influence in Labour. Affiliated organisations include Constituency Labour Parties and the Parliamentary Labour Party, but also other groups. For instance, affiliated trade unions have long had an important role in the Labour Party’s organisation. Whilst any influence they have had has largely been through supporting the party’s parliamentary leadership at conference (Minkin, 1991, Shaw, 2003), this has often been the result of a process of disagreement, debate and resolution (Laffin and Shaw, 2007). Other affiliated organisations and ancillary bodies also exist within the Labour Party, such as the Fabian Society and women’s and young people’s sections (Webb, 2013). These groups often represent diverse opinion within the Labour Party, and can have important influence not just on the party’s organisation but also electoral and policy debates in the party (see Roberts et al., 2014).

It is important to distinguish between formal and informal structures that permit influence within a party’s organisation (Heidar and Saglie, 2003). Formally, the grassroots within a party have very little influence. However in practice, members and activists may tolerate leadership control because the Labour leadership plan policy and strategy in anticipation of what their grassroots think. For example, debates for party conference are decided according to submissions by CLPs and affiliated organisations, which are then mediated by the National Policy Forum (Russell, 2005b). Also, particularly in the New Labour era, affiliated trade unions were willing to oppose the leadership where they felt their members’ interests were at risk, such as during debates on the Private Finance Initiative, and constituency parties occasionally supported this (Laffin et al., 2007). A recent example is the 2015 party conference’s decision *not* to debate Trident renewal, despite Jeremy Corbyn’s express wishes to do so.

Over half a century ago, McKenzie (1955) argued that power within the Labour Party rested predominantly with the parliamentary elite. To what extent has that changed? Webb (2000) argues that reforms to the policy making process since 1987, most notably the 'Partnership in Power' reforms of 1997 which set up the National Policy Forum (NPF), have strengthened the hand of the Labour party elite even further, although Russell (2005b: 185-186) suggests that reforms have simply confirmed the power structure that had already been established. Indeed in the policy context at least, there has not been much dissent from McKenzie's (1955) thesis that power lies with the Labour party leadership. Whilst the reformed organisational arrangements still leave the potential for dissent and damage should the collective will of party activists and members wish it (Russell, 2005b: 281-283), in practice, members and activists are effectively excluded from formally influencing Labour Party policy (Rye, 2015, Webb, 2013, Webb, 2000).

That such rights and responsibilities have ever been associated with membership of the Labour Party is questionable. As Drucker (1979: 46) argues, the notion that Labour's internal processes were once democratic was always its 'central myth'. Why would members and activists tolerate this? He argues that a key norm of Labour Party behaviour is 'loyalty to the leader' (Drucker, 1979: 12-16). Drucker's argument can be plausibly extended to mean 'loyalty to the leadership'. Since 1987, Labour's organisational reforms, particularly to policy-making, have strengthened the party elite and yet members and trade unionists have largely supported them. They largely got behind the argument made by party leaders Kinnock, Smith and Blair: that some activists who displayed radical tendencies were damaging the party's chances of electoral victory (Webb, 2000).

The idea that elites dominate a party's organisation at the expense of a party's grassroots has become an accepted argument in the comparative literature (Clark, 2008). The organisation model that has historically been argued to be most appropriate to Labour is Panebianco's (1988) 'electoral-professional' model (Russell, 2005b, Webb, 2000). Panebianco's work builds on Kirchheimer's (1966) concept of the 'catch-all' party model, which theorised that parties seek to develop electorally popular policies without the constraint of party members and activists. However, models are a useful guideline but can never be an exact representation. Panebianco's thesis does not sufficiently address the importance of the grassroots in maintaining and strengthening a party's organisation (Clark, 2004, Duverger, 1954, Fisher and Denver, 2009, Geser, 1999, LaPalombara and Weiner, 1966, Sartori, 2005).

In particular, Labour's organisational structure is currently being challenged by leader Jeremy Corbyn and supporters within the Parliamentary Labour Party. Although the issue of who controls Labour structures and policy has always been a contentious issue, fundamental questions about Labour's internal structures have now been opened up, and have yet to be resolved at the time of writing (Russell, 2016). For example, the party is currently openly debating and disagreeing over reducing the threshold of MP support for any prospective leadership election candidate.

Jeremy Corbyn's leadership led to huge rises in Labour's membership and support base. Supporters were allowed to join the Labour Party for a tiny fee so long as they subscribe to the 'aims and values' of the party. Whatever the party's constitution stated, this was largely left to the individuals themselves to define (Watts, 2017). The danger is that, in changing how individuals participate in a party without thorough understanding of the consequences, it becomes unclear who has authority (Scarrow, 2014). The consequences in Labour have been to open up a debate about who parliamentarians are there to represent: people in their constituency or people in their party.

Related to this has been the emergence of the activism group Momentum. Momentum evolved from Jeremy Corbyn's leadership campaign in 2015, and actively supports the Labour Party. People can join Momentum so long as they are at least 14 years old, a Labour Party member, and agree to its ethical code. This code strongly implies that Labour's intervention in Iraq was an 'illegal war', and seeks to work with those Constituency Labour Parties that share Momentum's 'aims and principles' (Momentum, 2017). While little has changed in Labour's formal organisational structures under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, much has changed informally. The result is a series of different organisations and debates about what Labour's territory and purpose is. As Watts (2017: 15) argues:

The older and clearer sense of tribalism through which legitimacy amongst Labour's elites over the boundaries of the party was propagated has vanished. Notions of the collectivities of class and class experience, once central to both policy and party structure, were cast aside by successive Labour leaderships in favour of structures which focused to a substantial extent on developing Labour as a political mirror of those that inhabited it.

At the time of writing, these debates are not being won by the Labour ‘moderates’ that have largely led the Labour Party since World War Two. Momentum activists look to play an active role in Labour Party politics, and have quite a fractious relationship with many Labour MPs. The ‘moderate’ wing of the party has sought to bolster itself through groups such as Progress and Labour First.

However, the more intra-party tensions continue to dominate Labour’s thinking, the less appealing the Labour Party is to moderate, centre parties like the Liberal Democrats. Likely less appealing are the Liberal Democrats to Labour. While they may share views with the Liberal Democrats on issues of defence and military intervention, there is a greater faith in the politics of principle, and an opposition to ‘watering down’ principles in order to be pragmatically and electorally successful. This newly dominant wing of the Labour Party is less disposed to Liberal Democrat co-operation than others.

Webb (2000: 208-209) summarises his work on Labour’s party organisation by ‘concluding that whereas Labour once provided an imperfect example of Duverger’s mass party, latterly it has evolved in the direction of the electoral-professional party’. At the time of writing, it is unclear in what direction it is now evolving. While the party’s modernisation process in the 1980s and 1990s prioritised electoral imperatives over democratic and ideological ones, and the advance of professional ‘experts’ within the party (Russell, 2005b, Webb, 2000) only strengthened links with Panebianco’s thesis, this has now been challenged by the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader. It has not yet been overturned: the party’s leadership retains the fundamental final authority, and it might be that Corbyn fails to change the structure. For now, this section adopts an admittedly frustrating ‘time will tell’ conclusion.

6.1.2 The Liberal Democrats

To what extent do the grassroots have influence within the Liberal Democrats? The party’s constitution claims that the party is organised along geographically federal lines. Indeed, there is a genuine devolution of power from the central ‘federal’ party to the sub-national and local levels (Laffin, 2007: 654-655). The English, Scottish and Welsh ‘state’ parties are devolved from the British ‘federal’ party, with each state party having the constitutional freedom to manage its own affairs, debate and decide policy specific to their constitutional responsibility, and select candidates for national and devolved institutional elections. The English state party

is divided into twelve regional parties³⁹, each of which has representation on the party's English Council. Devolved from each of the English, Scottish and Welsh state parties are 'local parties', whose constitutional role is to choose prospective candidates for local and parliamentary elections.

The central 'federal party' forms the professional aspect of the party. As well as developing strategy for national and European Parliament elections, the federal party is also responsible for party policy and strategy at the national level, international relationships and the presentation and image of the party. Its role remains ambiguous beyond that, with the constitution permitting it to 'do anything else which is incidental to its functions' (Liberal Democrats, 2012: 10). Such ambiguity exists throughout the constitution, and it has been suggested that some strata are better placed to exploit their position than others (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005: 58).

Evans (2007) notes the tension for the Liberal Democrats in trying to become a more electorally professionalised party that still adequately represents the interests of its members and commits to the rules of its constitution (also see Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005). She found that, while members and membership organisations are theoretically able to influence party policy via the federal conference, in practice this process is undermined by the vetting of motions, and the disregard for motions that are eventually passed. That the Liberal Democrats have professionalised and this has impacted upon members and activists is undeniable (Evans and Sanderson-Nash, 2011). However, as discussed in the electoral chapter such analysis can often be in danger of underestimating the continued importance local parties and members can have on political parties and the democratic process. The importance of local parties is especially the case for the Liberal Democrats, who have long struggled to achieve and maintain national success, and subsequently relied upon establishing themselves in local areas first (Johnson, 2014).

³⁹ Although representing a body of people as opposed to a geographic region, this list also includes Liberal Youth and Students (LYAS).

The strength of the Liberal Democrat grassroots is demonstrated in the final period of Paddy Ashdown's leadership, between 1997 and 1999. Ashdown's support for 'The Project', co-operation with Labour under leader Tony Blair, was increasingly at odds with his party membership. They found it harder to accept co-operation when the Labour government failed to deliver on electoral reform in Westminster elections and reform to the House of Lords (Brack, 2007). In several votes at party conference, both on policy areas and future coalition negotiation rules, the membership showed that they did not share his continued enthusiasm for co-operation with Labour, and the breakdown in relations between the leadership and grassroots ultimately led to his resignation in 1999. His successor Charles Kennedy did not continue such a co-operative relationship with Labour leader Tony Blair.

The most notable vote at party conference during that period was the decision to adopt the 'triple lock'. The triple lock was established in 1998 to give the party grassroots a veto over 'any substantial proposal which might affect the Party's independence of political action' (Pack, 2011). The spirit of this 'lock' is to include significant pre- and post-electoral co-operation, i.e. both electoral pacts and coalitions/confidence and supply agreements. The first 'lock' is that a three-quarters majority of the parliamentary party and the Federal Executive must support the proposal. Failing that, the second lock stipulates that a two-thirds majority of representatives at a specially convened conference support the proposal. Failing that, the third lock stipulates that a majority of all members (voting in a ballot) support the proposal.

The triple lock was partially enacted during the coalition negotiations following the 2010 general election. The first lock was passed comfortably, with more than three quarters of the parliamentary party and Federal Executive supporting the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition. Clegg went further than he was required to, convening a special conference of grassroots representatives to request their approval for the coalition. This was granted overwhelmingly, but it is unclear what the leadership would have done had they not. Certainly, the leadership were getting backing before being forced to do so at a later date (Evans and Sanderson-Nash, 2011). However, the conference has now become mandatory. A special article was added to the party's constitution prior to the 2015 general election, which stated that in the event of a proposed coalition, a special conference would be convened automatically.

The professionalisation of the Liberal Democrats has been widely analysed in recent years (Evans, 2007, Evans and Sanderson-Nash, 2011, Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005, Russell et al., 2007). Their general argument is that a party previously consisting of a small number of MPs deferred to its grassroots less often as the size of its parliamentary party increased. By 2005 the Liberal Democrats had 62 MPs, increasingly coming from a more professional background instead of from the party's local councillors (Evans and Sanderson-Nash, 2011). The flexible interpretation of the party's constitution gave much more power to the larger group of MPs (Russell et al., 2007). How this will change after the 2015 general election, where the party returned just 8 MPs but still has 108 peers in the House of Lords, is currently unclear.

A model of party organisational structure that is most applicable to the Liberal Democrats is provided by Ruud Koole (1994). His 'modern cadre party' model builds on earlier party organisational models to argue that the 'mass' label cannot be sustained, given the largely continuous declining membership of political parties (also see van Biezen and Poguntke, 2014, Mair and van Biezen, 2001, van Biezen et al., 2012). Koole characterises the modern cadre party as having a predominant professional elite (particularly at the parliamentary strata), but one that is accountable to the lower strata in the party, has an electoral strategy that seeks a wide pool of voters, but not enough to be ideologically diluted to a 'catch-all' party, and finally has a reliance on both the state and party members for financial resources. Heidar ((2001), cited from Heidar and Saglie, 2003: 221-222) adapts Koole's theory to argue for the 'network party' which, like Evans' (2007: 100) analysis of the Liberal Democrats, is characterised by a mixture of 'cadre' and 'mass' elements. Alongside Koole's articulation of the modern cadre party's characteristics, Heidar argues that network parties maintain their party organisation as a basis for debating and deciding new policy and recruiting new elites. In this sense, party policy and strategy is developed within party networks that are similar to, but less formal than, the concept of 'mass party' democracy (Heidar and Saglie, 2003). The models of Koole, and Heidar and Saglie, provide a reasonably accurate characterisation of the Liberal Democrats' organisational structure. Members and activists continue to have more power and influence than their Labour counterparts, yet face a structure which is increasingly geared towards professionalisation and adapting their party to an external audience.

6.2 Grassroots perspectives on influence

This section analyses each party's organisational influence further by establishing grassroots' perceptions of membership influence in each party. In doing so, it applies the Thomas theorem: 'if... [people] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences' (Thomas and Thomas, 1928: 572). The grassroots are a party's voice on the ground (Mair, 1994), and the actions that a party's grassroots might take in a party is dependent upon their own perception of their influence. This section measures the perceptions of local party chairs. In practice, local party chairs are also among the most likely to be involved in party activity, such as candidate selection, leadership selection or submissions and votes in relation to party policy. They are well placed to understand the extent of membership influence within a political party. Surveys of grassroots have been shown to be a good indicator of party organisational influence in the past (Clark, 2008, Fisher, 2000).

Together, the analysis so far suggests that neither party's grassroots will feel very influential in their organisation, but that the Liberal Democrats' grassroots will feel more influential than Labour's. This is tested in Table 6.1, which shows local chairs' responses to statements about broad membership influence: namely influence over electoral strategy, party policy and whether or not they feel the party leadership listens to members.

Table 6.1: Perception of membership influence in the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties (%)

	Disagree		Neither agree/nor disagree		Agree	
	Labour	Lib Dem	Labour	Lib Dem	Labour	Lib Dem
'The leadership listens to ordinary members'	54	31	22	20	22	49
'Members can influence party policy'	52	11	28	14	21	75
'Members can influence electoral strategy'	64	30	21	29	15	42

N: 101 (Labour); 121 (Liberal Democrat). Don't knows excluded.

Source: Survey of Labour and Liberal Democrat constituency parties, 2014-2015.

The main pattern that emerges in Table 6.1 is that Labour respondents do not perceive the party membership to have as much influence in their organisation as Liberal Democrat

respondents do. Just 22 per cent of Labour respondents agree in some shape or form that the Labour leadership listens to party members. This compares with 49 per cent of Liberal Democrat respondents. The difference between Labour and Liberal Democrat respondents is highlighted even further when considering membership influence over party policy. Here, just 21 per cent of Labour respondents agreed that the membership had any influence, compared with 75 per cent of Liberal Democrat respondents. Far fewer Liberal Democrat respondents agree that members have influence over electoral strategy: only 42 per cent of respondents agreed with this statement, compared with just 15 per cent of Labour respondents.

The conclusion that Liberal Democrat respondents perceive party members as very influential and that Labour respondents perceive their members as not influential at all would be too simplistic. However, the data gives further weight to the analysis so far that the Liberal Democrats' organisational structure permits more grassroots influence than Labour's. The Liberal Democrat data also suggests that to label every party's grassroots as unimportant parts of a party's decision-making process is inaccurate. However, the perceived lack of influence over electoral strategy suggests that Liberal Democrat grassroots might not have influence in discussions regarding electoral pacts or other strategies. While members and activists were able to achieve policies such as the 'triple-lock' to limit leadership power on coalition negotiations, it may not be as strong with regard to electoral strategy that affects co-operation.

The data in Table 6.1 suggests that there will be a difference between the two parties in regard to organisational influence over Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. This is tested further in Table 6.2, which reports grassroots' responses to statements about specific membership influence: namely influence over the 2010 coalition negotiations. Liberal Democrat members were consulted via a special conference convened eleven days after the general election. Labour members were never consulted. It is thus expected that Liberal Democrat respondents perceive their members to be more influential. It also asks the normative question of whether they would have liked the membership to have influence over any coalition negotiations that might have happened after the 2015 general election.

Table 6.2 shows that when organisational influence is applied to specific cases of co-operation, the Liberal Democrat respondents feel that their respective party's members have more influence than Labour respondents do. Looking back to the coalition negotiations that took place after the 2010 general election, 32 per cent of Liberal Democrat respondents felt

that members had influence. This is in contrast to Labour, who largely confined discussion to a small group of MPs and advisers to then Labour leader Gordon Brown (Adonis, 2013).⁴⁰ Not a single Labour respondent felt that party members had any influence over Labour’s coalition negotiations following the 2010 general election. While on the one hand this is unsurprising, given the lack of planned membership consultation by Gordon Brown had he achieved a coalition or agreement with the Liberal Democrats, it still highlights the differences between membership influence over co-operation between the two parties.

Table 6.2: Perception of membership over co-operation (%)

	Disagree		Neither agree/nor disagree		Agree	
	Labour	Lib Dem	Labour	Lib Dem	Labour	Lib Dem
‘Members had influence in the coalition negotiations following the 2010 general election’	95	45	5	24	0	32
‘I would like to have greater influence over coalition negotiations following the 2015 general election’	6	3	16	12	78	85

N: 101 (Labour); 121 (Liberal Democrat). Don’t knows excluded.

Source: Survey of Labour and Liberal Democrat constituency parties, 2014-2015.

However, while Liberal Democrat respondents gave a more positive response, it is hardly overwhelming. More respondents disagreed with the idea they had influence. This supports Evans and Sanderson-Nash’s (2011) argument, that the special conference convened after the 2010 general election served more to tie people in to a potentially unpopular decision, than it did constitute genuine engagement with the grassroots.

⁴⁰ The Conservatives adopted a similar approach to Labour. As Kavanagh and Cowley (2010: 221) point out, the coalition negotiations on the Conservative side were ‘driven by a handful of Cameron’s close confidantes, and involving the shadow cabinet and the parliamentary party only sporadically, and only when the leadership needed it’.

The difference in influence between the Labour and Liberal Democrat grassroots might in part be explained by context as much as organisational structure. Owing to their status as a more minor party than Labour and the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats have discussed coalitions and co-operation for years, and organisational difficulties in relation to co-operation forced the ‘triple lock’ to be added to the party’s constitution (Brack, 2007). Prior to 2010, Labour were in government and not thinking particularly strongly about any post-election co-operation. Indeed, they expected to badly lose the 2010 general election, and it was only closer to the election that they thought a Conservative majority could be prevented (Adonis, 2016). Put in this context, a difference in planning between Labour and the Liberal Democrats is unsurprising. However had there been a hung parliament and coalition negotiations after the 2015 general election, as expected, the Liberal Democrats would have consulted their membership via a special conference as they did in 2010. Labour planned no consultation with their membership at all (private interview, 2016).

The data so far suggests that while Liberal Democrat members feel more influential in their party than Labour members do in theirs, neither party feels particularly influential in relation to affecting the potential for party co-operation. The next question in Table 6.2 asks respondents the then prospective question of whether or not they would like influence over any co-operation after the 2015 general election, when a hung parliament was deemed likely and Labour-Liberal Democrat post-election co-operation was a distinct possibility (Monk and Lambert, 2015). It therefore gives an interesting insight into the normative responses of each party’s grassroots. Here, both parties’ grassroots wanted members to have influence over any potential co-operation, with 78 per cent of Labour respondents and 85 per cent of Liberal Democrat respondents agreeing with the statement that members should have a say in any coalition negotiations after the 2015 general election. Very few respondents in either party disagreed with the statement. There appears a strong disconnect between what each party’s grassroots wants to have and what they actually have.

6.3 Opinion structure within Labour and the Liberal Democrats

The previous section of this chapter outlined the influence that Labour and Liberal Democrat local party chairs think their grassroots have, both in general and specifically with regard to co-operation. This section analyses the attitudes of each party’s grassroots to co-operation

itself. The extent to which each party's grassroots' attitudes differ from the party elites has important consequences for the potential for co-operation. If they differ greatly, this might present an obstacle to co-operation. Comparative literature has broadly assumed the grassroots to hold more radical views than the party leadership and the electorate. Such an assumption was outlined by May (1973) with the 'law of curvilinear disparity'. The law can be summarised as follows. Voters are argued to be moderate actors and tend to endorse a continuation of the status quo. Party leaders, as rational actors, are argued to be keen to capture their votes in order to achieve political office, and so will cater to the voters' views. Activists are argued to stand apart, however, and insist upon far more radical programmes than most voters would support. Parties are thus successful when their elites are able to pursue an electoralist strategy that at the same time does not dissatisfy their activists. How does May's Law apply to the potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats? Following the law would mean that Labour activists would be more left-wing than party elites and voters, and it stands to reason that they would be ideologically further distant from the more centrist Liberal Democrats as well. While the Liberal Democrats are often discussed as neither left nor right (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005), their ideology and history, as discussed elsewhere in this thesis, suggest that members and activists might veer more to the left than right.

What is the importance of this for the potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats? Both parties co-operating would involve some form of policy agreement, likely on a moderate, centrist platform (Diamond and Kenny, 2012, Grayson, 2010, Harrop and Lee, 2015). If May's Law is found to be evidenced in Labour and the Liberal Democrats, and each party's grassroots are more radical than their leaders, then this presents party organisation as an obstacle to co-operation. Party elites might be forced to abandon co-operation, or seek support for policies with which a coalition partner might disagree. However, if each party's grassroots are of similar mind to their leaders, or even more moderate, this would suggest that should party elites from both parties find it beneficial to co-operate with each other, they may not face heavy objection from their own activists and members. Indeed, they might face an incentive.

Evidence suggests that ideological attitudes vary across party strata, and do not uniformly conform to a curvilinear disparity. Norris (1995) responds to May's claims in a study of the

various strata of the British Labour and Conservative parties. She finds instead that activists and members are ideologically located between party leaders and voters, with leaders generally articulating themselves as the most radical. Van Holsteyn et al. (2015) conclude that May's Law should be retitled 'May's myth', with no conclusive evidence that a party's grassroots are more radical than its leaders. However, such findings are not universal. Indeed, Webb and Bale (2014) found that Conservative party activists are heavily motivated by ideological concerns, and display more radical tendencies. Mair's (2000: 30) analysis of Labour's party organisation shows the 'initial resort to plebiscitary techniques within the party, aimed at overwhelming the militant activists', which builds upon Katz and Mair's (1995) 'cartel party', which afforded rights to the mass atomised membership at the expense of the undercut radical activists.

When testing May's Law, Norris (1995: 34) made four demands that should be met in order to convincingly test it: all party strata should be included (1); more than one party should be compared (2); the dependent variable of radicalism should be clearly set out (3); and groups of activists within the party should be specified (4). As Van Holsteyn et al. (2015: 4-5) contend, no study has managed to satisfy all four tests. To collect sufficient data from all party strata at a similar point in time is a very challenging task. However, the 2014-2015 survey of constituency party executives collected data that measures the *perception* of radicalism by party activists of each party's organisational strata. This applies May's Law in a manner that is conducive to addressing key questions of the thesis. This chapter is concerned with what each party's grassroots might do if they disagree with their leaders regarding co-operation. If they perceive their leaders to be less radical than themselves, then this represents perceived disagreement, and subsequently an obstacle to co-operation.

This survey does not satisfy Norris's first requirement that all party strata are included, although where data on other party strata is available, this is included.⁴¹ To be clear, this chapter is not setting out to conclusively test May's Law as Norris specifies, although it still

⁴¹ Where available, secondary data showing the average left-right positions of other party strata is also shown in Table 6.4.

makes a contribution to the broader literature on attitudes of different strata within party organisations. Instead, it sets out May’s Law in a manner that questions the effect of party organisation on co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. To this end, the other three requirements are met. To meet Norris’s second requirement, both Labour and Liberal Democrat activists are surveyed. To meet the third requirement, radicalism is defined as movement towards the left or right as measured by respondent placement on a left-right (1-10) scale (Norris, 1995: 34). While research has shown that attitudes within the ‘activist’ stratum is unrelated to their substantive position within that strata (Van Holsteyn et al., 2015), where possible the survey meets Norris’s fourth requirement that a party’s hierarchy needs to be more clearly specified than in May’s original paper. To this end, the chapter distinguishes between ‘voters’, ‘members’, ‘officers’ and ‘leaders’. How this is defined is set out in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3: How party are defined using the 2014-2015 survey

Leaders	A party’s elected MPs
Officers	Local party chairs (respondents to the survey)
Members	Those members not in official party positions
Voters	A party’s voters and supporters

Source: (Adapted from Norris, 1995)

Using May’s Law as a starting point, we can expect that officers will be the most radical in each party (1), voters will be the least radical in each party (2), and Labour will be to the left (more radical) than the Liberal Democrats (3). These expectations are tested in Table 6.4, which shows the average left-right position of the various strata of Labour and the Liberal Democrats, as perceived by the grassroots respondents in the 2014-2015 survey. The first expectation, that officers will be perceived to be the most radical, holds in Labour and partly holds in the Liberal Democrats. For Labour, officers are perceived to be the most radical, followed by members, leaders and then voters. For the Liberal Democrats, officers and members are perceived to be jointly radical, followed by leaders and then very closely by voters. The second expectation, that voters will be perceived to be the least radical, thus holds amongst both parties’ respondents. The final expectation, that Labour will be more radical than the Liberal Democrats at all levels, also holds.

Table 6.4: Opinion structure within Labour and the Liberal Democrats, as perceived by local party chairs

	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Lib Dems</i>
Leaders	4.11	4.71
Officers	2.85	4.22
Members	3.22 (2.17*)	4.22 (3.73*)
Voters	4.39 (2.93**)	4.77 (4.02**)

N: 101 (Labour); 121 (Liberal Democrat). Scale of 1 (Left) to 10 (Right)

Source: Survey of Labour and Liberal Democrat local party chairs, 2014-2015

Note: *This is taken from the ESRC Party Members project (Bale et al., 2016), showing how each party's members perceive themselves on a 1-10 left/right scale.

** This is taken from the 2015 British Election Study (pre-election wave), showing how each party's voters perceive themselves on a 1-10 left/right scale.

Some interesting results arise from Table 6.4. Firstly, there is not a big distance between Labour and Liberal Democrat perceptions of left-right space. Labour and Liberal Democrat respondents perceive their respective leaders and voters to be situated in broadly the same place. On the policies parties put forward and where parties need to win electoral support, activists perceive Labour and the Liberal Democrats to be in a similar place. The larger gaps between the two parties only appear at the member and officer level. Here, Labour respondents perceive themselves and party members to be more radical than Liberal Democrat respondents perceive themselves and party members. Even then, the gap is not very large. Interestingly, data from the ESRC Party Members project (Bale et al., 2016) suggests that both parties' members see themselves as more left-wing than local party chairs perceive them to be. This may be due to the influx of new party members following the 2015 general election. Overall, at every stratum of their party, Labour and Liberal Democrat officers perceive their parties to be on broadly similar ground at the centre-left of British politics.

Table 6.5: Labour grassroots' perception of opinion structure within the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat party organisations

	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Lib Dems</i>	<i>Conservatives</i>
Leaders	4.11	5.90	8.47
Members	3.22	5.09	8.52
Voters	4.39	5.07	7.43

N: 101 (Labour); 121 (Liberal Democrat). Scale of 1 (Left) to 10 (Right)

Source: Survey of Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, 2014-2015

Table 6.6: Liberal Democrat grassroots' perception of opinion structure within the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat party organisations

	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Lib Dems</i>	<i>Conservatives</i>
Leaders	3.71	4.72	8.28
Members	2.84	4.22	8.57
Voters	3.78	4.78	7.76

N: 101 (Labour); 121 (Liberal Democrat). Scale of 1 (Left) to 10 (Right)

Source: Survey of Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, 2014-2015

The next set of data examines how each party's grassroots perceive other political parties. Table 6.5 shows how Labour party chairs perceive opinion structure within the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative parties, and Table 6.6 sets out the same data for the Liberal Democrats' party chairs.⁴² At every stratum, Labour respondents perceive the Liberal Democrats as more right wing than Liberal Democrat respondents' do. Similarly, at every stratum, Liberal Democrat respondents perceive Labour as more left wing than Labour respondents do. Together, this suggests a greater divergence between the two parties' grassroots than was shown in Table 6.4. This does not provide a strong incentive to co-operation between the two parties. Nonetheless, the perceived differences are smaller than the differences either party is perceived to have with the Conservatives. Both Labour and Liberal Democrat respondents place their respective parties, at every stratum, closer together than they do either of their respective parties and the Conservatives. Liberal Democrat respondents placed Labour and the Liberal Democrats closer together more than Labour respondents. Interestingly, Labour respondents felt that Liberal Democrat elites were the most right wing within their party (5.90), particularly compared with voters (5.07). Nonetheless, they still placed the Liberal Democrats much closer to Labour than the Conservatives. Based on the data presented here, the grassroots within Labour and the Liberal Democrats do not hold attitudes that represent an overwhelming obstacle to co-operation between the two parties.

⁴² This does not include officers, as the data measures voters, members and leaders.

Kitschelt (1989) and Norris (1995) make strong criticisms of May's Law. Kitschelt in particular argues that May's (1973) conception of opinion structure within political parties is based on a fundamentally reductionist psychology. Narud and Skare (1999) suggest that a different way to tackle this is to also question the saliency of different issues, and whether this differs between party elites and party grassroots. The argument here is that party grassroots might have different priorities that are not the concern of voters, but the concern of more radical activists. The importance of saliency in public opinion and politics in Britain has long been noted (Clarke et al., 2009, Stokes, 1963), but also applies to party organisation (Kitschelt, 1989). As before, this is not testing May's Law in the manner suggested by Norris (1995) but instead testing the importance of different policy issues to different strata of party organisations. If each party's grassroots place different emphasis on policy, then this might represent an obstacle to co-operation.

The 2014-2015 questionnaire asked respondents to rank their most important policy priorities, and also to rank what they thought their broader party's most important policy priorities are. This serves two purposes. First, it reveals potential differences in priorities between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. If the parties are to co-operate, then it will rely on different levels of each party's organisation having some ideological convergence. Second, it reveals potential differences in priorities between party elites and grassroots. If Labour and the Liberal Democrats find areas of common ground that are not shared by their grassroots, this could lead to organisational obstacles to co-operation.

Party elites might have different priorities to a party's grassroots. The salience of issues in British politics as demonstrated by public opinion is likely to shape, guide and determine the issues that political parties will prioritise (Clarke et al., 2009, Muller and Strøm, 1999). In recent years, the economy, immigration and the NHS have been the most important issues to the British public (Johnson and Rodger, 2015). Political parties will also look to 'own' certain issues. Labour has long been associated with the NHS and education, and between 2010 and 2015 the party tried to make living standards a key issue that the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition would be judged on (Bale, 2015a, Cowley and Kavanagh, 2015). Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats have been associated with education, the environment, Europe and constitutional reform (Brack, 1996, Grayson, 2007). However, local parties might have different priorities to national parties due to different political contexts. For example,

local parties are unlikely to prioritise foreign affairs, and similarly national parties are unlikely to prioritise local government.

Table 6.7 shows each local party chairs' policy priorities, and their perception of where they perceive their national party's priorities to be. Firstly, two of the most salient issues in British politics, the economy and the NHS, are identified as among the most important to each party's grassroots and perceived to be among the most important to the national party. This is particularly the case for Labour, with 98 percent of respondents arguing the NHS to be a priority for their national party. However, it also ranked jointly second by Liberal Democrat respondents, and ranked third in their perception of national elite priorities. However, the other main salient issue of immigration is not ranked as a priority by either party's grassroots, nor do they argue it to be a priority for the national party. This is particularly surprising for Labour, who made a big effort to prioritise and win support on their immigration policy ahead of the 2015 general election (Bale, 2014). However, just eight percent of Labour's grassroots perceived it to be a priority for their national party (seven percent for Liberal Democrat respondents).

Secondly, issues that the party have looked to 'own' are shown as priorities in Table 6.7. Labour has long argued itself to be the 'party of the NHS', and is easily highlighted as the most important issue by their grassroots. Living standards are also ranked highly both by Labour's grassroots for themselves and in their perception of their party's elites, reflecting former Labour leader Ed Miliband's focus on it throughout the 2010 parliament (Bale, 2015a). Labour's focus on public services more broadly is also reflected in support for education and welfare as a priority for the grassroots and in their perception of national elites. For the Liberal Democrats, education and the environment are ranked highly by the party's grassroots and in their perception of national party elites. However, the European Union and constitutional reform were largely ignored as priorities for the Liberal Democrats. The lack of priority associated with constitutional reform may reflect the defeats in the referendum on the Alternative Vote in 2011 and House of Lords reform in 2013, and the acceptance or resignation (for now) that those issues are not in voters' minds. However, support for the European Union was a key part of the Liberal Democrats' differentiation from the Conservatives during the 2010 parliament (Goes, 2015), and its absence among Liberal

Democrat respondents is surprising. Conducting the survey again in light of recent events might have brought about different views.

Table 6.7: Local party policy priorities, and perception of national party policy priorities

	<i>Labour</i>			<i>Liberal Democrats</i>		
	<i>Local (%)</i>	<i>National (%)</i>	<i>Local/national gap</i>	<i>Local (%)</i>	<i>National (%)</i>	<i>Local/national gap</i>
Constitutional issues	4	1	3	10	16	-6
Economy	50	74	-24	62	78	16
Education	39	30	9	43	44	-1
Environment	1	2	-1	34	25	9
EU membership	0	2	-2	11	22	-11
Foreign affairs	0	0	0	1	1	0
Immigration	1	8	-7	5	7	-2
Law and order	2	0	2	7	4	3
Living standards	52	61	-9	15	17	-2
Local government	17	0	17	38	3	35
NHS	89	98	-9	43	36	13
Pensions	3	1	2	4	8	-4
Taxation	3	8	-5	11	26	-15
Welfare	38	15	23	14	11	3

Source: Survey of Labour and Liberal Democrat local parties, 2014-2015.

N: 101 (Labour); 121 (Liberal Democrat)

Note: Answers ranked 1, 2 and 3 in the list of options are added together to give the total shown.

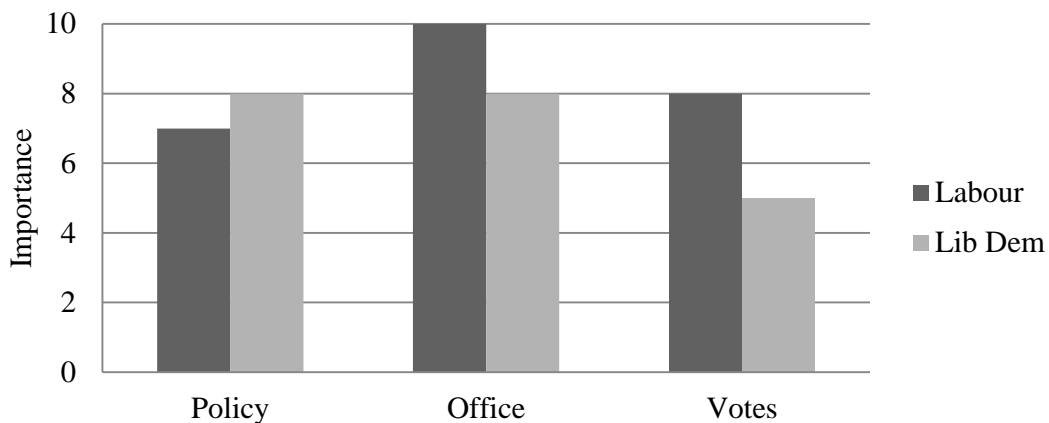
What differences are there between Labour and the Liberal Democrats? Issues that are salient to the public are broadly shared, such as the economy and public services. Many issues are largely ignored as priorities by respondents across both parties, such as pensions and law and order. There is some divergence, however. The NHS is a much more important issue for Labour, with nearly all respondents highlighting it as a most important issue, particularly for their national party. Welfare and living standards are also more important for Labour respondents than the Liberal Democrats. The environment, membership of the European Union, taxation and constitutional issues are more important to Liberal Democrat respondents than Labour respondents. While these differences also reflect matters of emphasis, they also

potentially reflect differences of substance. As shown in the ideological and policy chapter of this thesis, Labour and the Liberal Democrats have different policies on some of these issues, and that too might represent an obstacle to co-operation.

Table 6.7 also explores areas of convergence and divergence between party elites and grassroots. The data reflects a broad convergence between party chairs and how they perceive party leaders. There are differing degrees of emphasis: both parties' local chairs, particularly the Liberal Democrats', place more importance on local government than they perceive their national party to. This has potential implications for grassroots' support; especially if co-operation were to have an effect on party support in local government elections. Liberal Democrat respondents place more importance on the environment than they think the national party does. Labour grassroots place more importance on welfare than they perceive the national party to, which may help explain much of the anger with the Parliamentary Labour Party ahead of the Welfare Bill in July 2015. Both parties' grassroots perceive their national parties to place more importance on the economy and taxation.

Altogether though, there is not much to suggest significant degrees of difference between each party's grassroots and how they perceive their national party. Based on this evidence, each party's grassroots do not have substantively different policy agendas to their national elite, which contradicts parts of May's Law as amended by Kitschelt (1989). If the national elite in either party can find areas of agreement that might lead to or be a consequence of co-operation, then their grassroots will broadly agree, based on the evidence from this survey.

Figure 6.1: Local party chairs' perceptions of policy, office and votes



N: 101 (Labour); 121 (Liberal Democrat).

Source: Survey of Labour and Liberal Democrat local parties, 2014-2015.

One final measure of grassroots radicalism can be tested using the ‘policy, office and votes’ triad developed by Muller and Strøm (1999). May’s Law is based on the idea that members and activists are more concerned with ideological principles than party elites. May assumes that while elites have an incentives to win office, for members and activists the incentive for being in a political party is largely to direct policy in a more radical direction (May, 1973, Norris, 1995). To test this particular argument, the 2014-2015 survey asked respondents to give their thoughts on whether their party should be vote-seeking, office-seeking or policy-seeking. The questionnaire allowed respondents to agree to all three, so inevitably there will be some overlap. The results are shown in Figure 6.1. Both parties’ grassroots suggest the importance of office-seeking. If co-operation between the two parties is a necessary means of achieving office, this data suggests that each party’s grassroots might not represent an overwhelming obstacle. However, Liberal Democrat respondents also stress the importance of policy-seeking, which could pose problems if the Liberal Democrats do not achieve certain policy goals as a result of co-operation.

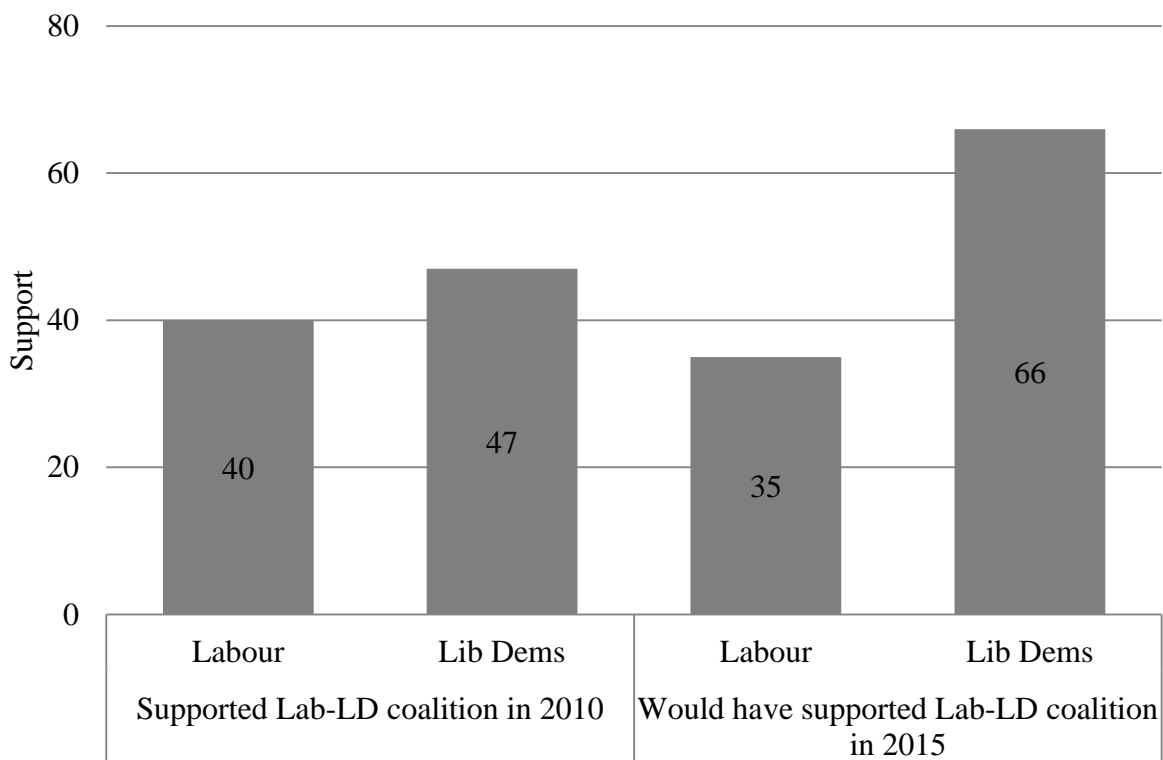
6.4 Grassroots attitudes to co-operation

The next set of questions from the survey tackles the issue of Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation directly, questioning whether respondents supported the coalition talks between the two parties following the 2010 general election, and whether they would have supported talks after the 2015 general election. Liberal Democrat respondents are expected to support coalition negotiations more than Labour respondents. This is for two primary reasons. Firstly, the analysis earlier in the paper of opinion structures in each party suggests that Liberal Democrat respondents perceive the two parties to be closer together than Labour respondents. Secondly, Liberal Democrats are more reliant on co-operation as a means of achieving office – Labour respondents might still have hopes of governing alone in a majority Labour government.

Figure 6.2 shows Labour and Liberal Democrat local parties’ retrospective attitudes to coalition negotiations following the 2010 general election, and their prospective attitudes to coalition negotiations following the 2015 general election had it delivered a hung parliament. With both questions, it is important to outline the context. A Labour-Liberal Democrat

coalition was always unlikely following the 2010 general election due to parliamentary arithmetic (Bale, 2011b). However, Jones (2013) argues that a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition was possible after the 2010 general election, and might have served both parties well. Both parties' negative response to this should be viewed within that context. There is also a substantial time lag between the 2010 general election and the survey period (late 2014-early 2015), which may affect responses.

Figure 6.2: Local party chairs' support for Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation, 2010 and 2015



N: 101 (Labour); 121 (Liberal Democrat).

Source: Survey of Labour and Liberal Democrat local parties, 2014-2015.

Based on the data in Figure 6.2, neither party found a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010 particularly appealing. As will be shown later in the chapter, the Liberal Democrats' grassroots supported the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010 more than the Labour alternative. However given that a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition would not have presented a majority in the House of Commons, there is a substantial percentage of positive

responses from both parties' respondents, which suggests that if the circumstances are right, each party's grassroots might support co-operation.

What of 2015? This question was asked before the 2015 general election, when a hung parliament was deemed likely (Hanretty et al., 2015), and subsequent Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition negotiations were a distinct possibility (Harrop and Lee, 2015). Despite this, Labour's grassroots were more negative about a coalition with the Liberal Democrats than they had been in 2010. Just 35 per cent of Labour respondents felt their local party would have supported a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition after the 2015 general election, compared with 66 per cent of Liberal Democrat respondents. There is a strong and positive significant correlation (0.547 at the <.001 level) between those Labour respondents who supported Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation following the 2010 general election and then again following the 2015 general election, suggesting that they maintained their support over time. However, there is no relationship in the Liberal Democrats between supporting Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation following the 2010 and 2015 general elections, suggesting that they changed their mind. This potentially indicates that the difficulties in the 2010 parliament for the Liberal Democrats made their grassroots more likely to support Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation following the 2015 general election.

Given the perceived likelihood for an electoral outcome in the 2015 general election that was more conducive to co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, why might Labour's respondents have been more negative about a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2015 than 2010? Much has been made of the Liberal Democrats damaging their social democratic credentials after joining the Conservatives in coalition in 2010, both in and outside of the party (Bale, 2012, Dommett, 2013, Eaton, 2014, Grayson, 2010, Kennedy, 2010). That this has influenced attitudes of Labour's grassroots is a reasonable assumption, and was stressed heavily during interviews with key Labour special advisers and MPs. This is unpicked further in Table 6.8. When asked if they had more negative opinions of the Liberal Democrats since 2010, 93 per cent of Labour respondents agreed that they did. While the Labour grassroots' perception of the Liberal Democrats' ideological position does not provide a strong organisational obstacle to Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation, their changing opinion of them between 2010 and 2015 appears to.

Table 6.8: Labour local parties' attitudes to co-operation

	Agree (%)
More negative opinions of the Liberal Democrats since 2010	93
Would support a coalition with other non-Conservative parties	63
Would rather be in opposition if no overall majority	10

Source: Survey of Labour local parties, 2014-2015. N = 101

Interestingly, there was greater support among Labour respondents for a coalition between Labour and other non-Conservative parties following the 2015 general election than there was support for a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition, with 63 per cent supporting a coalition with other non-Conservative parties compared to 35 per cent for Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition.⁴³ However, there was strong disagreement with the idea that Labour should choose opposition over co-operation with other parties: just 10 per cent of Labour respondents said that they would rather Labour be in opposition if they had no overall majority. Together, the results in Table 6.8 suggest that while Labour's grassroots are open to their party co-operating with others, they are particularly less supportive of co-operation with the Liberal Democrats. The argument that the Liberal Democrats have lost trust with their votes on key issues of trust and identity also appears to extend to Labour's grassroots, and presents an organisational obstacle to co-operation between the two. However, if faced with the practical choice in order to get into office, they might accept it.

What of the Liberal Democrats? Table 6.9 shows Liberal Democrat attitudes to co-operation, and to Labour and the Conservatives. The vast majority of respondents (82 per cent) want the Liberal Democrats to be in government again, and 55 per cent of respondents thought that being in coalition government was a good experience for the party. Agreement with this statement was far from overwhelming, but suggests that they thought the experience worthwhile and would like to experience it again. This chimes with evidence from Liberal Democrat members more broadly, who supported their party's efforts in coalition (Johnson,

⁴³ The Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru and the Greens were listed as potential parties that could partner Labour in coalition.

2015), and comments from former Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron, who has defended the party's coalition with the Conservatives and argued that there is 'nothing grubby or unprincipled about wanting to win' (Mason, 2015).

The Liberal Democrats' grassroots' want to be in government again, and in any realistic circumstance this will be through co-operation with other parties. However, while they supported co-operation with the Conservatives in 2010 and supported co-operation with Labour in 2015, this does not translate to positive attitudes to either party. As many as 85 per cent of respondents said they disliked the Labour Party. For both parties' grassroots, perceptions of ideological and policy convergence between the two parties is tempered by negative feelings towards each other. However, if Liberal Democrat respondents dislike Labour, they dislike the Conservatives more, with 92 per cent of respondents saying they disliked the Conservative Party. Liberal Democrat party chairs might be open to supporting co-operation with other parties, but it does not necessarily mean they actually like them.

Table 6.9: Liberal Democrat local parties attitudes to Labour and co-operation

	Agree (%)
Would like the Liberal Democrats to be in government again	82
The 2010 coalition was a good experience for the Liberal Democrats	55
Dislike The Labour Party	85
Dislike The Conservative Party	92
Generally supportive of a Labour government	35
Generally supportive of a Conservative government	18

Source: Survey of Liberal Democrat local parties, 2014-2015. N = 121

The final questions in Table 6.9 concern general attitudes to a Labour or Conservative government. In both cases, responses are mostly negative but there is greater positivity for a Labour government (35 per cent) compared with a Conservative one (18 per cent). This supports the evidence shown throughout this chapter, and suggests that the Liberal Democrats' grassroots might favour co-operation with Labour over co-operation with the Conservatives. While efforts by Liberal Democrat elites to move their party closer to the Conservatives (Astle and Bell, 2008, Astle et al., 2006, Laws and Marshall, 2004) might have made co-operation with the Conservatives an easier thing to swallow for the party's grassroots

after the 2010 general election, it has not necessarily led them to support the Conservatives over Labour generally.

Table 6.10: Bivariate coalitions between characteristics and support for Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition following the 2015 general election

	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal Democrat</i>
Support Lab-Lib Dem coalition in 2010	0.55***	0.63***
Wants a say on coalition talks in future	-0.05	0.19**
Would support coalition with minor parties, 2015	0.35***	0.35***
Party should prioritise winning seats	-0.01	0.11
Party should be prioritise principles	-0.18**	0.24***
Incumbent, 2010	-0.02	-0.02
Incumbent, 2015	-0.06	-0.02
Local party membership	-0.18**	0.03
Left/Right (Respondent)	0.05	-0.15
Left/Right (Labour)	-0.02	0.06
Left/Right (Lib Dem)	-0.26***	-0.11
Left/Right (Conservative)	-0.22**	-0.10
Would rather be in opposition if no majority	-0.15*	
Support Con-Lib Dem coalition in 2015		0.28***
Would like Lib Dems in government in 2015		0.27***
Would support a Labour government		0.33***
Would support a Conservative government		-0.19**

Source: Survey of Labour and Liberal Democrat local parties, 2014-2015.
N: 101 (Labour); 121 (Liberal Democrat).
Bold figures denote significant effects: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

The small N of each dataset makes finding statistically significant causal relationships difficult to find. Therefore, in order to explore variations in support for Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation across party chairs, Table 6.8 shows correlation coefficients measuring the associations between support for a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition following the 2015 general election and a series of variables from the party chairs survey.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Some results include questions only asked to chairs from one party.

Some of the data is not surprising. Chairs from both parties that supported a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition following the 2010 general election were more likely to do so again following the 2015 general election. The same applies to those who would have supported a 'rainbow' coalition with any of the minor parties following the 2015 general election. Again unsurprisingly, Labour respondents that were happy to go into opposition if their party did not win a majority were less likely to support a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition. For the Liberal Democrats, those who wanted the party in government again were more likely to support a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition. Likewise, those who would have generally supported a Labour government were more likely to support a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition, while unsurprisingly those who would have generally supported a Conservative government were less likely.

However, the data also throws up some interesting and potentially surprising results too. Whether or not respondents were policy seeking throws up different correlations in each party. Liberal Democrat respondents who prioritise principles were more likely to support coalition with Labour after the 2015 general election, suggesting that they potentially see Labour as a more principled coalition partner. However, Labour respondents who prioritise principles were less likely to support coalition with the Liberal Democrats after the 2015 general election. This supports arguments that the Liberal Democrats lost trust with more 'progressive' voters following coalition with the Conservatives after the 2010 general election (Cutts and Russell, 2015), but has negative implications for Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. Those in Labour who want the party to prioritise principles do not support Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. If the Liberal Democrats can change perceptions amongst Labour respondents, Labour support might change: those Labour local party chairs that saw the Liberal Democrats as more left-wing, and potentially closer to Labour, were more likely to support a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition.

Labour respondents that saw the Conservatives as less right wing were more likely to support Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. This might suggest that Labour respondents who see the Conservatives as moderate are more open to co-operation with other parties. Interestingly, chairs of parties with more members were less likely to support co-operation with the Liberal Democrats. This might point to chairs of parties in more metropolitan areas, but this would need more research with more data. For the Liberal Democrats, those who wanted more

influence over coalition talks would have been more likely to support co-operation with Labour. Finally, those Liberal Democrat respondents who would have supported co-operation with the Conservatives were also more likely to have supported co-operation with Labour, suggesting a broad support for co-operation with other parties as a matter of principle amongst those Liberal Democrat respondents.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the importance of party organisation to the potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, and shown each party's structure to be an important factor. Formal organisational structures provide the Liberal Democrats' grassroots with more opportunities to support or oppose co-operation with Labour, through party conference and policy-making processes within the party. Equivalent rights are not afforded to Labour's grassroots, although the Labour leadership informally take into account members and activists' attitudes in order to avoid confrontation further down the line. However, this is the case in both parties and data gathered from the 2014-2015 survey of Labour and Liberal Democrat local organisations shows that Liberal Democrat respondents feel that they have much more influence than Labour respondents within their party. This is shown when applied to specific issues of co-operation, with Liberal Democrat respondents feeling they had more influence over coalition negotiations in 2010 than Labour respondents did. Nonetheless, both parties' grassroots retain certain rights of influence. Parties continue to value members and activists and are aware that they can leave at any time, and any potential for co-operation must take into account their attitudes. This is particularly the case as both parties' grassroots would like more influence in the future.

Data from the 2014-15 survey also shows attitudes to co-operation within Labour and Liberal Democrat local parties. On the basis of the survey data, Labour's grassroots are not enthusiastic. They have more negative opinions of the Liberal Democrats than they did in 2010, and would have been against a coalition with them in 2015. Alongside this, those Labour respondents who prioritised principles were less likely to support co-operation with the Liberal Democrats. This suggests that the Liberal Democrats are likely to have a long and arduous process to regain the trust and support they had prior to joining the Conservatives in coalition (Cutts and Russell, 2015). Labour respondents were less against co-operation with

other parties. They showed more support for a coalition with other centre-left parties at the 2015 general election, and appeared to have a particular issue with the Liberal Democrats. They also perceived the Liberal Democrats to be ideologically closer to the Conservatives than the Liberal Democrats' grassroots did.

The Liberal Democrats' grassroots do not provide an overwhelming incentive to co-operation with Labour either. Their activists on the whole dislike the Labour Party, and preferred a coalition with the Conservatives over Labour in 2010. However, they would have preferred a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition following the 2015 general election over a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, and are more generally supportive of a Labour government than a Conservative one. They also position their party as ideologically closer to Labour than the Conservatives. Importantly, both parties' grassroots also show a willingness to be in government that might transcend any negativity about co-operation. Both parties' activists feel that their respective parties should prioritise winning office, and both grassroots reacted negatively to the idea of opposition in place of co-operation.

The thesis's theoretical framework argued that co-operation relies on an electorate accepting it, a policy direction that is open to influence by other parties, and a party organisation at least willing to tolerate it. On the basis of the data collected here, each party's grassroots is at least willing to tolerate it in order to achieve office. However, personal negativity and disagreement suggests that any organisational support for co-operation beyond that would be more difficult to sustain.

Chapter 7: Assessing the role of leadership in understanding the potential for Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation

This chapter analyses the contribution of both party's leaderships to the potential for co-operation between the two. This chimes with other analyses of leadership in politics, which regard it as a salient matter in electoral politics (Clarke et al., 2009, Whiteley et al., 2013). The extent to which party leaders have pursued convergent interests is hypothesised to act as an incentive to co-operation between the two parties. However, an entirely agent-led framework would ignore the influences and constraints upon party leaders (Strøm, 1990). The thesis works from the theoretical and practical position that electoral, ideological and organisational concerns are influences on a political party's leadership. The extent to which leaders have authority to act without intervention or constraint is important for the decisions parties take, and the nature of competition and co-operation between them.

Crucial to understanding a leader's authority within a political party is to have a theoretically informed but empirically grounded understanding of leadership performance and institutional constraint. As such, this chapter utilises an adapted form of Bennister et al.'s (2015) 'leadership capital index' framework. They argue that a leader's capital is composed of three dimensions: their skills, relations and reputation. The leadership capital index provides a 'checklist' from which to assess a prime minister's authority, and as such their performance. It is adapted here, as this chapter (and thesis) is not primarily focused on assessing their leadership performance for its own sake, but more the contribution that a party's leadership makes to the potential for Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation.

Much of the historical context to Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation is set out in the party system chapter. This chapter focuses on the recent leaderships throughout the period 2007-2017, with most research carried out on the leaderships of Gordon Brown, Ed Miliband and Nick Clegg through the period 2007-2015, when Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation was a distinct and much discussed possibility. This allows investigation over a sufficient period of time to identify variations, while still being focused enough to allow precise and detailed analysis of the relationship between the two parties. Applying coalition theory to the 2010 general election, Bale (2011b) argues that the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition formed because office and policy-seeking conditions were met. However, this analysis was

reached retrospectively; prior to the 2010 general election, any coalition was predicted to be Labour-Liberal Democrat (Dunleavy, 2010). Inside accounts from all the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrats parties all suggest that the working assumption was that Labour and the Liberal Democrats could put together an agreement that would pass a Queen's Speech and a Budget (Adonis, 2013, Laws, 2010, Wilson, 2010).

The chapter argues that existing analysis of this period of party interaction does not give sufficient attention to the role of individual leaders and the incentives and constraints by their parties. In 2010, while the fact that a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition arguably met the office and policy-seeking measures was crucial in instigating its formation, this does not mean that the roles of Brown, Clegg and their respective parties were not important. Brown's lack of capabilities as leader and Clegg's openness to the Conservatives were important. Important too was the lack of support from the Parliamentary Labour Party for remaining in government, and the enthusiasm with which the Liberal Democrats' party organisation supported working with the Conservatives. Between 2010 and 2015, Miliband's ambivalence to the Liberal Democrats hardly incentivised co-operation and Clegg's perceived submission to the Conservatives fundamentally damaged any possibility of the Parliamentary Labour Party supporting efforts to co-operate. These conclusions support analysis of other periods of Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation (or lack thereof), where decisions made by party leaders have affected party strategy towards each other (Joyce, 1999, Kirkup, 2016).

Throughout, the chapter makes use of primary interview data with Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs, peers and special advisers, as well as polling data. The first section outlines how leadership will be understood in this chapter. In particular, it incorporates the 'leadership capital' framework proposed by Bennister et al. (2015). The second section examines the period 2007-2010 and the leaderships of Gordon Brown and Nick Clegg. The third section examines the period 2010-2015 and the leaderships of Ed Miliband and Nick Clegg. The fourth section analyses Jeremy Corbyn and Tim Farron's respective leaderships. The concluding section brings this together to assess the role of leadership in understanding the incentives and obstacles to co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

7.1 Understanding leadership and co-operation

This chapter focuses on Labour and Liberal Democrat party leaders, their ability to exercise authority and the constraints and influences on them. The framework of co-operation outlined in Chapter Two, and applied throughout the thesis, argues that political parties are elite-led organisations, but influenced and constrained by their institutional and structural environment. Various comparative theories of political leadership accord different roles to structure and agency of party leaders. Greenstein's (2001) work on American presidents focuses primarily on individual agency, which has then been applied elsewhere in the USA and also in Britain (see Theakston, 2011). Buller and James (2015) argue that this account does not say enough about the structural context in which leaders operate, a point also made by Byrne et al. (2016) in their analysis of David Cameron's prime ministerial performance between 2010 and 2016. Bulpitt's (1986) statecraft analysis, primarily of Margaret Thatcher's leadership has also been incorporated into more recent studies, for example of Tony Blair's leadership (Buller and James, 2012).

In a particularly useful study, Bennister et al. (2015) argue that the success of a leader should be judged by the manner and extent to which they can exercise their authority. To do this, they bring together the skills and reputation of a leader, along with their relations to networks and institutions, to propose a 'leadership capital index'. It is this framework that is primarily utilised in this chapter. While other frameworks and studies look solely to evaluate a leader's performance, Bennister et al.'s framework provides a better understanding of a leader within the context of their party. Most important here is not just the actual skills of the leader, but how those around the leader 'confer authority on a particular office-holder who then uses it' (Bennister et al., 2015: 420). Studying leadership in this way permits leaders to be understood at once as both powerful and vulnerable (Koole, 1994). As this chapter is interested in a leader's authority in relation to their wider party performance, this is particularly helpful.

Bennister et al. suggest three ways in which a leader's 'capital' might be understood. First, their *skills* as an individual agent are important. Skills refer to a leader's perceived personal competence. They may be 'hard' skills, in the sense that they are transactional or 'soft' in that they are persuasive. To this end, they highlight Greenstein's (2001) work mentioned above as a starting point, which suggests six characteristics from which leaders might be judged: public communication, organisational capacity, political skill, public policy, cognitive style and emotional intelligence. A skilled leader can both manoeuvre and respond to the situation they

are in to promote or constrain co-operation between parties. The full skills are set out in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: The Leadership Capital Index

<i>Skills</i>	Political/policy vision
	Communicative performance
	Personal poll ratings relative to the opposition
	Time in office
	Re-election margin for the leadership
<i>Relations</i>	Party poll ratings
	Public trust in the leader
	Likelihood of credible leadership challenge
<i>Reputation</i>	Perceived ability to shape platform
	Perceived parliamentary effectiveness

Source: Bennister et al. (2015)

Second, a leader's skills and agency matter according to their *relations* with their structural and institutional context. As has been shown throughout this thesis, party leaders are constrained by their electoral context and public opinion, their histories, organisations and institutional environment. A leader might have excellent personal skills and competencies, but still be electorally unpopular, or facing a challenge within their organisation. The trade-offs between such relations will differ from party to party. Some leaders will have more formal constraints, such as organisational rules that limit their capacity to make decisions. This was shown in Chapter Six, where the Liberal Democrats' organisation permits more formal grassroots influence than Labour's, and this is perceived to be the case in practice when Labour and Liberal Democrat activists were surveyed. Some leaders will also have more informal constraints, such as dissent within their party or a weakened electoral position. How a leader is affected by this can have an important effect upon the potential for co-operation.

In terms of co-operation, relations matter within a political party, but also across parties, which brings us to the third and final consideration in Bennister et al.'s framework: *reputations*. As they argue, 'observers and critics alike all try to distil a narrative about what a leader is really like from the pattern of that leader's behaviour and its observable impact

(Bennister et al., 2015: 423, emphasis removed). If a leader develops a reputation that suggests they are not only willing to co-operate but are enthusiastic about it; or that they share common interests with another party then this is a clear incentive to co-operation. On the other hand, if they are seen as divisive and tribal, and their interest in co-operation is a last resort to secure only their own ends, it is more likely to act as an obstacle. Brought together, these three considerations provide a means of understanding how leaders have or lack *authority*. To what extent do party leaders have the authority to make decisions? To what extent do they have the authority to rely on the support of those necessary to make those decisions happen? Balancing these trade-offs reflects the complexity of leadership and how it is exercised within political parties.

Bennister et al. bring together their framework to propose a measurable index from which to understand a leader's capital, and compare that with other leaders over time and space (see Table 7.1). This study does not utilise the full measurable index, in that it is not looking to comprehensively measure a leader's capital as an end in itself. However, the framework's broader arguments about the importance of a leader's *skills, relations and reputations* provides a very helpful understanding of a leader's authority in making decisions in relation to each party, and how they might compete and co-operate as a consequence. Throughout, the chapter makes use of primary interviews with relevant Labour and Liberal Democrat figures, both those close to the leadership and those constraining the leadership in some way. Of course, there are limitations to relying on claims made by individuals who perceive the past, present and future through their own involvement and their own experience. This is mitigated by analysis of party documents and events, as well as using quantitative data where relevant and incorporating other cited research in this area.

Understanding leadership in this manner reflects the framework outlined in Chapter Two and employed throughout the thesis in that it recognises both the primacy and vulnerability of party leaders (Bennister et al., 2015). Leaders are constrained by their institutional and organisational contexts, but to some extent have the agency to restructure or manipulate them to their advantage (Riker, 1986). The framework is purposefully broad: while Labour and Liberal Democrat leaders face similar problems of electoral, policy and organisational imperatives and constraints, they differ depending upon the context. As Bennister et al. (2015: 426) themselves outline, 'what are considered assets (skills, achievements or victories) in one setting may not be in another setting'. A leader's capital might also change over time:

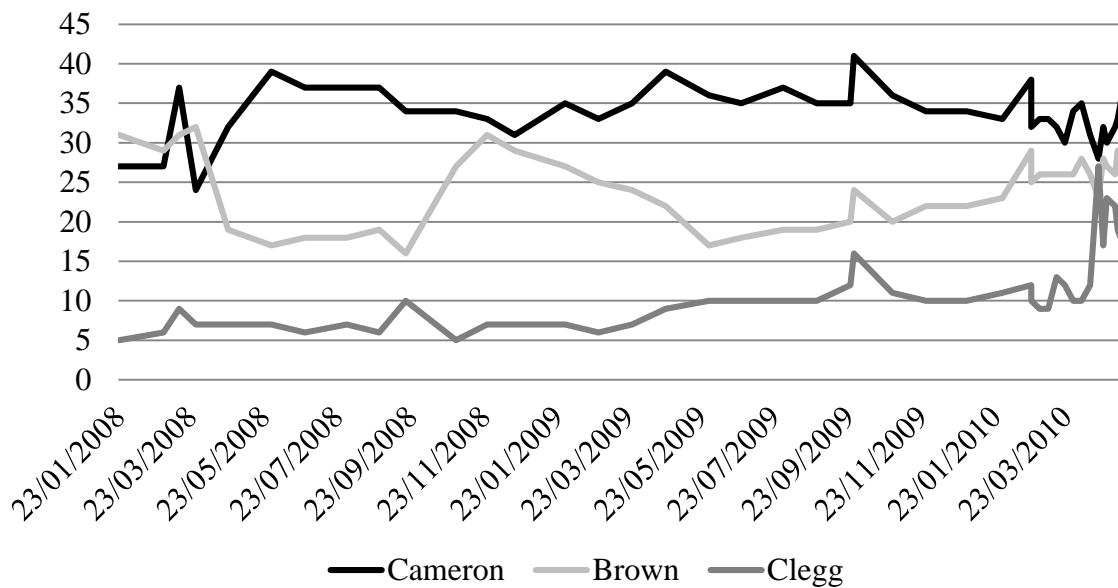
Breslauer (2002) argues that leaders acquire, manage and then lose leadership capital. A leader's position in time may influence co-operation between parties. A leader might be in a position to engender trust and support for co-operation within their party and the public. An example of this was David Cameron's 'big, open and comprehensive' offer to the Liberal Democrats. Alongside this, the specific perceptions of co-operation will differ in each party. For the Liberal Democrats, co-operation has always been a necessary path to national office. For Labour, this is a more intermittent and potentially increasing phenomenon. This has the potential to affect the different decisions leaders have to take, and the different constraints they face.

The remainder of this chapter addresses leadership and co-operation in the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties between 2007 and the present time, and how this aids our understanding of the contemporary potential for co-operation between the two. During this period, Labour and Liberal Democrat co-operation and potential realignment was nearly realised but ultimately defeated (Adonis, 2013, Heppell, 2013). As such, it provides a very useful understanding of where Labour and the Liberal Democrats are now, and the potential for co-operation between the two.

7.2 2007-2010: Gordon Brown and Nick Clegg

This section focuses on the period 2007-2010, and Gordon Brown and Nick Clegg's respective leaderships during that time. Gordon Brown became leader of the Labour Party in June 2007, having previously served as the MP for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (previously Dunfermline East) since 1983. He replaced Tony Blair, who had led Labour since 1994 and the country since 1997. Nick Clegg was elected leader of the Liberal Democrats in December 2007, having previously served as an MEP from 1999 to 2004, and then the MP for Sheffield Hallam since 2005. He replaced Sir Menzies Campbell, who had led the party since 2006.

Figure 7.1: Best Prime Minister ratings, 2008-2010



Source: Wells (2011), showing polls from the beginning of Clegg’s leadership of the Liberal Democrats through to the 2010 general election.

Considering *time in office*, while Brown only became leader of the Labour Party in 2007, he had been Chancellor of the Exchequer since 1997, and arguably one of the most powerful Chancellors in modern British history. He had huge swathes of control over domestic policy, particularly following the events of September 11th 2001 and the subsequent interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. This had positive and negative aspects. Brown was respected, and his longevity in office helped him assume the role of natural successor to Blair. In the early stages, the *likelihood of a credible leadership challenge* was low. Throughout though, the likelihood increased, and at various points appeared inevitable: a difficulty was whether or not Brown could form what appeared a ‘new’ government, one that was his own and different from Blair. For the most part he failed, consistently falling behind Cameron for who would be best Prime Minister (see Figure 7.1) Theakston (2011) concludes that Brown was ultimately an ineffective leader in a difficult context.

Clegg meanwhile was much more unknown to the public when he became leader: while he found it easier to *shape his own platform* than Brown, he had the perennial problem faced by Liberal Democrat leaders of trying to get noticed by the public. Much was made of Clegg as

the ‘*Orange Book*’ liberal who would take the party to the right (Assinder, 2007, Branigan, 2007). However, it is worth remembering that Clegg wrote his *Orange Book* chapter on the European Union, not on the forces of the market or virtues of economic liberalism, and he also wrote a chapter for the Social Liberal Forum’s *Reinventing the State* on tackling terrorism and recognising the limits of the state. His age and his experience marked a change from Paddy Ashdown, Charles Kennedy and Ming Campbell, but this was not a radical transformation of the party overnight.⁴⁵ More nuanced analysis rightly recognises the gradual attitudinal shift of the Liberal Democrats towards positions more sympathetic to the Conservatives (Bale, 2012, Evans and Sanderson-Nash, 2011). This coincided with a professionalisation of the party over time, some of which pre-dated Clegg (see Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005).

With regard to *political vision*, Brown was keen to show that he was more open in his outlook. One of his first acts as Prime Minister was to invite figures outside of the Labour Party into his government. These figures would come to be known as ‘GOATS’, or ‘government of all the talents’, and arguably constituted ‘the greatest import of experts from a non-political background since World War Two’ (Watt, 2007). However, alongside appointments from a non-political background were attempts to include political figures from outside the Labour Party. These included Liberal Democrat peers: Shirley Williams agreed to advise the government on nuclear proliferation, Anthony Lester on constitutional reform and Julie Neuberger on the third sector (Seldon and Lodge, 2010: 10). However, they did not amount to any significant co-operation: Brown was looking to form a government that would counter perceptions of his tribal approach to politics (Theakston, 2011). Liberal Democrats were invited alongside Conservatives and non-party political figures.

However, a more significant move was Brown’s invitation to Paddy Ashdown to join the cabinet as Northern Ireland secretary. Brown had a long-standing friendship with Ashdown and then Liberal Democrat leader Campbell. While friendship is unlikely to be the

⁴⁵ It is worth noting that Clegg’s biographer would disagree with this analysis, identifying Clegg as firmly rooted in the Dutch-style economic liberal tradition (Bowers, 2012).

determining factor for co-operation, it has been significant in the past. Tony Blair and Paddy Ashdown were good friends during the mid-1990s, and James Callaghan and David Steel enjoyed a close relationship during the Lib-Lab pact. Its effects can be exaggerated, but Brown's friendship with Ashdown and Campbell may have made him more likely to extend an offer to join the Cabinet. However, Brown had approached Ashdown without Campbell's knowledge or approval (Ashdown, 2009). When Ashdown asked him about the range of issues the two parties disagreed on, such as civil liberties, Brown's response was 'well, couldn't you stay silent?' (Ashdown, 2009: 386). Ashdown eventually declined the offer. This highlights two issues with regard to Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. Firstly, that ideological and policy disagreement are still important. Second, that Brown's *communicative performance* in order to mediate a conflictual situation was lacking.

Alongside overtures to Liberal Democrat individuals, Brown's *policy vision* was also one that would be of interest to the Liberal Democrats: constitutional reform. Between 2007 and 2010, he made three wide-ranging and policy-heavy speeches on political constitutional reform. In a speech to the House of Commons in 2007, he proposed House of Lords reform, proposals to establish a codified constitution, a review of the electoral system for Westminster elections, devolution and changing the voting age (Brown, 2010: 159-166). Brown's primary agenda was not to win over the Liberal Democrats. In part it was also a reaction to some of Blair's perceived failures: it more reflected Brown's changing attitude over time that the Liberal Democrats were a useful partner to have on board (Seldon and Lodge, 2010). His speeches on constitutional reform were important, and led to Labour promising in its 2010 general election manifesto to hold a referendum, and support a 'yes' vote, on changing to the alternative vote electoral system. There was fear within the Conservative camp that Brown would use the Liberal Democrats to Labour's advantage. Like William Hague had feared the consequences of Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation in the late 1990s (Richards, 2010), strategists within David Cameron's team feared that Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation would be deeply damaging to the Conservatives (Heppell, 2013).

However, Brown's *communicative performance* meant that he was again unable to positively change the nature of the Labour-Liberal Democrat relationship. Brown failed to demonstrate that he had the emotional intelligence or political skill in his dealings with the Liberal Democrats. The same criticism applies to his ability to deal with most people, including in his own party (Theakston, 2011). Peter Mandelson (2010: 10) noted his and Blair's doubt about

Brown's ability to 'bring people along', and here was clear evidence of it. Hurst (2010b: 45) argues that far from promoting Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation, Brown's overtures towards Paddy Ashdown deeply unsettled the Liberal Democrats, in that 'it smacked of a crude attempt to divide the party's senior ranks'.

Clegg's *policy vision* was a mix of disagreement with both Labour and the Conservatives. Between 2007 and 2010, most of Clegg's criticism was of the Labour government, be it on equality or foreign affairs, or on individual issues such as tuition fees, detention of terrorist suspects and rights for the Nepalese Gurkha soldiers. However, the Liberal Democrats remained broadly supportive of Labour's spending record. They attacked the Conservatives ahead of the 2010 general election on their plans to cut public spending, arguing instead that it should be maintained until the economy is in a better position to manage cuts.

An innovation of the 2010 general election campaign was the introduction of three debates between Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg. It gave Clegg and the Liberal Democrats increased media attention, and according to instant opinion polls Clegg was the most impressive with regard to *communicative performance*. Brown sought commonality with Clegg, constantly repeating that he 'agreed with Nick'. Cutts et al. (2010: 691) argue that it appeared an attempt by Brown to 'isolate the Conservatives and create common cause with the Liberal Democrats with the type of progressive alliance familiar to students of the Blair-Ashdown era'. However, Clegg did not appear convinced and was at best reluctant to accept Brown's praises. As David Cameron neatly summarised it in the debate: 'it's rather difficult, because Gordon says Nick agrees with Gordon and Nick says Nick doesn't agree with Gordon'. Going into the 2010 general election, Brown's *personal poll rating relative to the opposition* were poor (see Figure 7.1). Although Brown was often ahead of Clegg, this should have been a minimum expectation: Nick Clegg was never going to become Prime Minister. Brown was comfortably behind David Cameron on who would be the best Prime Minister.

Nonetheless, the 2010 general election delivered a hung parliament, and subsequently coalition negotiations and the potential for Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. Nick Clegg's preparation far exceeded Gordon Brown's. Clegg appointed four Liberal Democrat MPs (Danny Alexander, Chris Huhne, David Laws and Andrew Stunnell) to devise policy demands and tactics for any negotiations (Kavanagh and Cowley, 2010, Laws, 2010). Stunnell had experience of local government and coalition negotiations there, and had also

been involved in Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition negotiations in Scotland following the 1999 elections to the Scottish Parliament. Brown's preparation largely occurred during the election campaign itself, with advisers preparing documents on Liberal Democrat policy and areas of agreement. Eventually, the negotiating team was announced, consisting of two peers and three MPs (Andrew Adonis, Peter Mandelson, Ed Balls, Harriet Harman and Ed Miliband). However, preparation was minimal. As two of Brown's former advisers told me:

There were three reasons to explain Labour's lack of preparation ahead of the 2010 general election. Firstly, the pressure of governing, particularly during that time. Secondly, the majority view at the top of the Labour Party was a heavy defeat. Thirdly, we were concerned about appearing disloyal to the party's history (Adonis, 2016).

In 2010 that we didn't do much preparatory work. We should have done, but we didn't. The main reason was that we thought we were about to lose badly, and Gordon was worried about leaks. I think he thought if he commissioned work about what we had in common with the Lib Dems, it would get out (Wood, 2016).

Brown's lack of preparation reflects the differing attitudes to co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. As noted earlier, co-operation is always a necessary means to national office, while for Labour this has been a more intermittent phenomenon. Despite the obvious chances of a hung parliament, Labour appeared to take the view that a bad result for them necessarily meant they would be out of government. It was only after the election that Brown did any preparation. Adonis's comments about the party's history also suggest a deep unease about co-operation with other parties, potentially reflecting previous experience with the SDP and even earlier to Ramsay Macdonald and the National Government (Joyce, 1999).

It was also clear that the Conservative and Liberal Democrat negotiating teams had much more power over decision-making than their Labour counterparts. Labour's team continually

needed to refer things back to Brown, or Chancellor Alistair Darling.⁴⁶ Negotiations following the 2010 general election were largely led by the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, and the Liberal Democrat negotiating team were key in persuading their MPs and peers to support a coalition (Evans and Sanderson-Nash, 2011, Laws, 2010). Prior to the election, Clegg had set out that in the event of a hung parliament the Liberal Democrats would speak to the party with the strongest mandate. While it was unclear whether the mandate was defined by votes, seats or a combination of the two, Clegg stuck to the line. In doing so, he disregarded the official Cabinet Manual on the subject, and similar actions by Clegg would be described during the 2015 general election by a leading academic on constitutional matters, Vernon Bogdanor, as ‘absurd’ (Boffey, 2015).⁴⁷

No matter how absurd they were, they were clear efforts by Clegg to manipulate the rules of the game. The predictions following the 2010 general election were that the Conservatives would win a plurality of votes and seats: Clegg’s words on the strongest mandate were a clear signal that co-operation after the 2010 general election would be between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives (Russell, 2010). Cameron’s position as the leader of the largest party meant that he had much greater *ability to shape the platform* than Brown, who was mostly side-lined. While it could be argued that Clegg was narrowing his options in an irrational fashion, he was being pushed on this issue daily by the media, and it was as much an effort to find a satisfactorily vague answer as it was anything else. However, any hopes that Clegg would use the Liberal Democrats’ history of co-operation with Labour as a signal of intention was forlorn. As one of Labour’s representatives on the coalition negotiations Andrew Adonis (2016) told me: ‘it was much harder to put together than I thought. As soon as Nick Clegg talked of equidistance I knew it would be incredibly difficult’.

⁴⁶ Much to the dismay of the Liberal Democrat negotiating team, Brown facilitated one meeting between Alistair Darling and Vince Cable. However, both agreed that they could do little on their own, and simply enjoyed a friendly conversation over a cup of tea instead (Laws, 2010).

⁴⁷ The Liberal Democrats were unimpressed by Bogdanor’s description, telling Kavanagh and Cowley (2015: 197): ‘thank God constitutional experts don’t run politics... just because it worked like that in 1924 or whenever doesn’t mean we should still work like that’.

This is not to suggest that decisions by party leaders and negotiating teams individually determined the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition following 2010. The main reason for the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition was that they had the numbers in the House of Commons to satisfy the requirements to hold office, and had enough overlap in policy terms to implement a governmental programme (Bale, 2011b). It is instead to argue that individual agency and *skills* were important as well. Clegg had little trouble working together at an individual level with Cameron (Dorey et al., 2011), while he found Brown to be ‘lecturing, hectoring and bullying’ (Mandelson, 2010: 550). Leaders might be more effectively understood as veto-players: the extent to which they can exercise such a veto depends on electoral context and other institutional considerations outlined throughout this thesis, but they can exercise it all the same. As Greenstein (2001) argues, emotional intelligence is a crucial ability of any leader. Again, this was to Brown’s detriment in relation to Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. Throughout the coalition negotiations, texts and conversations between Labour and Liberal Democrat figures centred around Gordon Brown’s inability to lead a coalition government. His more tribal reputation belittled any attempts he made at co-operation. Part of this was due to the apparent rejection of him by the electorate, but also his inability to work with others. Brown still labelled the Liberal Democrats the ‘Liberals’⁴⁸, and his friendships with elder Liberal Democrat statesmen did not extend to those elected since 2001 and 2005. As former Liberal Democrat Cabinet Minister David Laws (2010) has noted, every change in leadership between 1997 and 2010 decreased the chances of Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation and increased the chances of Conservative-Liberal Democrat co-operation. The Liberal Democrats were less likely to work with Gordon Brown than Tony Blair, but also more likely to work with David Cameron than William Hague, Iain Duncan Smith or Michael Howard. Gordon Brown was simultaneously less likely to work with Nick Clegg than Paddy Ashdown, Charles Kennedy, Ming Campbell or Vince Cable (Heppell, 2013).

⁴⁸ The effect of this is often overstated. For instance, former Conservative minister Ken Clarke regularly refers to the Liberal Democrats as ‘the Liberals’, and he was respected and liked by Liberal Democrats during the 2010-2015 coalition (Laws, 2016a).

Insiders were aware of the problem. Labour peer and member of the negotiating team Lord Adonis (2013: 25) labelled it the ‘Gordon issue’: ‘everyone knew that an arrangement with the Lib Dems was impossible unless it was [resolved]’. Brown was desperate to avoid the Conservatives claiming victory and installing themselves in government (Adonis, 2013). As one of Brown’s advisers at the time told me:

[Gordon] knew himself it wouldn't work... [but] he wanted a Labour Government to survive. His logic was if you can bind the Lib Dems into some sort of higgledy piggledy clunky minority government, the Tories would get rid of Cameron, then euroscepticism takes over and they go into meltdown. That was the game. It's hanging on by your fingertips for enough time for the Tories to decapitate their leader, because they're good at that, and then the eurosceptic leader comes through and says the future has to be an anti-European one for the Conservative Party, and then we're in business, we can worry about another election and all that. He was not dewy eyed about a progressive alliance - it was a strategy. And he thought that if the Tories got in they would be in for 15-20 years and it's to be decided if that's true or not. That, for him, was the logic at the time (Wood, 2016).

For all the criticisms of Brown’s *communicative* performance, his *political vision* was sharp. Throughout the five days, Brown strongly urged Clegg not to side with a party he fundamentally disagreed with on the European Union. On the Eurozone crisis that was beginning to unfold, Brown presciently put it to Clegg that ‘our relationship with Europe will be damaged’ if the Liberal Democrats allowed the Conservatives to govern (Adonis, 2013: 126). In recognising the electoral constraints upon him, he was trying to move the agenda to ideology and policy, where Brown and Clegg were still much more aligned than Clegg and Cameron. However, demonstrating the strength of concerns other than ideology and policy, Clegg’s response to Brown was that this ‘isn’t really about policy’ (Adonis, 2016). Brown’s *time in office*, *personal poll ratings* and *public trust in the leader* fundamentally damaged him, and he was unable to overcome those obstacles to co-operation. Again, Brown knew this, and offered to resign in order to allow a Labour leader more amenable to the Liberal Democrats to take charge, but it was to no avail.

Another Labour leader may have provided greater incentives to Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. David Miliband was often discussed, both pre- and post- Brown, and may have been more to the Liberal Democrats’ liking. However, his ardent support of intervention in

Iraq would have created problems both within the Labour Party and with the Liberal Democrats. Harriet Harman became acting Labour leader after Gordon Brown's resignation as Prime Minister, but was very negative to the Liberal Democrats between 2010 and 2015. Alan Johnson was more supportive of the Liberal Democrats, and also strongly supported electoral reform, but it is doubtful that he would have wanted to become Labour leader. Also, as will be shown in the following section, a leader more ideologically in line with the Liberal Democrats does not necessarily make Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation more likely.

Organisational influences and constraints were also important. As noted in the organisational chapter, the Liberal Democrats' federal structure allows more influence for members, activists and the parliamentary party than Labour's structure does. Demonstrating impressive *political vision* and *communicative performance*, Clegg continually consulted the parliamentary party throughout the coalition negotiations, and then a few days after the agreement was reached with the Conservatives, a special conference was held to support the deal. Opposition was minimal. Evans and Sanderson-Nash (2011) argue that Clegg and the leadership were taking the initiative of consulting the party's organisation before being forced to do so by more rebellious members in the party. This argument has merit. As one of the Liberal Democrats' 2010 coalition negotiation team told me:

Virtually everybody had their hands dipped in the blood from Nick Clegg downwards, so it was very difficult for everybody to not feel consulted... if people feel they've had a say and they own the decisions, then they feel a lot different about them... if they'd just said it's mad, we wouldn't have been able to go ahead... in which case there would be a loose confidence and supply agreement, which would have been the minimal we could have got away with without pulling the government down and generating another election... (Laws, 2016b).

This suggests that consultation with the organisation was still a constraint on the leadership, but also an opportunity to win the grassroots' support. In Labour, Gordon Brown consulted his cabinet, but not his parliamentary party and certainly not the party membership. At no point, were they ever really discussed during the 2010 coalition negotiations. However, Brown knew that *relations* would be a major issue. He would have struggled to carry the parliamentary party on changing the electoral system to the Alternative Vote, and would have failed to win support for a proportional electoral system. Significant interventions by co-

operation-sceptic MPs such as John Reid and David Blunkett served to undermine any attempts at agreement (Adonis, 2013, Laws, 2010). Brown lacked the authority within his party to carry them with him. Clegg would have faced less hostility from his party in trying to win support for a Labour-Liberal Democrat deal.

As Bennister et al. (2015: 418) argue in relation to a leader's authority, 'what really counts is not one's formal position but the informal authority one is granted'. In the context of Labour and the Liberal Democrats, the formal institutions of each party were a greater constraint for Clegg, but the informal and actual strength of opposition was a bigger constraint for Brown. While an informal network structure can limit the strength of opposition to a party leader (Heidar and Saglie, 2003), if its opposition and its voice is loud enough it can still weaken a leader's authority. Brown found that as he tried to persuade Clegg of the historic case for Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation, he had senior figures in his party saying the exact opposite on national television. His authority was fundamentally weakened. Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats were more united. For instance, Paddy Ashdown was crucial throughout the coalition negotiations. His authoritative position in the party as a trusted former leader was used to persuade others in the party that coalition with the Conservatives was the correct decision for the Liberal Democrats.

Another constraint upon Labour and the Liberal Democrats was David Cameron's Conservative Party. Although he faced an easier opponent in Gordon Brown and a more tired Labour Party compared with William Hague, Iain Duncan Smith and Michael Howard before him, David Cameron showed himself to be a very able and skilled opposition leader (Bale, 2011a). Between 2005 and 2010, he changed voter perceptions of his party on salient issues, and modernised the Conservatives to the extent that they were able to take advantage of Gordon Brown and his government's unpopularity. While he was unable to win a majority following the 2010 general election, it is difficult to think of any other Conservative politician who would have got as close as he did.

Heppell (2013) argues that David Cameron manipulated the agenda during the coalition negotiations, and knocked on its head the idea that the Liberal Democrats should only ever support the Labour Party. Former Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown said following the coalition that 'I am not happy with where we've arrived. I am not happy at the death of the realignment of the left' (Heppell, 2013: 277). Leadership and individual agency were

important in the process of how it was formed, what structure the eventual government actually took and what and how policies would be implemented. Importantly for the next period analysed in this chapter, leadership and individual agency also helped to shape and change future situations and agenda.

Brown and Clegg did not solely prevent Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. However, they did challenge the widely-held view that the Liberal Democrats were much more likely to co-operate with Labour than the Conservatives. The parliamentary arithmetic was vital, but had such results followed the 1997, 2001 and 2005 general elections, it is unlikely that the same coalition outcome would have formed. Iain Duncan-Smith and Charles Kennedy would probably not have attempted to form a coalition. Neither would John Major or William Hague with Paddy Ashdown. Brown and Clegg's leaderships both helped to structure an agenda that eventually facilitated Conservative-Liberal Democrat co-operation, with ramifications for the 2010-2015 parliament and beyond.

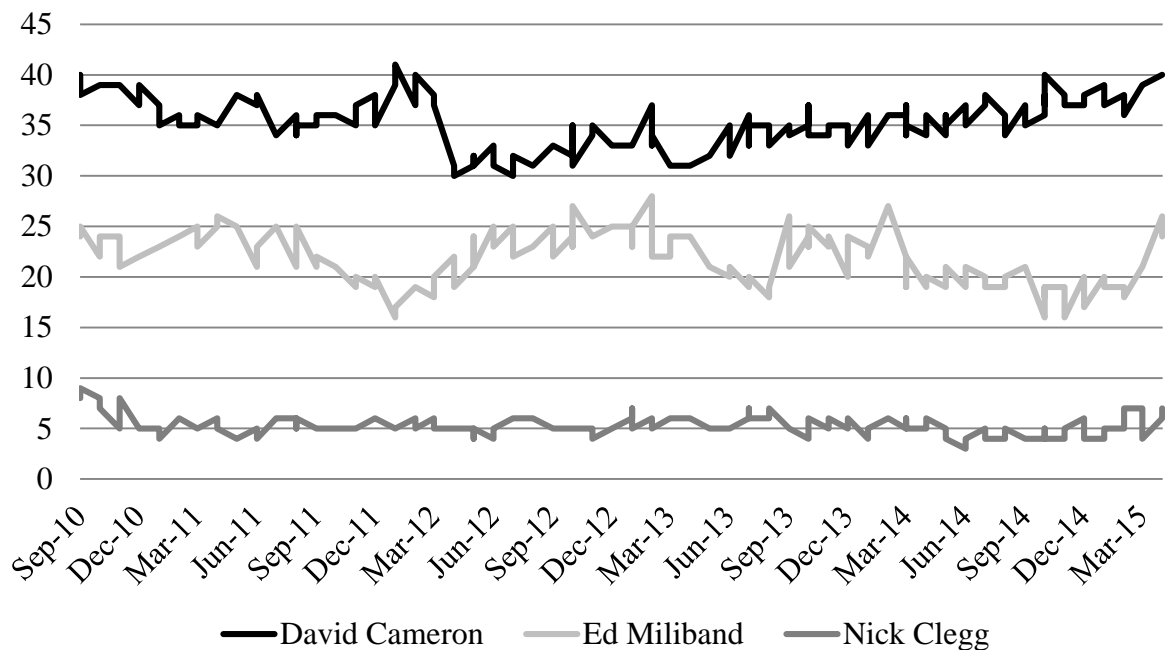
At the *relations* level, Brown's authority was severely hampered by the electoral arithmetic and a parliamentary party divided on how to respond. At a *skills* and *reputation* level, he was never able to persuade the Liberal Democrats that he had a genuine commitment to changing the dimensions of British politics to one where the Liberal Democrats got a fairer hearing. His reputation was as commanding but bullying, and tactical but clumsy. Structurally, Clegg had more room for manoeuvre. Although they had lost seats and were deflated after a largely positive campaign, the Liberal Democrats remained the most powerful players in the 'game': without them a majority government would not have formed (Bale, 2011b). They got some concessions from the Conservatives in return for their strength, but while Clegg 'won' his party a referendum on the Alternative Vote, it was a superficial victory, and one that would be ultimately defeated by the electorate in 2011. More broadly throughout the 2010 parliament, Cameron and the Conservatives were held responsible by the electorate for the government's achievements in office, while the Liberal Democrats were ignored (Bale and Webb, 2015, Cutts and Russell, 2015). He did not shape the agenda in a way that benefitted his party. While some have labelled it 'the right thing to do' (Bowers, 2015), it serves to show how the coalition was a big advantage for the Conservatives and a big disadvantage for the Liberal Democrats (Bale and Sanderson-Nash, 2011).

7.3 2010-2015: Ed Miliband and Nick Clegg

This section focuses on the period 2010-2015, and Ed Miliband and Nick Clegg's respective leaderships during that time. Ed Miliband became leader of the Labour Party in September 2010, having first been elected as the MP for Doncaster North in 2005. As such, Miliband's *time in office* had been short: he had a much lower profile than Gordon Brown. Indeed, he began his leadership in difficult circumstances: his victory over David Miliband in the Labour leadership contest was as a result of trade union affiliate votes, and his victory owed more to a ruthless charm offensive of enough parliamentarians to win their second preferences, combined with anti-New Labour rhetoric, than it was a united party seeking to support him. As a consequence, his *re-election margin for the leadership* was small and he struggled for authority with the parliamentary party from the beginning. His *personal poll ratings relative to the opposition* were also poor (see Figure 7.2). He was dogged throughout his premiership by accusations of underperformance and comparisons with his older brother (Bale, 2015b). By this point, Clegg had led the Liberal Democrats for over two years, and was now Deputy Prime Minister. The Liberal Democrats were in government for the first time in their party's short history, and Clegg opted to place representatives from his party in every ministry, aiming for breadth rather than depth in government. While this might have diluted his *perceived ability to shape platforms*, the electoral defeats that were inflicted upon the Liberal Democrats between 2010 and 2015 suggests that having one or two more powerful ministries might not have made much difference.

During the early years of the 2010 parliament Labour targeted the Liberal Democrats as much as, if not more than, the Conservatives. This was based on the Labour view that in Conservative-Labour marginals, there were enough Liberal Democrat voters that, if they converted to Labour, could swing those seats. Indeed, during the Labour leadership election campaign Ed Miliband set out his *political vision* as different from New Labour, and as a progressive that could win Liberal Democrat voters. During the Labour leadership election contest, he tried to court 2010 Liberal Democrat voters into joining the Labour Party in order to support him: 'your leadership has sold out and betrayed your traditions. I ask you to look again at Labour' (Miliband, 2010). Miliband's approach is interesting in that Chapter Five set out a co-operative approach to winning Liberal Democrat support in Labour-Conservative marginals; Miliband opted for a competitive approach. It was not successful.

Figure 7.2: Best Prime Minister ratings, 2010-2015



Source: YouGov (2017b), showing opinion polls from the beginning of Ed Miliband’s leadership to the 2015 general election.

The strength of negative feeling between the Labour and the Liberal Democrat leaderships had its roots in events that took place prior to and following the 2010 general election. As argued earlier, while the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition that formed after the 2010 general election was more a result of the parliamentary arithmetic than the interplay of personal relationships; individual decisions taken during that time still had a knock-on effect. As an adviser to the Labour leadership told me:

For the people particularly close to the view that Labour should co-operate with the Lib Dems, the Brown/Clegg experience in 2007-2008 up to 2010 was quite significant in that post-2010 period. At the top of the party, you’ve got Ed Miliband, Ed Balls, Yvette Cooper and Andy Burnham: they had all seen Gordon court Clegg quite assiduously during the pre-2010 period... Brown knew that he might need the Lib Dems. Many around Gordon were keen on Lab-Lib co-operation... [but] their experience was of Clegg keeping his distance. For that four... the extent to which Clegg kept his distance was telling. They basically took the view that the ‘Orange Book’ Lib Dems running the party did not want to work with Labour (Private interview).

As shown above, the extent to which Brown ‘quite assiduously courted Clegg’ is certainly open to question, but the argument stands that the 2007-2010 period had a knock-on effect on leadership relations between Miliband and Clegg after 2010. There was very little communication between the two leaders, and public relations were poor. This was relayed to me by a former adviser to Ed Miliband:

Clegg-Ed relations were bad in the first two years. Ed was putting the boot in a lot and Clegg was putting in the boot back, and was being used as the front man to attack Labour's record. For all those reasons, it got a bit unpleasant for a while (Wood, 2016).

The Liberal Democrats were hostile to Labour for many reasons. The two parties were further apart both in relation to policy but also in personal relations in 2010, compared with 1997. While in 1997, both parties’ *political vision* was more united in being anti-Conservative, the Liberal Democrats now found themselves in coalition with the Conservatives. As such, they were also very keen to stress the positive effects of coalition as a form of governance in Britain, which meant prioritising unity with the Conservatives rather than any distinctive agenda that might ease relations with Labour (McEnhill, 2015). Labour’s negative approach to the Liberal Democrats also made it very easy for the Liberal Democrats to return the favour. In the early months of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, Clegg (2010) argued that while the Conservatives had ‘embraced two-party working with integrity’, Labour ‘are still struggling to come to terms with it’. He particularly accused Labour of practicing ‘cry foul’ adversarial politics, a point which one former Liberal Democrat cabinet minister agreed with:

Labour were very aggressive about us and about Nick and others. They could have taken a different line... where they sought to divide us from the Conservatives and be very pleasant and tolerant but disappointed, and finding those cracks. I think David Miliband would have taken that course. As they didn’t, they took a very tribal approach, that exacerbated our tendency to then have to justify what we were doing... by pointing to Labour’s record... we didn’t feel very positive about Ed Miliband. On various encounters we had with him, he wasn’t coming across as somebody who could compete with Cameron as a Prime Minister in waiting (Laws, 2016b).

Labour and Liberal Democrat relations were rotten in the early years of the 2010 parliament. While Miliband remained keen to demonstrate that he was a social liberal, this appeared driven more by attempts to win back former Labour voters than it was setting out a *policy vision* more aligned with the Liberal Democrats. He told *The Times* in 2010 that the ‘Miliband re-alignment is that you put together social democratic Labour combined with the liberal tradition of civil liberties and other issues’ (Treneman, 2010).

However as the 2010 parliament went on, the extent of hostility between Miliband and Clegg eased. The collapse in the Liberal Democrat vote meant that there were not many votes left to chase, and Miliband’s changing approach was as much an organic development as it was any change in *political vision*. Nevertheless, it had two main consequences. First, it served to show the Liberal Democrats that, in the event of a hung parliament, the two parties could be partners in coalition. Miliband looked at the Liberal Democrats as a party he could work with. As one Miliband adviser told me:

He was quite happy having a progressive alliance of some sort. He thought there was enough there for a common agenda on Leveson issues, to common approaches to internationalism, to social liberal policies on domestic affairs, crime, prison reform, all sorts of things for a common cause (Wood, 2016).

Second, Miliband’s more friendly relationship with the Liberal Democrats was in part an effort to move the agenda in his own party towards a *policy vision* he supported himself; particularly on civil liberties. Cameron executed a similar strategy during the 2010 coalition negotiations. Prior to the 2010 general election, the Conservatives had yet to really modernise their party in the same way that Labour had ahead of the 1997 general election. Bale (2009) argues that while New Labour was reengineered, the Conservatives were merely re-styled. However following the 2010 general election, Cameron was able to use the Liberal Democrats to further his own ambition of the Conservatives as a moderate, centrist party in government (Hayton, 2012), although the extent to which this was a successfully executed strategy or a fortunate side effect is questionable. During the 2010 parliament, Ed Miliband increasingly saw the Liberal Democrats as a potential moderating force to his own parliamentary party, who were more socially authoritarian on home affairs and social policy.

As one adviser to the Shadow Cabinet who was involved in preparing Labour for coalition negotiations after the 2015 general election told me:

The areas where I would have been worried were defence, civil liberties and surveillance powers, things like that, where my instincts are closer to mainstream Labour than the Lib Dems or frankly Ed Miliband. The worry was that he would have an ally he would use to tip the balance within the party away from a sensible policy (private interview).

This was supported by one of Ed Miliband's advisers, who outlined to me:

I think Ed was quite a shy social liberal... There's a streak in the PLP that hates, more than anything else, fluffiness on social issues. It's a difficult thing to really capture - even people who were sceptical of Blair liked his putting physical security, ASBOs, etc. on a par with economic security stuff. That was the thing about Ed that many inside the PLP didn't like the most about him - the sense that he was too liberal on issues of crime. He never did a crime speech or police speech, or not really on national security, other than when discussing Libya. We didn't take that agenda seriously enough. A sense that our voters, especially working class voters, like that 'tough on crime' dimension, and that many found the Liberal Democrats hypocritical on those issues after they joined the coalition (Wood, 2016).

On social liberal issues, Miliband knew that his *policy vision* was different from many in his parliamentary party, shadow cabinet and broader party. Miliband knew that co-operation with the Liberal Democrats offered an opportunity to restructure the debate in a way that suited him. As his adviser told me:

If you talked to Ed a year ago about the Lib Dems, he'd very privately say that part of him quite liked the idea of a Lib Dem coalition because he thought along the lines of the Steve Hilton logic, that the Lib Dems forced Tory modernisation that they failed to do themselves over 20-25 years ago... Of course Ed would have preferred a single party government. But Ed liked the idea of having the Lib Dems as balance on social liberal issues and constitutional reform issues, against a party many of whom thought that was nonsense... It's not just a clichéd metropolitan, liberal, fluffy granola-eating vs gritty, working class, feel the coal dust on the chest sort of thing, it's not that. It's more complicated than that... It's really to do with how you see the electorate. How much you think they care about those issues (Wood, 2016).

To have simply advocated a more liberal approach would have brought about a lot of intra-party opposition. By restructuring the situation to one of appealing to Liberal Democrat voters, and then trying to win Liberal Democrat support for potential post-election co-operation, Miliband was trying to structure the situation to support his own interests. Just as Cameron managed to placate the Conservative right during the early stages of the 2010 parliament by using the Liberal Democrats (Lee, 2011), Miliband saw an opportunity to use the Liberal Democrats to do the same to Labour.

The Miliband camp also appeared to place more importance on individual actors in each party than Brown had prior to 2010. From interviews with Miliband's advisers, it is clear that they recognised that the parliamentary arithmetic would be the main, predominant factor in determining the outcome of the next government, but they also thought that co-operation with some Liberal Democrats would be easier than with others. Miliband met a number of times with Vince Cable during the parliament, as well as Lord Oakeshott, the former Liberal Democrat peer who had run a series of polls in order to undermine Nick Clegg's leadership. While Clegg and Miliband's relations healed during the 2010 parliament, there was still a clear sense that Clegg lacked the trust and authority of the Labour Party to have a major role in a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition. There was a strong preference within the Labour leadership for a Cable-led Liberal Democrat party that Labour could co-operate with more effectively (private interview, and Wood, 2016).

Nick Clegg was not especially keen on Ed Miliband either. Throughout the five years in coalition, Clegg found Cameron difficult and disagreeable on many issues, but ultimately a reasonable colleague to work with. Whenever he needed to work with Miliband, he was not impressed and doubted his *ability to shape the platform*. As he conveyed to David Laws:

It's interesting that big, controversial stuff like this [Syria] always brings Cameron and me together... I am afraid Ed Miliband is totally unreliable. I am fast losing respect for him. Every time there is a big decision – Alternative Vote, Lords, Syria – Miliband has the chance to act big, but he always, always acts small... if there is a hung parliament after the next general election, and there is a possibility of a Lib-Lab coalition, Miliband's weakness would be a real problem in working together (Laws, 2016a: 322).

Once the short campaign began ahead of the 2015 general election, predictions across the media and academic community were that the Conservatives would win roughly 300 seats, with Labour winning approximately 275, the Scottish National Party 50-55 and the Liberal Democrats 20-30 (Monk and Lambert, 2015). While this would not have given a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition a majority, the commonly-held view was that the Scottish National Party would not be able to prop up a Conservative-led government, and would have to back Labour in a budget or vote of no confidence. There is disagreement amongst different advisers to the Labour leadership as to what sort of arrangement the Labour leadership would have liked with the Liberal Democrats.

If there'd been a hung parliament, and the numbers would have made it work, we'd have offered a coalition with the Lib Dems. A formal coalition, rather than confidence and supply... And Lib Dem members, Cable, in the cabinet. Almost certainly. That was our plan (Wood, 2016).

The basic... plan in the event of a hung parliament was for a minority Labour government. The question was how that would secure its majority, and there was a plan to run it differently to the 2010 coalition. The 2010 coalition had functioned by a series of deals. 'You give us this, and we'll give you that'... and trade away things they stood on. You could see the Tories and Lib Dems getting ready to do that again... and we talked a lot about that sort of problem. We didn't want to run a Labour government on that basis. The basic approach would be to bring issues to parliament and say this is where we stand. Support us or not, we're not going to trade things through... Ed was saying ahead of the election that he had a plan for government, and making the arguments for his programme, rather than a deal-by-deal government. If the Liberal Democrats had come into government, it would not have been a universally agreed programme with Lib Dems taking big cabinet positions (private interview).

Labour prepared for potential coalition talks with the Liberal Democrats through a series of negotiations between Lord Falconer and a series of advisers to Ed Miliband, Ed Balls and the rest of the shadow cabinet. The general mood amongst different people was that Labour would be able to do a deal with the Liberal Democrats that would not involve them giving much ground on policy. Labour felt that the Liberal Democrats did not gain much from the Conservatives in coalition, a point made in academic analysis too (see Bale, 2012). One Labour adviser was quite disdainful about the potential influence the Liberal Democrats might have over Labour in any coalition negotiations, telling me:

Basically if Clegg could stay on with us and salvage his reputation for basically being a Tory, he'd have loved it. If the Lib Dems could stay in government and survive after their Tory colleagues had fucked off, they'd have loved it. If you imagine a world in which Danny Alexander is still in the Treasury and George Osborne is booted out, they'd have absolutely loved it. They'd have begged for it... the idea that they were ever going to be tough negotiators... they weren't in 2010 and they wouldn't have been in 2015. In coalition preparation, it boiled down to: are the Lib Dems going to be funny about this? Well, they're gonna have to lump it (Private interview).

The Liberal Democrats prepared for potential coalition talks with Labour much in the same way they had ahead of the 2010 general election. The big difference was the expected change for the party in votes and seats. The Liberal Democrats' *poll ratings* were dire, and they knew that, at best, they would have half the votes and seats they had in 2010.⁴⁹ This was a bit of a double-edged sword. From one perspective, their *reputation* would be heavily weakened: they would lack the same *ability to shape the platform* and their *parliamentary effectiveness* would be much weaker with a reduced group of MPs. They would be unable to be as important to a government in passing votes in parliament, and would be going into coalition negotiations having lost badly. However, they would have also been accountable to a much smaller aspect of the electorate. As one former Liberal Democrat cabinet member told me, 'the risks are considerably less than if you're going in with 23 per cent of the vote' (Laws, 2016b). Within the leadership team, there was a definite sense that once sections of their former electorate had rejected them, they would not be an electoral constraint upon the party if they were in government after the 2015 general election.

Again, Clegg appointed a team of people to lead the preparation and negotiations for post-electoral co-operation: Danny Alexander, Sal Brinton, Steve Webb, Lynne Featherstone and David Laws. Laws and Alexander had both been involved in 2010. Webb provided a social democratic liberal response to Laws and Alexander, while Featherstone brought individual expertise from local government, as well as the internal party relations. As party president,

⁴⁹ As it happened, they had roughly one third of the vote and one seventh of the seats they won in 2010.

Brinton provided a useful understanding of the party's organisation and intra-party relations. The Liberal Democrats' party organisation continued to act as a constraint on Clegg. As noted in Chapter Six, a special article was added to the party's constitution prior to the 2015 general election, which stated that in the event of a proposed coalition, a special conference would be convened automatically. The coalition negotiating team would also consult an appointed reference group, consisting of nine representatives equally formed from the party's Federal Executive, Federal Policy Committee and the parliamentary party.

Labour had no such formal plans for consultation with the parliamentary party and membership. As one Labour MP told me, 'there wasn't very much scrutiny [of Labour/Lib Dem negotiations]. There was a lot of nervousness about things coming out... most of the PLP in that time were in election mode...' (Twigg, 2016). One (now former) Labour MP was angry at the lack of consultation by the Labour leadership following the 2010 general election, and would have wanted more consultation following the 2015 general election. In particular, he pointed out Labour's lack of consultation in stark contrast to the Liberal Democrats' more open procedures.

Going back to 2010, where I got angry with Labour was in learning that these attempted deals [with the Liberal Democrats] were tried to be made, which I think I would have supported. Contrast that with the way in which the Lib Dems undertook their negotiations... in terms of the way the Lib Dems were updated on a regular basis, so the body of their opinion could shape negotiations. The PLP was never afforded that, and that made me really angry (Reed, 2016).

Formally, Miliband could enter into a coalition agreement with the Liberal Democrats without a lot of constraint. However, parties cannot be sure that whatever agreements they reach will be respected by their institutions and organisations (Strøm and Muller, 1999a: 272). The attitudes to the Liberal Democrats within the Parliamentary Labour Party were mixed, but were mostly very negative. Behr (2012) said that Labour's attitudes to the Liberal Democrats amounted to 'tribal loathing' and 'unending spite'.

Labour MPs' perception of Liberal Democrats, like Labour's grassroots as highlighted in the organisational chapter, was one of betrayal and dislike. One Labour MP told me that following the 2010 general election, the parliamentary Labour party 'never knew whether to hate them or hug them. That duality just persisted all the way through' (Reed, 2016). Another

Labour MP was less complimentary, arguing that there is no point ‘pretending the party of Clegg, Laws and Alexander is a progressive force... the only value they hold is that of survival’ (Danczuk, 2012). Many Labour MPs represented constituencies that had faced strong Liberal Democrat competition prior to 2010, and happily witnessed the Liberal Democrats’ decline in successive local council elections between 2010 and 2015. Many will have spent countless hours at constituency party meetings listening to members and activists berate the Liberal Democrats’ actions in government. Eaton (2015a) argues that some within the parliamentary party and shadow cabinet would never have countenanced a deal with the ‘yellow bastards’. Unite leader Len McCluskey also warned that there would be financial ramifications if Labour co-operated with the Liberal Democrats (Helm, 2014). Admittedly, McCluskey not warning of financial ramifications would have been more surprising.

Miliband did not seem worried about opposition to a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition or arrangement after the 2015 general election. This appears naïve: while a *credible leadership challenge* never emerged throughout Miliband’s time in office, he was never fully respected or revered by the PLP, and any increased co-operation with the Liberal Democrats would have tested the relationship even further. One of Miliband’s key advisers felt it would be a big issue. Similarly to 2010, informal hostility and the actual strength of opposition would have likely been a bigger constraint on Miliband than Clegg. One adviser told me: ‘perhaps Ed was a bit cavalier about the ease with which he thought he could do a deal with the Lib Dems’ (Wood, 2016).

Clegg’s leadership had suffered badly during the 2010 parliament, and there was a real sense he lacked the authority among Labour MPs to be part of any Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation after the 2015 general election. While he managed to overcome challenges his leadership, his *communicative performance* and *perceived ability to shape the platform* was severely weakened. His credibility as a virtuous leader of a party of protest was always going to suffer in coalition with the Conservatives (Cutts and Russell, 2015). It is very difficult for leaders of ‘radical’ parties to try and disassociate themselves from a perception of betrayal. Being in coalition with a party with a different ideology or policy mindset is likely to undermine a smaller party leader over time (Dunphy and Bale, 2011). Clegg became a figure of hate to many Labour MPs over the course of the parliament. Miliband recognised this, and while again co-operation after the 2015 general election would have ultimately depended upon parliamentary arithmetic, the importance of individual party figures was still important.

His argument was that 'it all depends on whether Clegg goes'. It's a different ball game with Cable compared with Clegg... And you can't underestimate the hostility to Clegg inside the PLP at the time. It was really personal for a lot of Labour MPs, and I think they saw that when they went back to their constituencies, where many Labour activists hated Clegg so much (Wood, 2016).

Together, the hostility to Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation within the parliamentary Labour party suggests that it would not have been easy for Ed Miliband had he tried to co-operate with the Liberal Democrats. As highlighted in Chapter Four, had the numbers worked out Miliband and his negotiating team would have been able to put together a coalition policy document without too much difficulty. Like Cameron did successfully in 2010 (Heppell, 2013), Miliband may have been able to manipulate his party into supporting co-operation with the Liberal Democrats in order to win office. However, he would have faced challenges to keep his party united over a parliament.

As with Brown in the period 2007-2010, Miliband faced a lot of hostility to any idea of Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. Attitudes within the Parliamentary Labour Party to the Liberal Democrats were very negative, and while Miliband would have probably been able to persuade them of the merits of co-operation in order to win office, maintaining a unified government would have been a big challenge. He was also caught between attacking the Liberal Democrats to satisfy his (flawed) strategy of winning their voters, but feeling that he could use their MPs to win office after the 2015 general election. Such a strategy did not incentivise co-operation between the two parties. Clegg was severely weakened by his participation in the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, and became a figure of hate/fun to many in Labour. In his own party, he would not have faced much constraint had he looked to co-operate with Labour after the 2015 general election. Together, Miliband and Clegg's relations and reputations both in and across each party provided more obstacles than incentives to co-operation. Miliband might have been more open to it at a policy level than Brown, but his skills as a leader of the opposition did not enamour him to the Liberal Democrat leadership. Clegg approached Labour in much the same way that he had in 2010: open to co-operation, but with no discernible preference in comparison with co-operation with the Conservatives. There was little effort or success in shaping an agenda that promoted co-operation between the two parties.

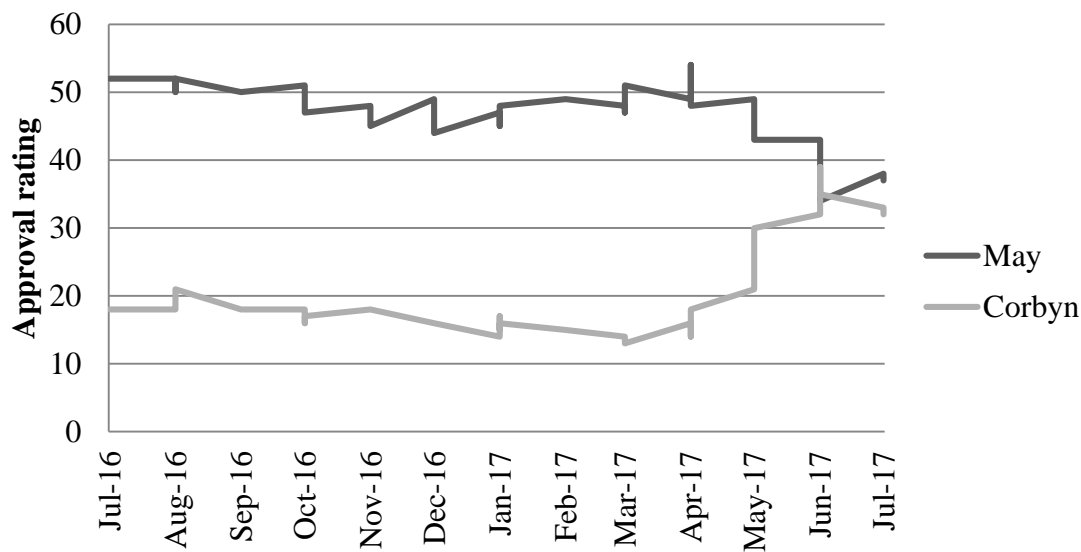
7:4 Post-2015: Farron and Corbyn

The failures of Labour and the Liberal Democrats at the 2015 general election led to Ed Miliband's and Nick Clegg's respective resignations. In the summer of 2015, Tim Farron was elected leader of the Liberal Democrats, having been the MP for Westmorland and Lonsdale since 2005. He resigned following the 2017 general election. In the autumn of the 2015, Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader of the Labour Party, having been the MP for Islington North since 1983.

Corbyn's *political vision* is notably different from any previous Labour leader in the post-war period. Miliband was a minimal departure from New Labour compared to Jeremy Corbyn. Russell (2016) argues that for the first time in British political history, Labour has a leader that does not have the most basic support of its parliamentary party. Indeed, a *credible leadership challenge* was almost inevitable as soon as he was elected, although in the end Owen Smith's campaign against him was not especially shrouded in credibility. Nonetheless, Corbyn remains unpopular with the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party. While the differing attitudes of the PLP compared to the grassroots might negate the chances of actual challenges to his leadership, his *perceived ability to shape the platform* and his *perceived parliamentary effectiveness* are low within the PLP.

This changed at the 2017 general election. Prior to 2017, MPs and peers criticised and derided Corbyn's *communicative performance*, and his *personal poll ratings relative to the opposition* (or any other party leader in recent history) prior to the 2017 general election campaign were dire (see Figure 7.3). While the PLP still criticise him, their primary challenge to Jeremy Corbyn was his inability to win an election. The Owen Smith campaign in 2016 was presented as embodying the best of Jeremy Corbyn – principles and policy – with the electoral credibility to achieve. There was little challenge to Corbyn on the differences in *policy vision* between him and the PLP, albeit there was some focus on the European Union. Labour winning 40 per cent of the vote and 262 seats at the 2017 general election now weakens any potential PLP challenge to Corbyn. All the same, much of Labour's current debate remains focused on intra-party conflict. Many of the people surrounding Corbyn are more concerned with transferring power to elements of the party more in line with their way of thinking than they are looking to win office and implement policy (Bale, 2016).

Figure 7.3: Best Prime Minister ratings, 2016-2017



Source: YouGov (2017b). Data issues with YouGov prevent data being available for September 2015 to June 2016.

Tim Farron led a reasonably united parliamentary party, but then there were fewer people to unite after 2015 than before it. The Liberal Democrats won just eight MPs at the 2015 general election, although this increased to nine following the by-election in Richmond Park in 2016. As such, his *ability to shape platforms* and his *parliamentary effectiveness* was weak. An example of this is that a Liberal Democrat leader is no longer considered worth putting into the YouGov political tracker polls on who would make the best Prime Minister. As one adviser to Ed Miliband told me:

You can't underestimate how irrelevant the Lib Dems are now after 2015. The dislike of the Lib Dems is still there in Labour ranks, but it's now a historical and local issue... The irrelevance of the Lib Dems since 2015 is now immense (Wood, 2016).

Farron's *political vision* became dominated by Britain's vote to leave the European Union, which he strongly opposed. Since that vote, he was possibly the loudest critic of the government's plans and strategy, and while their national poll ratings remained stubbornly low, for a time the party's performance in local and parliamentary by-elections has been

impressive, especially in areas that voted 'Remain' (Johnson, 2016). They were not able to capitalise that, and Farron's *communicative performance* during the 2017 general election campaign was weak. He refused to answer questions about sexuality that would have been straightforward for any previous Liberal Democrat leader, and became very defensive as the campaign went on. He resigned after the 2017 general election.

Vince Cable now leads the Liberal Democrats, elected unopposed, with 12 MPs in the parliamentary party. He will continue to question Britain's exit from the European Union, and like Farron will try to get attention for individual policy issues. Cable has been referenced throughout this chapter as somebody with whom Brown and Miliband may have favoured co-operation. However, Labour is in a very different position under Corbyn's leadership. Should public opinion to Britain leaving the European Union change, there is potential for Corbyn to join Cable in opposing Britain leaving, but Cable is certainly closer to many others in the Parliamentary Labour Party on this issue than Jeremy Corbyn.

This chapter has covered the period 2007-2017. Both parties are in a very different position at the end of this period than at the beginning. This presents potential incentives to co-operation in that it could make both parties rethink their electoral position, and there remains much in common between the two parties in terms of policy. However, Corbyn's election as Labour leader departs from many of the norms that both parties have followed. Farron sought to deride Corbyn's leadership, and the changing nature of the Labour Party throws up an opportunity that he is looking to use to his advantage. At the Liberal Democrat 2015 party conference, he argued that Jeremy Corbyn's election as Labour leader meant there is 'a massive space in the centre ground of British politics for sensible, moderate, progressives who are opposed to what the Conservatives are doing, but cannot bring themselves to support a party of the hard left' (Perraudin, 2015). Farron remained open to co-operation with the Labour Party itself. In particular, he attempted to 'woo' Labour MPs to the Liberal Democrats. As he told me at an event in early 2016:

My view is there needs to be a fundamentally progressive, and I'll use the phrase 'centre-left', alternative to the Tories that is credible, that is electable, that can challenge them and replace them... Model 1 is that the people in the Labour Party come over and join the Liberal Democrats as we are now. Or Model 2, famously, is the SDP. They decide to set up their own party, and we come to some sort of arrangement with them.

However, no matter how distressed Labour parliamentarians might be, Farron was met with the cold shoulder, with one Labour MP telling *The Guardian* that 'every Labour MP I know... despises Tim Farron as being slippery and untrustworthy' (Perraudin, 2015). The party's sheer weakness following the 2015 general election has made it very difficult for them to capitalise upon any opportunity, and the party's reputation within much of the Parliamentary Labour Party continues to be one of betrayal and contempt.

Nonetheless, there were media reports of discussions about electoral reform between Tim Farron and an aide of Jeremy Corbyn in 2016 (McTague, 2016). Corbyn is unlikely to find the moderate, centre-ground Liberal Democrats as appealing a partner as Tony Blair did in the mid-1990s, or even Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband between 2007 and 2015, but it suggests that he is open to a fundamental reform of the British political system. When asked if he would be open to electoral reform, Corbyn responded, 'obviously' (McTague, 2016).

However, the strategy for the Liberal Democrats appears to be to build resources and momentum again in areas where they can challenge the Conservatives. If the Conservatives face electoral difficulty following the European Union referendum and the pressures of governing without a Liberal Democrat shield, then this could reap reward for Farron and the Liberal Democrats. Co-operation with Labour might not be a pressing priority.

Bennister et al.'s leadership capital index shows Corbyn to be lacking in many areas. His *skills* are low, save for the re-election margin for the leadership: his *political vision* is markedly different from New Labour and any other post-war Labour leader, yet his practical *policy vision* is markedly indifferent from Ed Miliband's. While his *personal poll ratings* are better than they were, they are still poor, and his *communicative performance* is strong within his party but weak outside of it. His *relations* are low, although the *likelihood of a(nother) credible leadership challenge* is lower than it was. His *perceived parliamentary effectiveness* is also low: despite spending over thirty years in parliament, he has never placed much faith in

the parliamentary process, focusing much more on raising issues in campaigns outside of parliament. As Helen Lewis (2016) argues:

He has signed early day motions on everything from using pigeons as suicide bombers (anti) to Arsenal (pro). But throughout his time in parliament he has refused to chair a single select committee... [yet] he has purchased his power at the expense of damning the parliamentary system...to buy into Corbynism you have to reject the idea of parliament as a place where real change can be achieved.

However, his *party's poll ratings and reputation* are much better than they were. Corbyn has been credited with running a very good campaign in the 2017 general election. Corbyn managed to *shape the platforms* on which the campaign was fought, and largely deflected negative campaign efforts by the Conservatives. For Cable, it is too early to tell what shape his leadership will take.

7:5 Conclusion

Using the leadership capital index provides a helpful means of understanding each party leader's 'stock of authority', and question what their leaderships mean for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats. Between 2007 and 2010, Gordon Brown showed signs that he wanted to reformulate the political agenda so that Labour and the Liberal Democrats were together natural opponents of the Conservatives, and manoeuvre a situation where the Conservatives go into meltdown over the European Union. However, this was as much a response to the previous Blair government as it was a move towards the Liberal Democrats. He largely failed: that this happened highlights how leadership is at once both strong and fragile. Structural factors weakened Brown's position, while his own lack of leadership weakened him further.

At a structural level, Brown was defeated by the electoral context he was in: following the 2010 general election, Labour and the Liberal Democrats could not command support in the House of Commons over an entire parliament with any confidence. Cameron was in a position to offer the Liberal Democrats something Brown could not: stable government. Brown was also constrained by his party's position. Brown could not shake off the perception that Labour had 'lost' the 2010 general election, either to the Liberal Democrats or his own

parliamentary party, who went on the airwaves to rubbish Brown's attempts to stay in government. However at an agential level, Brown also failed. His attempts to encourage co-operation were not viewed by the Liberal Democrats as genuine engagement with Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation, but as strategic manoeuvring. Conversations between Brown and Clegg showed Brown's knowledge and intelligence, but also that he was unwilling to listen to those he was seeking to persuade. At no point did he appear a genuinely pluralist and co-operative figure (Rawnsley, 2010, Theakston, 2011). Brown was hampered by the structure around him and his own political skills.

Clegg's leadership between 2007 and 2010 was to further move the Liberal Democrats away from being seen as Labour's natural partners, and open up the prospect of co-operation with the Conservatives. While Clegg agreed with Brown that Labour and the Liberal Democrats were well suited on most policy issues, this did not extend to any substantive preference for co-operation with Labour. This highlights the insufficiency of ideological and policy concerns in predicting co-operation. While former Liberal Democrat leaders would speak openly of their preference for Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation, Clegg was more openly hesitant (Adonis, 2013, Laws, 2010). His position that the Liberal Democrats would look first to co-operate with the party with the strongest mandate ended up as an open invitation to the Conservatives and a clear obstacle to co-operation with Labour. Once that statement had been made, it would have been very difficult for Clegg to have then co-operated with Labour instead (Russell, 2010: 512).

The period 2010-2015 highlighted Ed Miliband's failure as party leader. Early on in the parliament, Miliband had a clear sense that former Liberal Democrat voters were there for the taking, and enough of them in the right constituencies would reap electoral reward for Labour. Whatever the electoral problems of such an argument, it also damaged the prospect of co-operation with the Liberal Democrats. By attacking them so viciously early on, it made the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats appear the natural co-operators rather than Labour and the Liberal Democrats. While this might have been Miliband's intention, it did little either for his electoral fortunes or the potential for Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. Later in the parliament, he saw the Liberal Democrats as an option to win office and to also shield him from the more socially authoritarian elements of his party, but at no point did this amount to a successful strategical effort. While Cameron successfully used co-operation to his and his party's advantage, Miliband adopted a mixed and confused approach that ultimately failed.

Had the 2015 general election resulted in a hung parliament, Miliband would have needed to persuade his party of the merits of co-operation through rhetoric, manipulation and, if necessary, punishment (Strøm and Muller, 1999a). Based on his leadership between 2010 and 2015, it is unclear if he would have achieved this.

Clegg was in a very difficult position following the formation of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition. The Liberal Democrats were always going to lose voters due to co-operation with the Conservatives, and they failed throughout the five years to appear a credible and distinctive force in British politics. This in part reflects the structural difficulties for a junior coalition party in British politics (Bale, 2012), but also Clegg's failure to distinguish himself and his party from the Conservatives between 2010 and 2015 (Cutts and Russell, 2015). For Labour MPs, Clegg became a figure of hate and disdain, potentially more disliked than the Conservatives. Electoral arithmetic would ultimately determine whether or not Labour and the Liberal Democrats could have co-operated after the 2015 general election, but Clegg's position as Liberal Democrat leader would have made it harder for Miliband to sell to his party. Between 2007 and 2010, Clegg was not keen on co-operation with Labour. Between 2010 and 2015, Labour was not keen on co-operation with him.

Following the 2015 general election, most within both Labour and the Liberal Democrats' parliamentary parties treated Corbyn with contempt, and co-operation was much less likely. Farron ruled out a coalition with Labour after the 2017 general election, and Corbyn was not particularly interested in the Liberal Democrats.

For the most part, leaders and their individual actions are not as important as the electoral factors that might affect co-operation. Labour and the Liberal Democrats did not co-operate following the 2010 and 2015 general elections because they did not have the numbers in the House of Commons. However, decisions taken by each party's leaders were still important. Between 2007 and 2010, 2010 and 2015, and 2015 and 2017, the Labour and Liberal Democrat leaderships appeared to have divergent interests, and this was to damage the potential for co-operation between the two. Brown was never able to convince the Liberal Democrats that his idea of co-operation was ever going to advantage anybody but the Labour Party. Clegg was never as keen as previous Liberal Democrat leaders on Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. Miliband saw the Liberal Democrats as a goldmine of voters that would help him become Prime Minister in 2015, and not as a party he could co-operate with

to manipulate a situation to his advantage. Corbyn barely thought about the Liberal Democrats, and Farron saw more use in competing with Labour than co-operating.

For both Brown and Miliband, co-operation seemed an option that appeared as a last resort. While this is often the case for most party leaders, it meant that when they actually came around to realising the benefits of co-operation, they and their party were in a position of weakness rather than strength. It also meant that the Labour leaders faced greater hostility from their parliamentary party: while co-operation is always the end-game for a Liberal Democrat leader, this is not the case for a Labour leader. This fundamental question may need to be addressed by Labour leaders in future.

This is possible, with a majority Conservative government following the 2015 general election and another Conservative government following the 2017 general election, and the still pressing need for Labour and the Liberal Democrats to recover their electoral position. However, the potential for co-operation will depend on both parties identifying convergent interests, and then having the political skill, manoeuvrability and context to see it through. The indications are that both parties have a long way to go before this is realised.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This thesis has analysed the potential for co-operation between the British Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, with an objective of contributing to our understanding of how parties interact and why. This chapter aims to bring together the previous chapters' findings and conclusions. The first section addresses the main findings of the thesis in the context of the theoretical framework. The second section examines the implications for Labour, the Liberal Democrats and how parties interact in British politics. The third section extends the findings of this research to comparative perspectives of party interaction. Finally, the chapter discusses the implications for further research that might arise from this thesis.

8.1 Theoretical framework and context

Addressing how co-operation might be understood between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, the thesis has drawn on a series of literatures. Existing analysis of party co-operation has been of enormous benefit to the discipline. However, it has commonly understood co-operation in discrete forms, and the comparative interest in predicting the general likelihood of certain coalitions or pacts does not provide sufficient analysis of individual party characteristics. In understanding co-operation in a more nuanced and flexible fashion, this thesis takes into account the numerous forms that co-operation can take, and the incentives and obstacles that might promote or constrain it.

It reaches some interesting conclusions for both parties. Firstly, co-operation relies on compatible interests being jointly pursued by both parties. This is difficult to achieve. For all the discussions over a long period of time of a progressive alliance opposed to conservatism, Labour and the Liberal Democrats are different parties with different identities, interests and objectives. Co-operation relies on the admission that a party's interests cannot be achieved alone: the adversarial nature of party competition in Britain makes this a very difficult prospect, and it is not clear that either party is in a position to be comfortable with such an admission. In theory, that should be blindingly obvious to the Liberal Democrats, but even that is unclear. Secondly, it relies on a series of considerations aligning themselves to promote co-operation, or at least not actively obstruct it, at any one time. For example, electoral imperatives are crucial, but if they promote co-operation between the two parties, the two

parties' ideologies and policies are also important, as are the organisational imperatives. At each point, these factors are interacting with each other, and it is not merely the case that one particular set of incentives will bring about co-operation between the two parties. Finally, co-operation relies on these considerations aligning themselves in both parties simultaneously. The incentives and obstacles to co-operation are different in each party, yet they rely on each other for it to be realised.

It is clear that for Labour and the Liberal Democrats, co-operation is not a priority. Throughout this thesis, co-operation has been referred to as a 'paradox': it is difficult to contemplate co-operation in a context so geared towards competition. Even the Liberal Democrats, who in their existence have never been in a position to govern alone, continue to prioritise competitive and adversarial politics over co-operative interaction. This is perfectly sensible: evidence suggests that smaller parties suffer most when they co-operate (Duch et al., 2015, Johnson and Middleton, 2016). Nonetheless, there are ways and means in which co-operation can help parties in their office, policy and vote-seeking objectives, yet co-operation is usually an afterthought.

One example of this is the manner in which Labour and the Liberal Democrats have contemplated post-electoral co-operation much more than pre-electoral. It remains the case in British politics that prior to an election, competition is the only means of interaction between political parties. Pre-electoral co-operation is discussed, but often only in principle. Meanwhile, post-electoral co-operation, often in the event of a hung parliament, is becoming almost routine in British politics. The 2010 and 2017 general elections resulted in post-electoral co-operation, as did the 1999 and 2003 Scottish Parliament elections and the 2003, 2007 and 2016 Welsh Assembly elections. Co-operation becomes more of a possibility once electoral competition has finished.

This is a paradox that is particular, in part to Britain. While Wager (2015) argues that Britain provides many examples of pre-electoral co-operation, it does not provide many successful examples. For the most part, it provides discussions of it. Bardi and Mair (2008) discuss the 'embedded' nature of the UK party system, in that its competitive and adversarial history helps to sustain it as competitive and adversarial in the present. The introduction of devolution, with more proportional electoral systems and multi-party interaction, has challenged this in recent years, and it might be that this becomes less of a paradox in time.

8.2 Office-seeking and policy-seeking concerns

The theoretical framework sought to identify a series of rational choice and institutional factors that might provide incentives and obstacles to co-operation. Chapter Four analysed the extent to which two parties had compatible ideological and policy programmes that might incentivise co-operation. Debates abound within each party about the extent to which there is a ‘progressive alliance’ between the two. It is indeed the case that at various points in their histories, each party has held very similar ideological positions on the role of the state and market, and the individual and society. Labour’s overlap with social liberalism has been evident throughout the 20th century, and its socialism has always been in an evolutionary, reformist form. The Liberal Democrats, even under Nick Clegg’s leadership, have prioritised social liberalism more than typical continental understandings of liberalism. However, differences remain regarding the two parties approaches to equality and freedom, and in both parties there are ideological traditions that might pull the parties further away from each other.

It is also the case that ideological and policy concerns might be overridden by electoral and public opinion considerations. With regard to pre-electoral co-operation, Chapter Five showed that while there are some incentives, it is a very risky strategy. Labour’s electoral prospects have been damaged by a weaker Liberal Democrat party, and losing Labour-leaning supporters cost the Liberal Democrats at the 2015 and 2017 general elections. However, for Labour, co-operation with a social and economic liberal party is likely to further alienate Labour’s former core, more socially conservative vote. For the Liberal Democrats, co-operation with a social democratic party that has recently failed to convince the electorate that it can be credible and competent in government risks losing Conservative-leaning voters. There are more reasons for optimism regarding post-electoral co-operation. Coalition outcomes involving the Liberal Democrats were more popular than any other multi-party outcome, suggesting that voters are more amenable to the Liberal Democrats being in government than other smaller parties. Labour and Liberal Democrat voters were also more likely to support a coalition outcome between the two at the 2015 general election. However, while the clear office-seeking incentives of co-operation remain, both parties’ precarious electoral positions mean they have potentially overwhelming challenges to address before thinking about coalition negotiations. Brought together, these conclusions show that there is potential for co-operation between Labour and the Liberal Democrats based on electoral

concerns, but there are big risks too. Without a big change in each party's thinking there are more reasons to be pessimistic at present.

8.3 Organisational and institutional considerations

Chapters Six and Seven considered the importance of each party's organisations. Chapter Six analysed the extent and nature of influence of each party's grassroots, arguing that member and activist influence and attitudes to co-operation are important. Formal organisational structures provide the Liberal Democrats' grassroots with more opportunities to support or oppose co-operation with Labour, through party conference and policy-making processes within the party. Equivalent rights are not afforded to Labour's grassroots, although the Labour leadership informally take into account members and activists' attitudes in order to avoid confrontation further down the line. Data from the 2014-15 survey also shows attitudes to co-operation within Labour and Liberal Democrat grassroots. Labour's grassroots do not give much enthusiasm. They have more negative opinions of the Liberal Democrats than they did in 2010, and would have been against a coalition with them in 2015. This is not to say that they were against any form of co-operation with any party. They showed more support for a coalition with other non-Conservative parties at the 2015 general election, and had a particular issue with the Liberal Democrats. They also perceived the Liberal Democrats to be ideologically closer to the Conservatives than the Liberal Democrats' grassroots did. The Liberal Democrats' grassroots do not provide an overwhelming incentive to co-operation with Labour either. Their activists on the whole dislike the Labour Party, and preferred a coalition with the Conservatives in 2010. However, they would have preferred a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition following the 2015 general election over a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, and are more generally supportive of a Labour government than a Conservative one.

Chapter Seven analyses the elites within each party's organisation, and the role and effect of leadership on the potential for co-operation between the two parties. For the most part, leaders and their individual actions are not as important as the electoral factors that might affect co-operation. Labour and the Liberal Democrats did not co-operate following the 2010 and 2015 general elections because they did not have the numbers in the House of Commons. However, decisions taken by each party's leaders were still important. The two party's recent

leaderships had interests that made co-operation a more difficult prospect than it might otherwise have been. For recent Labour leaders Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband, co-operation seemed an option that appeared as a last resort. While this is often the case for most party leaders, it meant that when they actually came around to realising the benefits of co-operation, they operated from a position of weakness rather than a position of strength. While Corbyn has shown his support for electoral reform, and there have been occasional reports of discussions between Labour and the Liberal Democrats, he has never expressed any wish to work with the Liberal Democrats. Clegg was never as keen as previous Liberal Democrat leaders on Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation. While former Liberal Democrat leaders would speak openly of their preference for Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation, Clegg was more openly hesitant (Adonis, 2013, Laws, 2010). Clegg was in a very difficult position following the formation of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, and struggled to distinguish himself from the Conservatives. This in part reflects the structural difficulties for a junior coalition party in British politics (Bale, 2012, Johnson and Middleton, 2016), but also Clegg's failure to distinguish himself and his party from the Conservatives between 2010 and 2015 (Cutts and Russell, 2015). Farron was a campaigning leader that kept the party going, but was unable to win back enough of its 2010 or 2015 support.

8.4 Implications for Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation

Both parties have many reasons as to why they should consider co-operation. Both can currently be argued to have a series of compatible interests. A strong Liberal Democrat party in the past has damaged the Conservatives more than it has Labour, and as a consequence the Liberal Democrat collapse largely served to benefit the Conservatives at the 2015 general election (Johnson and Middleton, 2016). For example, there was very little seat change between Labour and the Conservatives at the 2015 general election. Labour gained eleven seats from the Conservatives, and the Conservatives gained eight in return. The seats that won the Conservatives a majority were mostly at the expense of the Liberal Democrats. In total, the Liberal Democrat collapse gave 27 seats to the Conservatives, 12 to Labour and 10 to the Scottish National Party. Furthermore, research by Green and Prosser (2015) suggests that voters switching from the Liberal Democrats to Labour helped the Conservatives win some of those 27 seats.

Both parties recognising their electoral position and finding ways in which they might co-operate to get each other out of it might be a sensible option. There are questions both parties should at least privately consider. Do Labour need to stand candidates in certain Conservative-Liberal Democrat marginals in England? Richmond Park is a useful example. Labour's lacklustre campaign in the Richmond Park by-election in 2016 resulted in Labour losing polling just 3.6 per cent, and the Liberal Democrats won the seat by nearly 2000 votes. In the 2017 general election, Labour's more successful national campaign led them to polling 9.1 per cent in Richmond Park, and the Liberal Democrats lost to the Conservatives by 45 votes. Research by Fieldhouse and Prosser (2017) suggests that Labour won some of the Liberal Democrats' 2015 voters in 2017, as well as winning most of the 'Remain' vote. Labour standing a candidate in Richmond Park in the 2017 general election probably did the Liberal Democrats no favours. It would help Labour's cause if they can realise that in certain seats they are not competitive, and should question whether they would rather see a Liberal Democrat elected, or a Conservative.

In the 2017 general election, their national vote share fell even further from their already paltry 2015 performance. From the Liberal Democrats' point of view, do they gain anything by losing deposits in Conservative-Labour marginals? Financially at least, they would save £500 each time they stand down a candidate in those seats. Particularly in light of Britain's exit from the European Union, the Liberal Democrats might consider whether standing against pro-EU Labour MPs or candidates in Labour-Conservative seats is a sensible strategy.

It might be that both parties have a long term view, that by contesting every seat they might increase their competitiveness over time. Nonetheless, if this is not based on a rational consideration of the potential for winning the seat in the short or medium term, then at least considering co-operation should be preferable. Short of a pact, each party could encourage tactical voting in key constituencies, which has served both parties well in the past (Herrmann et al., 2015, Johnston and Pattie, 2011a). Chapter Seven uses qualitative data to show how negatively the two parties viewed each other between 2010 and 2015, and Chapter Five showed the damaging electoral effects of this. At the very least, a more conciliatory tone might help both parties in the future.

Is this likely? A more conciliatory tone probably is. The Liberal Democrats are no longer in government, and their sheer electoral weakness at least means they are no longer so much of a

scapegoat for Labour attacks. However, Labour (and other parties) are not so much adopting a more conciliatory tone towards the Liberal Democrats, as much as adopting no tone at all. The Liberal Democrats are routinely ignored in parliament and in the national media. In 2011, Labour MP John Mann asked in parliament: what is the point of Nick Clegg? At the time of writing, one could reasonably ask the same of the Liberal Democrats. They have still been combative towards Labour. This has mostly regarded Labour's direction under Jeremy Corbyn, and the potential electoral benefit this might bring to the more centrist Liberal Democrats. Even so, Farron repeatedly signalled his willingness to work with Labour to oppose the Conservatives, Cable has done so in the past, and a more conciliatory tone ahead of the next general election appears likely. To this end, the two parties have occasionally voted together against the government in parliament, and have occasionally campaigned together in support of Britain's membership of the European Union, and in opposition to Theresa May's Conservative government following the referendum.

It is also premature to entirely write off the Liberal Democrats as an electoral force in British politics. They are in deep trouble, and at the 2017 general election they could not build on their earlier reasonable performances in local elections and by-elections. Nonetheless, new leader Vince Cable remains one of their more well-known figures, and they remain the main competitor to the Conservatives in many seats where Labour is far back.

A more conciliatory tone is thus likely. However, whether this develops into co-operation in some form appears unlikely, short of a hung parliament at the next general election forcing coalition negotiations. Barring a discussion about electoral reform (see McTague, 2016), the two parties have signalled little intention of entering into a pact, encouraging tactical voting or working together at an elite-level on policy issues. Labour's parliamentarians and intellectual groups have formed any number of working groups and discussion bodies in light of the 2015 general election: there has been little mention of the Liberal Democrats. While Compass strongly advocated a progressive alliance between non-Conservative parties, Labour and the Liberal Democrats largely stayed out of this debate, and any deals were restricted to small numbers of local parties. A book edited, highlighted in Chapter Four, by Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate Chris Bowers, Green Party MP Caroline Lucas and Labour MP Lisa Nandy suggests some potential scope for co-operation, but there is little suggestion this will lead to anything more substantive yet. Between 2010 and 2017, qualitative data from Chapter Seven shows that there was little feeling in either Labour or the Liberal Democrats that co-

operation between the two might lead electoral benefit. This idea did not advance after the 2015 general election.

Attitudes in both parties might be different if they are in a position to co-operate after a general election in coalition or some other agreement. For example, even with the negativity between the two parties that contributed to electoral damage at the 2015 general election, they would have had little difficulty in forming a coalition. As shown in Chapter Four, the two parties' policy programmes were sufficiently compatible, and over time their policy directions have been more aligned than with the Conservatives. Chapter Seven also showed that both parties' leaderships were open to a coalition or parliamentary agreement after the 2015 general election. Chapter Six used survey data to suggest that the Liberal Democrats' grassroots would have preferred a coalition with Labour than the Conservatives, and Labour's grassroots would have tolerated it to win office, although co-operation with other centre-left parties would have been preferred. They may be more positive about the Liberal Democrats presently, following the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union. However, Chapters Four, Six and Seven also showed that any agreement might have been more difficult to sustain in the medium and longer term, due to differing ideological outlooks and intra-party disagreements, particularly in the Labour Party.

Both parties also need to be aware that while co-operation between them might bring some electoral benefit, this might be outweighed by big electoral risks. Both in interviews conducted for the research and utilised in Chapters Five and Seven, and in interviews elsewhere (see Cowley and Kavanagh, 2015), Liberal Democrat elites spoke of how effective the Conservative campaign about fearing Labour-Scottish National Party co-operation was, and how badly this affected them in Liberal Democrat-Conservative seats. While quantitative data is mixed, and definitive conclusions cannot be drawn from it, the qualitative data overwhelmingly suggests that the prospect of Scottish National Party influence on a Labour-led government after the 2015 general election did the Liberal Democrats great electoral damage (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2015). In the weeks during the run-up to the 2015 general election, Nick Clegg spoke with Ed Miliband about it and voiced his concerns, and ahead of the election Clegg even contemplated ruling out any co-operation with Labour afterwards, to try and stop the narrative that a vote for the Liberal Democrats was a vote for Ed Miliband's Labour Party (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2015).

It may be the case that the Liberal Democrats' electoral success depends, in part, on the nature of the Labour Party at any given time. The Liberal Democrats have long needed to balance the interests of a wide range of supporters. In any seat they are looking to win, they have had to satisfy the Liberal Democrat voter who would support them anywhere, the Conservative-leaning voter or Labour-leaning voter who like the local Liberal Democrat candidate, and the distrustful, angry voter who thinks the Liberal Democrats are the best anti-establishment party. The last group of voters have largely gone now following the Liberal Democrats' participation in government between 2010 and 2015, with quantitative and qualitative evidence suggesting that a large amount of the Liberal Democrats' 2010 and 2015 support went to UKIP and the Greens (Chapter Five, and Green and Prosser, 2015). This might change as the Liberal Democrats continue to protest government actions with regard to leaving the European Union. Nonetheless, both the Conservative and Labour-leaning voters remain crucial. As discussed, most of the seats in which the Liberal Democrats' are competitive are Conservative-facing, and Labour-leaning voters leaving the Liberal Democrats was damaging to the party in 2015 and 2017. However, so was an Ed Miliband-led Labour Party. The Liberal Democrats have long relied on Conservative-leaning supporters (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005). They did very well in Conservative-facing seats between 1997 and 2010 when a moderate, centrist Labour Party was in office, and potentially presented less of a concern to Conservative-leaning supporters than Ed Miliband's Labour Party in 2015, or Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party in 2017 or the next general election. While Labour is not addressing its fundamental reasons for defeat in the 2010 and 2015 general elections (and to some extent 2017), the Liberal Democrats might be well advised to tread carefully with regards to co-operation with them.

Labour must also be careful with regard to co-operation with the Liberal Democrats. Labour has struggled to maintain its former core, more socially conservative vote in recent years (Roberts et al., 2014). In particular, many Labour parliamentarians and commentators are beginning to focus on Labour's issues with identity politics and nationalism (see Hunt, 2016). Co-operation with the Liberal Democrats, a socially liberal party focused on issues such as the environment, the European Union and constitutional reform, might be detrimental to rebuilding support with voters concerned about identity and nationalism. Academic research has suggested that the rise of the radical right party UKIP is not just a threat to the Conservatives but also to Labour (Ford and Goodwin, 2014). Some Labour figures have

suggested that Labour-Liberal Democrat co-operation is the best means of improving Labour's electoral prospects (Greenwood, 2015). Such suggestions need to take into account the potential negative consequences of co-operation as well.

8.5 Applying the framework to other examples

One of the interesting developments throughout the life of this research is the number of other examples of co-operation (or potential co-operation) that have arisen. For example, the issue of co-operation between Labour and the Scottish National Party dominated the 2015 general election, while more recently the Conservatives and DUP have entered into a formal parliamentary agreement. While the same level of detailed analysis cannot be given here as given to the case of Labour and the Liberal Democrats, the framework can be briefly applied.

- Labour and the Scottish National Party

This example was one barely discussed by the Labour Party ahead of the 2015 general election, but it was talked about by everybody else. In terms of co-operation in the electorate, the obstacles outweigh the incentives for both parties. Electorally, in all of Labour's seats, the SNP are the primary challengers. Withdrawing their candidates in those seats would make little sense, as there is very little benefit for them. For Labour, aligning with the SNP ahead of a general election would fuel the Conservatives' argument in England that a vote for Labour was a vote for left-wing government propped up by Scottish Nationalism. Both Cowley (2015) and Fielding (2015) suggest that this badly damaged Labour's electoral prospects in England after the 2015 general election.

In terms of co-operation in government or in parliament, there are significant ideological and policy differences between them too: the parties disagree on independence, and it is the most important issue for the Scottish National Party. However, there is less disagreement on many other policy issues, and both share a rhetoric that is anti-Conservative, and might be labelled as 'progressive'. While it would fuel a Conservative Party electoral argument, if both parties perform sufficiently well to form some form of coalition government or parliamentary agreement together, then there are more incentives than co-operation in the electorate. Also, as shown in Chapter Six, Labour's grassroots may not be strongly opposed to co-operation with the SNP as a means of winning office.

- Conservatives-DUP

Following the hung parliament at the 2017 general election, the Conservatives and the Democratic Unionist Party announced a confidence and supply agreement, with extra money for Northern Ireland public services and infrastructure in return for DUP support for the Conservative government in the House of Commons. The agreement is initially for two years, being reviewed at the end of the parliamentary session (in 2019). The incentives and obstacles are different in this case, as the Conservatives are not electorally competitive in Northern Ireland, nor do the DUP stand candidates outside of Northern Ireland. In recent years, the Conservatives have either stood unsuccessfully alongside the Ulster Unionist Party, or unsuccessfully on their own.

There are ideological obstacles to co-operation. While the DUP's opposition to extending abortion rights and same-sex marriage will not formally change any legislation in England, Scotland or Wales, it will still be difficult for some Conservatives to accept (although not all). Indeed, Scottish Conservatives leader Ruth Davidson has publicly pressured Theresa May on this issue. It may present some electoral obstacles in time, as some Conservative voters might not approve of co-operation with a more socially conservative party. There are also electoral obstacles relating to spending. While the £1 billion pledged for Northern Ireland is not actually a large pot of money, when the Conservatives have spent seven years insisting on spending restraint, it has the potential to upset voters in England, Scotland and Wales. The overriding incentive for the Conservatives is that it satisfies the office-seeking tendency. The Conservatives might struggle to pass votes of no confidence or a Queen's Speech/Budget without the DUP's support. Whatever the costs of co-operation, the Conservatives get to stay in government.

There are a lot of incentives for the DUP. They strongly dislike Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party, and would find it difficult to vote in parliament in a way that might bring about a general election that Labour could win. In this agreement, they have secured extra funds for their country with not a great deal given in return. They also have the organisational incentive that by remaining outside of government, they get to keep the short money afforded to opposition parties. The Liberal Democrats lost out financially because of entering government in coalition between 2010 and 2015. There may also be electoral gain for the DUP from angering voters in England, Scotland and Wales. Any public anger

from the Scottish or Welsh governments might only serve to highlight the canny hand that Arlene Foster played for Northern Ireland.

As with any co-operation in parliament, the role of parliamentarians will be crucial. Even with the two parties joining forces, the ‘government’ only has a majority of six. Kirkup (2017) argues that trust will be crucial, as will the role of the Leader of the House and the whips in each party, to try and ensure that government can adequately function throughout the parliament. Each party’s leadership will also be important: just as Callaghan and Steel helped to ensure the longevity of the Lib-Lab pact, Theresa May, Arlene Foster and Nigel Dodds will be very important in ensuring the success of this arrangement. This will not just be in ensuring good relations between the two parties, but in ensuring the continued support of backbenchers in each party. The nature of interaction between opposition parties will also be crucial: for the government to be defeated, all of the opposition parties’ MPs will need to cooperate – this, in part, explains why the 1974 Labour government was able to remain in office for as long as it did.

- Co-operation in devolved administrations

Scotland has had its own parliament and government since 1999. Labour has governed in coalition with the Liberal Democrats (1999-2007), and the Scottish National Party has governed as a minority government (2007-2011 and 2016-present) and as a majority government (2011-2016). As in Wales (see below), the electoral system for the devolved administration is more geared towards generating hung parliaments, which has often made co-operation in government and parliament necessary. The first eight years of the parliament also coincided with Labour and the Liberal Democrats agreeing on many devolved issues, which mainly focus on public services. The case of the Liberal Democrats in Scotland is interesting, in that they did not electorally suffer as a result of being the smaller party in coalition between 1999 and 2007. Their electoral performances in Scotland fell apart only after their participation in coalition with the Conservatives in Westminster. Much of this may be down to the sense of betrayal at co-operating with the Conservatives (Johnson and Middleton, 2016), but also the difference between governing as a centre-left socially progressive party in good economic times and during time of significant public spending restraint. It also suggest implications for how voters’ perceive

different levels of government, and there may be bigger ramifications of co-operation and competition in Westminster than there is in Holyrood.

Labour has been in government in Wales since the introduction of Welsh devolution in 1999. Sometimes, it has officially governed alone (1999-2000, 2003-2007 and 2011-present) and on other occasions in full coalition with the Liberal Democrats (2000-2003) or Plaid Cymru (2007-2011). However, in the periods where it has governed alone it has still relied on the support of other parties. Kirsty Williams AM, leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats, is Education Minister in the Welsh Government, but both Labour and the Liberal Democrats insist that it is not a coalition. Labour has 29/60 seats in the current Welsh Assembly and runs a minority government, and alongside relying on the support of the sole Liberal Democrat AM in the Assembly (Williams), they also rely on the support of Plaid Cymru to pass legislation.

Open discussion of party co-operation is much more prevalent in the Welsh Assembly than in Westminster. Prior to Labour and Plaid Cymru joining in coalition in 2007, the Conservatives, Plaid Cymru and Liberal Democrats held discussions about a coalition, while Plaid Cymru have spoken openly about the difference between government and parliamentary arrangements with Labour in light of the 2016 Assembly election. More open discussion reflects a number of factors. First, the Additional Member electoral system is less likely to result in majority government, which makes coalition and parliamentary negotiations more common. Second, the Assembly is a newer entity, and having coalitions and co-operation from the outset potentially reduces the nature of adversarial politics. Third, the nature of party interaction is different. While the Conservatives have continually had representation in the Welsh Assembly, and UKIP currently do, representation in the Assembly has been overwhelmingly centre-left, either through Labour, Plaid Cymru or the Liberal Democrats. This presents fewer policy obstacles in Wales compared with in Westminster. Devolution also means that there are fewer policy issues to negotiate, and policy discussions tend to focus on public services, where centre-left parties may find more common ground.

Focusing on the electoral, ideological and organisational elements that impact the potential for co-operation in these examples is helpful. In particular, they highlight that understanding how

parties interact is more than just understanding coalitions but understanding the benefits of different co-operative arrangements depending on circumstances (Boston and Bullock, 2012).

8.6 Contribution to comparative research

The answers to the research questions in this thesis complement and challenge some of the existing literature on party interaction, both in Britain and comparatively. In Britain, pacts, tactical voting, parliamentary co-operation and coalitions have existed in Westminster and elsewhere at the local and sub-national level for a long period of time (Bennie and Clark, 2003, Dunleavy, 2005, Lynch, 2007). In Westminster, the hung parliament at the 2010 general election was the culmination of a long period of changing support for political parties in Britain (Curtice, 2010). Nonetheless, that event has triggered more research into smaller parties, the effects of party competition and co-operation, and the changing nature of the party system in Britain (Lees, 2011, Curtice, 2012, Brandenburg and Johns, 2013, Ford and Goodwin, 2014, Green et al., 2015). This thesis has shown the different considerations that might be understood in how parties respond to the changing party system.

Comparatively, the thesis provides an application of the literature on party co-operation to a country that has often been (reasonably) ignored. The gradual change in the party system and the events following the 2010 general election mean parties have had to openly consider co-operation alongside competition. This thesis, alongside other studies of political parties in Britain since 2010, helps to provide further evidence and analysis for this comparative literature. The continuing likelihood of hung parliaments and multi-party competition in British politics means that further study should not stop following the Conservatives' majority following the 2015 general election. The hung parliament at the 2017 general election supports this argument. How parties interact with each other, and the competitive and co-operative actions they take, are going to be important in coming years.

Analysis of office and policy-seeking concerns applied to a specific case also allows the specific indicators of co-operation identified in the comparative literature to be tested in a detailed fashion. A brief glimpse at the two parties suggests many incentives for the two parties to co-operate, but delving deeper into each individual party, their electoral context, their base of support, their ideological history and identity and their policy priorities demonstrates the more nuanced factors at hand in understanding Labour-Liberal Democrat co-

operation (or lack thereof). The electoral chapter demonstrated that new considerations of incentives and obstacles to co-operation are needed beyond merely arguing that two progressive parties can line up to defeat a conservative one. The ideological chapter demonstrated that to have two policy-seeking parties with a great deal of alignment is not sufficient on its own, but needs to be considered not just alongside other considerations, but also differing ideological views in each party.

This thesis has also demonstrated the importance of in-depth studies of party organisation to better inform how parties interact. Previously, parties' grassroots have been given too little attention in academic analysis (Clark, 2004). This has since changed in British politics, with a lot of focus on the contributions and attitudes of party members and activists (Cutts, 2014, Pemberton and Wickham-Jones, 2013, Webb and Bale, 2014), with more research currently taking place of members in across a number of UK political parties.⁵⁰ However, the specific influence and attitudes of party grassroots on party interaction remain under-researched and under-theorised, and this thesis has made an important contribution. Using primary data from constituency parties allows comparative theories to be examined in detail: the primary data from the grassroots survey shows that activists perceive themselves as more radical than their party's voters and MPs, presenting an interesting angle when testing May's Law. However they are not necessarily less office-seeking, and appear pragmatic in accepting the idea of co-operation as a means of entering government.

This thesis also makes an original contribution to the role of leadership in political parties. It accepts the argument that office-seeking considerations were the primary influence on the formation of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010 (Bale, 2011b). However, it does not accept that leaders are therefore redundant in how parties interact, and Chapter Seven shows the importance of leaders' qualities and decisions in directly and indirectly affecting the potential for co-operation. Actions by Gordon Brown, Ed Miliband and Nick Clegg

⁵⁰ For example at the 2016 Political Studies Association Annual Conference, research was presented on surveys of the party memberships of the Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, UKIP, the Greens and the SNP.

significantly damaged the potential for co-operation between the two parties, at a time when co-operation originally appeared likely.

8.7 Implications for further research

This thesis has made a significant contribution to the literature on political parties and their interaction, and provided findings based on quantitative and qualitative data that inform our understanding of the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties and their interaction. Nonetheless, this has been an exploratory case study, and further research could inform this literature and the broader literature on party competition and co-operation.

The co-operation framework provides many research opportunities. In this instance, it has been applied in a fashion analysing why co-operation has not taken place. Application to other case studies, contemporary or otherwise, that have provided more success will help illuminate the incentives and obstacles to co-operation. Furthermore, the framework theoretically assumed equally powerful different incentives and obstacles, and then uncovered unequal relations as each consideration of incentives and obstacles was analysed. It also prioritised electoral, ideology and policy, organisational and leadership considerations above others, such as the role of the media or of interest groups. This is not intended to eliminate or ignore those other considerations, but to identify and prioritise aspects that were deemed important and could be applied and measured in the specific context of Labour and the Liberal Democrats. Future research can hopefully identify generalise variables and how they differ across case studies of co-operation.

More survey data on organisational attitudes to party interaction would benefit the discipline. Data collection in this field of research remains sketchy, although this is beginning to change, with significant funding for party membership studies in Britain (Bale et al., 2016). This thesis has drawn interesting conclusions from a postal survey of party activists in 2014-2015. Repeating this would allow more detailed analysis of grassroots' attitudes and how they differ over time, and the influence of different events and actors. While a body of survey data is now in the field regarding political party members, this could do more to distinguish between party strata, and their attitudes on how parties interact.

This thesis relied on qualitative data with regard to party leaderships, and as shown above drew interesting conclusions. It was also able to make use of voters' attitudes to party leaders, which is crucial in understanding party elite behaviour. However, it would have been very helpful to complement this with quantitative data of party elites. The absence of this data in recent years has been to the detriment of the discipline, and while voter surveys like the British Election Study and Hansard Audit of Political Engagement rightly go from strength to strength, it is a pity that data such as the British Representation Study does not receive similar attention and support. This research could tell us more about attitudes to party interaction, and the potential causes of support or opposition to party co-operation. Put together with other organisational data, it could also make a greater contribution to theories such as May's 'Law of Curvilinear Disparity' (May, 1973).

Finally, building a base of knowledge regarding attitudes to party co-operation would also be of benefit to future research in the area. Surveys by individual polling companies between 2010 and 2015 illuminated our understanding of public opinion towards coalition. However, more could be asked about voter attitudes towards co-operation. Johnston and Pattie (2011a) have used the British Election Study to test theories regarding tactical voting, but questions on issues like pacts, and how this affects voter behaviour in Britain, would be very useful for future research. One of the understandable priorities for polling organisations is repeating questions to allow comparison over time. However, this presents a problem when trying to understand new phenomena, and questions about different types of co-operation in major surveys remains limited. In particular, survey data that allows analysis of the relationship between the various indicators of co-operation outlined here would be very useful. For instance, with such data it would be possible to study the relationship between the ideological and policy congruence of parties and voters' willingness to switch support strategically, as well as the influence of party leaders, coalition activity and identification with relevant political parties. This is an ambitious set of research agendas, but the changing nature of interaction in British politics and elsewhere warrants rigorous attention. Hopefully, this thesis has made a contribution to that objective.

Appendix 1: 2014-2015 survey of activists

c/o Jenny Dawley
School of Geography Politics and Sociology
5th Floor Claremont Tower
Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 7RU

Telephone: 0191 222 5973

Email: craig.johnson1@newcastle.ac.uk

Academic supervisors: Dr Alistair Clark and Dr Nick Randall

Wednesday 21st January 2015

Dear Sir/Madam,

The activities and opinions of political parties and their members continue to be important yet remain largely ignored in British politics. I am a PhD student in British politics at Newcastle University, and my current research seeks to contribute towards redressing this balance.

I would be very grateful if you could complete the enclosed questionnaire, which aims to understand more about the activities and opinions of party members and activists. This questionnaire is intended to be filled out by **Constituency Labour Party Chairs**. Other local party executive members may also fill it out if they are unavailable.

You have either provided your address to me upon request, or it has been obtained from your local party's website. Neither your private details nor your individual replies will be passed onto anybody else at any time. Any analysis and conclusions will be reported purely in summary form, and not until after the next general election.

The survey itself is easy to fill out, and I hope you find answering the questions within it interesting. Most questions involve crossing a box, although in some cases you may be asked to provide figures. In such cases, approximate estimates are fine. If you would prefer to not answer a question, please leave it blank. The questionnaire should take no more than 15 minutes to complete, and should be returned in the stamped addressed envelope. Any answers you provide will be invaluable to my research. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you in advance for your help.

Yours sincerely,



Craig Johnson

Political attitudes

1. People often talk of left and right in politics. Please look at the following list of political parties and politicians. For each, consider where you would place them on a scale of 1 (left) to 10 (right). Place an **[x]** on each line to indicate your answer.

	Left					Right				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Labour										
Conservatives										
Liberal Democrats										
UKIP										
SNP										
Ed Miliband										
David Cameron										
Nick Clegg										
Harriet Harman										
Chuka Umunna										
Ed Balls										
Yvette Cooper										
Andy Burnham										
Tony Blair										
Gordon Brown										
Diane Abbott										
Andrew Adonis										
Jon Cruddas										
George Osborne										
Danny Alexander										
Vince Cable										
Nigel Farage										
Nicola Sturgeon										

2. Using a scale that runs from 1 to 10, where 1 means strongly dislike and 10 means strongly like, how do you feel about each of the following parties/politicians? Place an **[x]** on each line to indicate your answer.

	Dislike							Like		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Labour										
Conservatives										
Liberal Democrats										
UKIP										
SNP										
Ed Miliband										
David Cameron										
Nick Clegg										
Harriet Harman										
Chuka Umunna										
Ed Balls										
Yvette Cooper										
Andy Burnham										
Tony Blair										
Gordon Brown										
Diane Abbott										
Andrew Adonis										
Jon Cruddas										
George Osborne										
Danny Alexander										
Vince Cable										
Nigel Farage										
Nicola Sturgeon										

3. Consider again the case of 'left' and 'right' in relation to the Labour Party specifically. Using the scale of 1 (left) to 10 (right), please answer the following questions by placing an **[x]** on each line to indicate your answer.

Where would you place the following on a left-right scale?	Left					Right				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Yourself.										
The typical Labour voter.										
The typical Labour member.										
The typical Labour councillor.										
The typical Labour MP.										
The typical Labour MSP/AM*.										

* If in Scotland, provide an answer for MSP. If in Wales, provide an answer for AM. If in England, please leave blank.

4. Now think about 'left' and 'right' in relation to other parties. Using the scale of 1 (left) to 10 (right), please answer the following questions by placing an **[x]** on each line to indicate your answer.

Where would you place the following on a left-right scale?	Left					Right				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
The typical Conservative voter.										
The typical Conservative member.										
The typical Conservative councillor.										
The typical Conservative MP.										
The typical Conservative MSP/AM*.										
The typical Liberal Democrat voter.										
The typical Liberal Democrat member.										
The typical Liberal Democrat councillor.										
The typical Liberal Democrat MP.										
The typical Liberal Democrat MSP/AM*.										

* If in Scotland, provide an answer for MSP. If in Wales, provide an answer for AM. If in England, please leave blank.

5. Please look at the following list of issues in British politics today. Consider what you think is important to **your local Labour party**. Please rank each of them in order of importance (1, 2, 3, 4 etc.), with 1 being the most important. Please fill in as many numbers you can.

Constitutional issues	
Economy	
Education	
Environment	
EU membership	
Foreign affairs	
Immigration	
Law and order	
Local government	
NHS	
Pensions	
Standard of living	
Taxation	
Welfare	

6. Now, consider what you think is important to the **Labour Party nationally**. Please rank each of them in order of importance (1, 2, 3, 4 etc.), with 1 being the most important. Please fill in as many numbers you can.

Constitutional issues	
Economy	
Education	
Environment	
EU membership	
Foreign affairs	
Immigration	
Law and order	
Local government	
NHS	
Pensions	
Standard of living	
Taxation	
Welfare	

Local Party Opinions

In this section, please think about the opinions of members in your local Labour party.

7. Thinking of your local party organisation, how many members do you currently have? If you do not know the exact number, please provide an estimate. Please write your answer in the space provided.

8. On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree), state how you think members of your local Labour party would feel about the following statements. Place an **[x]** on each line to indicate your answer.

	Disagree					Agree				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
The Labour leadership listens to ordinary party members.										
Labour members have a real opportunity to influence their party's policy.										
Labour members have a real opportunity to influence their party's electoral strategy.										
The relationship between political parties in my local area is competitive.										

In this section, please think about the opinions of members in your local Labour party.

9. On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree), state how you think they would feel about the following statements. Place an **[x]** on each line to indicate your answer.

Members of my local party...	Disagree					Agree				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
...felt that they had influence over Labour's decision to try and form a coalition with the Liberal Democrats in May 2010.										
...would have supported a coalition with the Liberal Democrats in May 2010.										
...would have supported a 'rainbow' coalition with the Liberal Democrats, Greens, SNP and Plaid Cymru in May 2010.										
...have more negative opinions of the Liberal Democrats now than they did in May 2010.										

In this section, please think about the opinions of members in your local Labour party.

10. On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree), state how you think they would feel about the following statements. Place an **[x]** on each line to indicate your answer.

Members of my local party...	Disagree					Agree				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
...would like a say on any coalition Labour might form after the next general election.										
...would support a coalition with the Liberal Democrats after the next general election.										
...would support a coalition with the Scottish National Party/Plaid Cymru/Greens after the next general election.										
...would support a Labour minority government after the next general election.										
...would prefer Labour to stay in opposition if it does not win a majority at the next general election.										

11. On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree), state how you think they would feel about the following statements. Place an **[x]** on each line to indicate your answer.

Members of my local party...	Disagree					Agree				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
...think that Labour should prioritise winning as many votes across the country as possible.										
...think that Labour should prioritise winning as many constituencies as possible in order to be in government again.										
...think that Labour should stick to their principles, even if this comes at the cost of votes or being in government.										

Please return the survey in the enclosed postage pre-paid envelope.

If you are happy to be contacted further about the research, please write your name and email address below.

Name:

Email:

Thank you for your help.

**Appendix 2: Details and more data from the 2014-2015 survey of
constituency parties**

Table 1: Respondents to 2014-15 survey of constituency parties, by region		
Region	Labour (%)	Liberal Democrats (%)
East Midlands	9	18
East of England	10	11
London	10	6
North East	2	4
North West	16	10
Scotland	6	7
South East	20	18
South West	11	11
Wales	4	3
West Midlands	8	7
Yorkshire & Humber	5	6

Table 2: Respondents to 2014-15 survey of constituency parties, by 2010 and 2015 incumbency and membership		
	Labour (%)	Liberal Democrats (%)
Incumbent in 2010	23	5
Incumbent in 2015	18	1
Average membership	310	98

Appendix 3: Component selection for two-dimensional policy scale

Component selection for two-dimensional policy scale			
<i>Economic left-right</i>			
Left		Right	
403	Market Regulation: Positive	401	Free Enterprise: Positive
411	Technology and Infrastructure	407	Protectionism: Negative
412	Controlled Economy: Positive	414	Economic Orthodoxy: Positive
413	Nationalisation: Positive	505	Welfare State Limitation: Positive
503	Social Justice	507	Education Limitation: Positive
504	Welfare State Expansion: Positive	702	Labour Groups: Negative
506	Education Expansion: Positive		
701	Labour Groups: Positive		
<i>Social liberal-conservative</i>			
Liberal		Conservative	
105	Military: Negative	109	Internationalism: Negative
106	Peace	302	Centralisation
107	Internationalism: Positive	305	Political Authority: Positive
201	Freedom and Human Rights	601	National Way of Life: Positive
202	Democracy	608	Multiculturalism: Negative
301	Decentralisation		
416	Anti-Growth Economy		
501	Environmental Protection		
502	Culture		
602	National Way of Life: Negative		
607	Multiculturalism: Positive		
704	Middle Class and Professional Groups		
705	Underprivileged Minority Groups		
706	Non-economic Demographic Groups		
Source: Prosser (2014: 99)			

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